

Week 9: What is a Proper Noun?

Capitalize Objects in Space

Capitalize Geographic Names - Countries, Continents, and Oceans

Prior Knowledge

During the past few weeks your students have learned that nouns name people, places, and things. They have also have learned that the following words should be capitalized: *names of people, names of months, days of the week, holidays, names of cities and states.*

Lesson Focus

Students will learn the difference between a common noun and a proper noun and the reason that proper nouns are capitalized.

Students will add two new categories of proper nouns to their backgrounds.

1. **objects in space**-planets, galaxies, and constellations
2. **geographic names**- countries, continents, and oceans

During this week, a significant amount of direct teaching will be required.

Days One and Three are Teacher-Directed Lessons.

Teacher Background

A common noun names a person, place, or thing.

A proper noun names a *specific* person, place, or thing.

For your lesson determine which of the following choices of terminology creates the best mental connection for your students. Ex: *specific* person, place, or thing; *particular* person, place, or thing; or *certain* person, place, or thing.

Question: When do you capitalize the words *moon and sun and earth*?

The Government Printing Office, the Chicago Style Manual, and even NASA do not agree on whether to capitalize these words. For this reason, this topic will not be treated in the DLI materials.

There is, however, agreement on capitalizing the names of planets (Mercury, Mars), galaxies (Milky Way), and constellations (Little Dipper).

Lesson Strategy

When writing about topics in *general* terms, common nouns are useful. However, when writing about topics in *specific* terms, proper nouns are often needed. These proper nouns are capitalized.

Act It Out

This strategy is a way to concretely demonstrate the meaning of the word *specific*.

Write this sentence on the board: **"All of the girls stand up, please."** Next, read the sentence out loud and have all of the girls stand up. Call attention to the fact that the word *girls* was not capitalized in this sentence because it was not specific.

Write this sentence on the board: **"Jana and Tina stand up, please."** (Use the names of two students in your class.) Then, wait while Jana and Tina stand up. You have become very specific, telling exactly which girls you want to stand up, so a proper noun with a capital letter is needed for the names of the girls.

Repeat this process using other pairs of similar sentences:

"Did you see that man driving the bus?" (The word *man* is **not** capitalized.)

"Did you see Mr. Jones driving the bus?" (Mr. Jones is capitalized.)

"Have you been to the ocean?"

"Have you been to the Atlantic Ocean?"

"Do you have a birthday next month?"

"Do you have a birthday in April?"

"Have you hiked in the mountains?"

"Have you hiked in the Rocky Mountains?"

When you move from general (a common noun) to specific, the resulting proper noun needs to be capitalized.

Hint: Should both words be capitalized? Pacific + Ocean

Draw this comparison for your students. If a student is named Mario Fox, both his first and last names will be capitalized. Both names are needed to identify him. The same is true for the Pacific Ocean. Think of the word

Ocean as the "last name." Offer other examples: Great Salt Lake, Lake Superior, Ohio River, Grand Canyon, and San Francisco Bay.

2. Notice the Day One DLI lesson format for Week 9 and use the same type of two-column approach as you brainstorm pairs of nouns with your students: one common and one proper that fit in each column.

Brain Breaks/Videos

Search: Proper Noun Song by Melissa

This song has a catchy tune and will stick in your students' heads; it features an engaging visual complement. Categories of proper nouns from this week of instruction are included as well as categories from later in second grade.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfkHRgqCnOM>

Search: Common and Proper Nouns by Stacy Aldridge

(Not recommended: the version that is labeled Grammar Flip)

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This video by a third grade teacher is worthwhile and quite professional. It begins with an introduction and then shows pairs of pictures: one of a common noun and another of its corresponding proper noun. (Example: a picture of a chocolate bar (common) and a picture of a wrapper showing Hershey's chocolate (proper). A short quiz at the end shows pictures with labels and asks students to tell if they are common or proper. Suggestion: have your students stand up to represent the capital letter used when the picture is a proper noun.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6CrUeNhOII>