

A little bit lower now

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
Friday, 14 July 2023 03:57



Using decapitalization as a writing style

As soon as I wrote a column on Caps Lock, the lowercase, aka “minuscule” letters, demanded an essay of their own. The irony is that both of my Apple keyboards have decapitalized the command keys, leaving Caps Lock in a minor key.

I’m sure the first topic that comes to mind is the American poet E.E. Cummings. Edward Estlin Cummings (you can see why he went with “E.E.”) often wrote in all lowercase letters, played with spacing and challenged traditional punctuation rules. Cummings took full advantage of his poetic license but didn’t always write exclusively in lowercase.

Contrary to popular belief, Cummings didn’t even write his own name in all lowercase letters. His signature clearly featured two capital “E”s with periods after each one, and a capital “C” followed by an apostrophe and a lowercase “s.” How’s that for a John Hancock?

Cummings’ poetry did feature entire poems in lowercase letters, although he didn’t always employ that style. The trend of his name appearing in small letters started in the 1960s when book cover designers decided to opt for this style. After that, the “e.e. cummings” format stuck.

Fast forward to today, where we find many areas of no caps. Texting has led to shorthand typing that often lacks proper capitalization or punctuation. I don’t fault people for this method,

A little bit lower now

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
Friday, 14 July 2023 03:57

as they are simply eking out a brief communiqué. The person receiving the message gets the point without needing the formal style we're used to seeing in books, newspapers and magazines.

This trend in "getting your point across quickly" extends beyond the realm of texting to the internet at large. Online communities, including Reddit and Discord, find people with similar affinities getting their messages out there at a fast pace, capitalization be darned. When a conversation is happening in real time over a text-based chat, the extra effort to capitalize or find specific punctuation keys isn't worth it; rapidity trumps formality in these situations.

Where does that leave the rules of capitalization? Are we doomed to have opposing factions of people who type in all caps and people who never capitalize anything? Formal writing standards will likely remain in official outlets, websites and media sources. However, in these other forms of communication, the rules aren't as important as the perceived urgency to communicate. After all, telegraphs never discriminated between uppercase and lowercase.

—Curtis Honeycutt is an award-winning syndicated humor columnist. Connect with him on Twitter ([@curtishoneycutt](https://twitter.com/curtishoneycutt)) or at [curtishoneycutt.com](https://www.curtishoneycutt.com) .

'Grammar Guy'
By Curtis Honeycutt
Guest Columnist