

Modern Language Association (MLA) Formatting Guide

A Guide For:

General Formatting

In-Text Citations

Works Cited

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1. General Format

- MLA (Modern Language Association) has specific guidelines for formatting manuscripts in writing. This format can be used when writing essays, research papers, and even creative writing assignments.
- When a writer properly uses MLA they demonstrate their credibility by giving credit to the source material. It is even more important that a writer be protected from being accused of plagiarism, which is improper use (purposeful or accidental) of source material by other writers.

Paper Format

Below are some basic guidelines for preparing a manuscript using MLA format.

General Guidelines

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8 ½ x 11-inch paper.
- Double space the text of your paper and use a font like Times New Roman.
- Set the margins of your document to 1-inch on all sides. Indent the first line of a paragraph ½ inch (five spaces or press TAB once) from the left margin.
- Create a header that numbers all of your pages consecutively in the upper-right hand corner, flush with the right margin. (You may be asked to omit the number on your first page. Always follow your teacher's guidelines).
- Use either italics or underlining throughout your essay for titles of longer works.
- If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Works Cited page.

Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

- Do not include a title page for your paper unless your teacher instructs you to.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your teacher's name, the class, and the date. This is double-spaced.
- Following this portion, double space again and center the title of your paper. Don't underline your title, put it in italics or quotation marks. Do not use all capital letters.
- Use appropriate punctuation if you refer a work in your title, but otherwise the title is not punctuated. (
 - Example: Love Lost in *Romeo and Juliet*
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.
- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner of your paper that includes your last name followed by a space with a page number. The pages should all be numbered consecutively, flush with the right margin. (Note: You may be asked by your teacher to omit this header on the first page. Always follow their guidelines.)

Here is a sample first page of an essay in MLA style:

	Smith 1
John Smith	
Mr. Jones	
10 th grade English	
October 17, 2006	
Building a Dream: Martin Luther King	
Be sure to indent your paragraph five spaces and allow the word processing program to wrap around the lines. The body of your paper should be double-spaced...	

2. In-Text Citations: The Basics

In-Text Citations are notations that are made within the body/text of your paper that signals to your reader that the information you have used comes from another source. In-Text Citations will not be included in every paper that you

write, but if the paper includes factual information that you researched and are including in your paper, it is imperative that you cite the source.

Basic In-Text Citation Rules

In MLA style, referring to the works of others in your text is done by using parenthetical citations. Immediately following a paraphrase of a source's ideas or a quotation from a source, you place the author's name followed by a space and the page number(s) on which the information was found.

Example:

Human beings have been described as "symbol-using animals" (Burke 3).

When a source does not have an author listed (such as in a Internet source), use a shortened title of the work instead of the author's name. Place the title in quotation marks or italicize it.

The in-text citation in your paper should correspond with one of the entries in your Works Cited page. An example of the entry on the Works Cited page (for the above parenthetical citation) would look like this:

Example:

Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1966.

When a Citation is Not Needed

The questions that always arise are "When do I use an in-text citation?" or "How do I know if I should cite the information?" A good rule to follow is that "it is better to be safe than sorry." In other words, if you are not sure if it deserves an in-text citation it is better to cite the source and give credit to the author of that work. You do not need to give sources for familiar proverbs, well-known quotations or common knowledge.

3. In-Text Citations: Author-Page Style

MLA format uses the author-page method of in-text citation. This means that the author's last name and the page number(s) from which the paraphrase or quotation is taken must appear in the text, and should correspond with a source listed in your

Works Cited page. The author's name may appear either in the sentence itself or in parentheses following the quote or paraphrase, but the page number(s) should ALWAYS appear in the parentheses. For example:

Wordsworth stated that Romantic poetry was marked by a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (263).

Romantic poetry is considered by the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 263).

Wordsworth extensively explored the role of emotion in the creative process (263).

In the above examples, the citations both (263) and (Wordsworth 263) lets the reader know that the information in the sentence can be found on page 263 of the work by the author named Wordsworth. If the reader needs more information they can consult the Works Cited page where they would find the following information:

Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads*. London: Oxford U.P., 1967.

Anonymous Work/Author Unknown

If the work you are citing has no author, use an abbreviated version of the work's title. (For non-print sources, such as films, TV series, pictures, or other media, or electronic sources, include the name that begins the entry in the Works Cited page.) For example:

An anonymous Wordsworth critic once argued that his poems were too emotional ("Wordsworth Is a Loser" 100).

Citing Authors with the Same Last Names

Sometimes more information is necessary to identify the source from which information is taken. For example, if two or more authors have the same last name, give both authors' first initials in your in-text citation. For example:

Although some medical ethicists claim that cloning will lead to designer children (R. Miller 12), others note that the advantages for medical research outweigh this consideration (A. Miller 46).

Citing Multiple Works by the Same Author

If you cite more than one work by an author, include a shortened version of the title for the work from which you are quoting or paraphrasing to distinguish it from the others. In the example listed below, the author's name is not listed in the parentheses because his name is listed at the beginning of the sentence. For example:

Lightenor has argued that computers are not useful tools for small children ("Too Soon" 38), though he has acknowledged elsewhere that early exposure to computer games does lead to better small motor skill development in a child's second and third year ("Hand-Eye Development" 17).

If the author's name is not mentioned in the sentences, then you would format your citation with the author's name followed by a comma, followed by a shortened title of the work, and then followed by the appropriate page numbers. For example:

Visual studies, because it is such a new discipline, may be "too easy" (Elkins, "Visual Studies" 63).

