



Tip of the Month 01: The Black Sabbath Rule

Some confusion exists on when to highlight a name with italics, quotation marks, both, or neither. The legendary heavy-metal band, Black Sabbath, provides a convenient memory prompt. Black Sabbath, in addition to being the name of the band, was also the name of their first album, and the first song on that album. The name of the band, a proper noun, is capitalized but requires no further emphasis. The album name, because it is a “major title,” is emphasized in italics; other major title categories include books, movies, plays, etc. The song name, a “minor title,” is emphasized with quotation marks; other minor title categories include articles, poems, etc. Combining the rules yields this example of a correctly-formatted sentence: “Black Sabbath” is the first song on Black Sabbath’s *Black Sabbath*.

Note that the major vs. minor emphasis is a formatting convention; it indicates the scale of the work; it confers no value judgment of the quality or importance of the item being emphasized. Additionally, no title should receive the double-emphasis of quotation marks *and* italics.