

Punctuating Titles: When to Use *Italics*, Underlining, and "Quotation Marks."

It's easy for students to forget that different types of titles require different typographical features. It is even harder to remember which type of title requires which type of punctuation. Despair not! If you remember these two handy rules, you can keep the difference straight:

- 1) Short works and parts of long works are usually in quotation marks.
- 2) Long works and collections of short works are usually put in italics (or underlined when submitting publication work to editors).

"Short Works" & "Sections of Longer Works"	<i>Long Works & Collection of Short Works</i>
1) "Title of a Short Poem." Ex: "The Raven."	<i>Title of an Epic Poem or Book-Length Poem</i> Ex: <i>The Odyssey</i>
2) "Title of a Short Story." Ex: "Young Goodman Brown"	<i>Title of a Novel</i> Ex: <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>
3) "Title of an Essay" Ex: "The Fiction of Langston Hughes"	<i>Title of a Collection or Anthology of Essays</i> Ex: <i>Modern Writers and Their Readers</i>
4) "Title of a Short Song" "Money Talks"	<i>Title of a CD, Cassette, or Album</i> Ex: <i>The Razor's Edge</i> , by AC/DC. Also: <i>Title of a Ballet or Opera</i> Ex: <i>The Nutcracker Suite</i> or <i>Die Fliedermaus</i> Also: <i>Title of Long Classical or Instrumental Compositions Identified by Name, Rather than Number.</i> Ex: Wagner's <i>The Flight of the Valkyries</i>
5) "Title of a Skit or Monologue" Ex: "Madman's Lament"	<i>Title of a Play</i> Ex: <i>The Importance of Being Ernest</i>
6) "Short Commercial" "Obey Your Thirst."	<i>Title of a Film</i> Ex: <i>Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones</i>
7) Title of "Individual Episode" in a Television Series. "Sawyer's Past"	<i>Title of a Television Series as a Whole</i> Ex: <i>The Lost</i> Ex: <i>Everybody Loves Raymond</i>
8) "Title of a Chapter in a Book" Ex: "Welsh Mountains"	<i>Title of a Complete Book</i> Ex: <i>A Guide to Welsh Geography</i>
9) "Encyclopedia Article" Ex: "Etruscan"	<i>Title of Encyclopedia</i> Ex: <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i>
10) "Title of an Article in a Magazine" Ex: "Training Your Toddler"	<i>Title of the Magazine.</i> Ex: <i>Parenting</i>
11) "Title of an Article in a Newspaper" Ex: "Man Kills Seven in Subway"	<i>Title of the Newspaper</i> Ex: <i>The New York Times</i>
12) "One or Two Page Handout" Ex: "Old English Verbs: A One Page Guide"	<i>Pamphlet</i> Ex: <i>The Coming Kingdom of God and the Millennium.</i>

A Few Final Notes:

- In past editions of MLA, *underlining* a title and *italicizing* it were considered synonymous. That is no longer the case, and the current edition of MLA favors italics. If you submit articles for publication, some proofreaders and copy editors prefer underlining to italics. The arrival of word-processing has made italics fairly easy to make, and many people think they look classier than underlining.
- Traditional religious works that are foundational to a religious group or culture are capitalized, but not italicized or underlined. For instance, note the Torah, the Bible, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Vedas [no italics or quotation marks].
- Visual artwork, including paintings, sculptures, drawings, mixed media, and whatnot, is italicized, never put in quotation marks. Thus, Van Gogh's *Starry Night* and Rodin's *The Thinker* both have italics.
- The one exception to this policy is the title of your own unpublished student essay at the top of the first page. You do not need to underline your own title or put it in quotation marks.

Capitalization of Titles

Normally, most words in a title are capitalized. The most common rule is that all "important" words should be capitalized, which I think isn't helpful as a criterion. In actual practice, MLA requires the first and last word in the title is capitalized, along with every noun and every verb, every adjective, and every adverb. MLA typically does not capitalize prepositions and articles; however, outside of MLA requirements, many other guidelines call for capitalizing every word that is more than three letters long. Another common rule of thumb is to capitalize the first and last words of the title, and then capitalize everything else except for prepositions and articles. Sometimes, especially in short titles, every single word might optionally be capitalized.

Examples:

The Planet of the Apes [The words "of" and "the" are not capitalized.]

The Land that Time Forgot

"Why Not Me?" [Since title is so short, all the words are capitalized.]

"Losing My Religion" [Since title is so short, all the words are capitalized.]

You can refer to how the author or book capitalizes the title to double-check how the author did it. When in complete doubt, just capitalize every word; it is better to capitalize too many words than too few in a title.

Capitalizing words does not mean putting each letter in capital print, only the first letter. Do not indicate titles by putting them in all capitals, like DRACULA. Instead, write *Dracula*. Note that these guidelines reflect Modern Language Association (MLA) format for English students. Scientific articles follow different conventions in American Psychological Association (APA) format.