

A Guide to Writing Paragraph Titles

1. Like many things in the English language, most native speakers agree on the 'rules' that they use, but often disagree about the details. Writing titles for your paragraphs, and perhaps essays, at Toyama Prefectural University is no different. Your English professors will all agree about the basic rules for writing titles, but there may be some minor differences.
2. The reason for these differences is that your professors, like all native speakers, are just following some guidelines that they probably used when they were students. These guidelines are called 'style guides,' and there are many. Here are some American style guides: the Chicago Style Guide, the APA Style Guide, the MLA Style Guide, the AP Style Guide, the New York Times Style Guide, and recently, the Wikipedia Style Guide.
3. It is very unfortunate that there are so many style guides. Only one style guide is really necessary. Often these style guides are very long and complicated, and give rules for many things that writers **must** follow when they use that style.
4. In my class, you must follow my rules for titles. However, my rules for titles are very basic, and are in no way unusual. But you **must** follow them. You cannot make your own rules for titles. You must not think the rules are not important. You must not think you can just write anything for a title and it will be okay because you are being 'creative.' The rules are basic, but strictly enforced every time. These rules are based on Cambridge University textbooks.
5. The rules are these:
 1. Put the title in the center and above your paragraph.
 2. Don't underline it.
 3. Capitalize the first and last words in the title every time.
 4. Capitalize the main words in the title: names, nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns.
 5. Don't capitalize articles: a, an, the (unless it's the first word).
 6. Don't capitalize coordinators: and, but, or, so (these will never be first/last word).
 7. Don't capitalize prepositions: in, on at, to, for, with, etc, (unless it's the first/last word).
 8. Don't write your title as a grammatical sentence or question.
 9. Don't put a full stop (period) at the end of your sentence (an exclamation mark (!) is ok).
 10. Some style guides tell you to capitalize infinitive 'to.' For example: How To Play the Guitar. So, I cannot stop you if you want to do this. However, because it's ugly, I recommend that you don't capitalize it: How to Play the Guitar.
6. Please check that your paragraph's title follows these rules. Email me if you need to check.
7. Here are some titles from your textbook. Compare these to the rules above:
 1. Red (p. 3)
 2. My Favorite Color (p. 4)
 3. Barefoot Boy (p. 5)
 4. The Pink Sheep (p. 13)
 5. Life in a New Place (p. 15)
 6. Summer by the Sea (p. 21)
 7. Working as a Hotel Receptionist (p. 23)
 8. My Grandfather the Baker (p. 24)
 9. There They Are! (p. 25)
 10. A Wise Shopper (p. 26)