Citing Indirect Sources

Sometimes you may have to use an indirect source. This is when an author quotes another author/person in his work. It is always best to try and find the original source where the quote was made, but many times that is not possible. When not possible you should use "qtd. in" to indicate the source you actually consulted. For example:

Ravitch argues that high schools are pressured to act as "social service centers, and they don't do that well" (qtd. in Weisman 259).

Citing the Bible

When citing the Bible, you want to make clear which version of the Bible you are using. The first time you quote from the Bible you should state the version. Italicize or underline the version of the Bible, followed by the book of the Bible, chapter and verse. For example:

Ezekiel saw "what seemed to be four living creatures," each with faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Ezekiel 1:5-10).

All other references can just cite the book of the Bible, chapter and verse since you already stated what version you are using.

4. Formatting Quotations

When you directly quote a source in your paper, you will format the quotations differently depending on their length. Below are some basic guidelines for using direct quotations in your paper.

Short Quotations

To indicate short quotations—which are fewer than four typed lines of text or three lines of poetry—in the body of your paper, enclose the quote in double quotation marks. Give the author and specific page number (in the case of poetry, provide line numbers) in the text, and include a complete reference on the Works Cited page. Punctuation marks such as periods, commas, and semicolons should appear after the parentheses. Question marks and exclamation points should appear within the quotation marks if they are part of the quoted portion, but after the parentheses if they are part of your text. For example:

According to some, dreams express "profound aspects of personality" (Foulkes 184), though others disagree.

According to Foulkes's study, dreams may express "profound aspects of personality" (184).

Is it possible that dreams may express "profound aspects of personality" (Foulkes 184)?

Mark breaks in short quotations of verse with a slash, /, at the end of each line of verse:

Cullen concludes, "Of all the things that happened there/ That's all I remember" (11-12).

Long Quotations

Place long quotations longer than four (4) typed lines in a free-standing block of text, and omit the quotation marks. Start the quote on a new line with the entire quote indented one inch from the left margin. Be sure to continue double spacing. Only indent the first line of the quote by a half inch if you have more than one paragraph of quotation. The in text citation should come AFTER the closing punctuation mark (Note: This is different than a normal quotation shorter than four lines.). When quoting a poetry verse, follow the original line breaks of the poem. And be sure to maintain double-spacing throughout the paper. For example:

Nelly Dean treats Heathcliff poorly and dehumanizes him throughout her narration:

They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room, and I had no more sense, so, I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it would be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr. Earnshaw's door, and there he found it on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how it got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house. (Bronte 78)

Poetry would be handled something like this:

In her poem, "Sources," Adrienne Rich explores the roles of women in shaping their world:

The faithful drudging child
the child at the oak desk whose penmanship,
hard work, style will win her prizes
becomes the woman with a mission, not to win prizes
but to change the laws of history. (23)

Adding or Omitting Words in Quotations

If you add a word or words in a quotation, you should put brackets around the words to indicate they are not part of the original text.

For example:

Jan Harold Brunvand, in an essay on urban legends, states: "some individuals [who retell urban legends] make a point of learning every rumor or tale" (78).

If you omit a word or words from a quotation, you should indicate the deleted word or words by using ellipsis marks, which are three periods (...) with a space before and after. For example:

In an essay on urban legends, Jan Harold Brunvand notes "some individuals make a point of learning every recent rumor or tale ... and in a short time a lively exchange of details occurs" (78).

5. Works Cited Page: Basic Format

According to MLA style, you must have a Works Cited page at the end of your research paper. Works Cited page formatting is covered below. All entries in the Works Cited Page must correspond to the works cited in your main text. In other words, if you list a source in your Works Cited page, you should have at least one in-text citation in your paper that refers to that source. This is not a bibliography page listing all the sources you consulted during your research; this is a list of the sources that you are actually citing and using within your paper.

Basic Guidelines:

- Begin your Works Cited page on a separate page at the end of your research paper. It should have the same 1-inch margins and last name, page number header as the rest of your paper.
- Label the page Works Cited (do not underline the words Works Cited or put them in quotation marks) and center the words Works Cited at the top of the page.
- Double space and alphabetize all citations, but do not skip extra lines between entries. Maintain the same double spacing that you have been using throughout the rest of your paper. The second line of each entry is indented 5 spaces.

- List page numbers of sources efficiently when needed. If you refer to a journal/magazine article that appeared on pages 225 through 250, list the page numbers on your Works Cited page as 225-50.

Using Noodle Tools to Complete your Works Cited Page

A helpful tool in completing your Works Cited Page is the online site Noodle Tools. This site allows you to enter information regarding your source. It then places the information in the correct order and formats the punctuation and spacing according to MLA style.

The instructions for accessing and using this site are as follows:

- Go to www.noodletools.com
- Click on NoodleBib Express
- Select either

MLA

APA

- Because we are using MLA Style Format, you would choose MLA.
- Select the type of citation (book, internet, magazine, etc.) and click GO
- Go through the questions and fill in the blanks. If something does not apply to your source, leave it blank.
- Click "Create Citation."
- Cut and paste the citation to your document. You will have to change the font to match the font of your paper. You will also need to change the color of the font to black and be sure to double space.

Sample Works Cited Page

Smith 11
Works Cited
<p>Duvall, John N. "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's <i>White Noise</i>." <i>Arizona Quarterly</i> 50.3 (1994): 127-53.</p> <p>Heller, Steven and Karen Pomeroy. <i>The Hummingbird House</i>. Denver: Harcourt Press, 1999.</p> <p>Palmer, William J. <i>Dickens and New Historicism</i>. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.</p>