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cap·tain  (kăp tən)

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n.

1. One who commands, leads, or guides others, especially:

a. The officer in command of a ship, aircraft, or spacecraft.

b. A precinct commander in a police or fire department, usually ranking above a lieutenant and below a chief.

c. The designated leader of a team or crew in sports.

2.

a. A commissioned rank in the US Army, Air Force, or Marine Corps that is above first lieutenant and below major.

b. One who holds this rank or a similar rank in another military organization.

c. A commissioned rank in the US Navy or Coast Guard that is above commander and below rear admiral.

d. One who holds this rank or a similar rank in another military organization.

3. A figure in the forefront; a leader: *a captain of industry*.

4. One who supervises or directs the work of others, especially:

a. A district official for a political party.

b. A restaurant employee who is in charge of the waiters and usually attends to table seating.

c. A bell captain.

tr.v. **cap·tained, cap·tain·ing, cap·tains**

To act as captain of; command or direct: *captained the football team*.

[Middle English *captain*, from Old French, from Late Latin *capitāneus*, chief, from Latin *caput*, *capit-*, head; see **kaput-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

cap tain·cy, cap tain·ship *n.*

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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