

MLA Paper Format

If you are asked to use MLA format for a research paper, the book to consult is The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. MLA maintains a website (<http://www.mla.org>) that provides documentation information. Included here is a brief summary of MLA style for the research paper.

General Guidelines

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper,
- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font like Times New Roman. The font size should be 12 pt.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks (unless otherwise instructed by your instructor).
- Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides. Indent the first line of a paragraph one half-inch (five spaces or press tab once) from the left margin.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.
- Use either italics or underlining throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.

Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

- Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.
- Double space again and center the title. Don't underline your title or put it in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case, not in all capital letters.
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.
- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number; number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.

In-Text Citations: The Basics

A guideline for referring to the works of others in your text using MLA style is covered in chapter six of the MLA Handbook.

Basic In-Text Citation Rules

In MLA style, referring to the works of others in your text is done by using what's known as parenthetical citation. Immediately following a quotation from a source or a paraphrase of a source's ideas, you place the author's name followed by a space and the relevant page number(s).

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

When a source has no known author, use a shortened title of the work instead of an author name. Place the title in quotation marks if it's a short work, or italicize or underline it if it's a longer work.

Your in-text citation will correspond with an entry in your Works Cited page, which, for the Burke citation above, will look something like this:

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

Information on creating the Works Cited page will follow, but right now it's important to know that parenthetical citations and Works Cited pages allow readers to know which sources you consulted in writing your essay, so that they can either verify your interpretation of the sources or use them in their own scholarly work.

Multiple Citations

To cite multiple sources in the same parenthetical reference, separate the citations by a semi-colon: (Burke 3; Dewey 21).

When Citation is not Needed

Common sense and ethics should determine your need for documenting sources. You do not need to give sources for familiar proverbs, well-known quotations or common knowledge. Remember, this is a rhetorical choice, based on audience. If you're writing for an expert audience of a scholarly journal, they'll have different expectations of what constitutes common knowledge.

Formatting Quotations

When you directly quote the works of others in your paper, you will format quotations differently depending on their length.

Short Quotations

To indicate short quotations (fewer than four typed lines of prose or three lines of verse) in your text, enclose the quotation within double quotation marks. Provide the author and specific page citation (in the case of verse, 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 parenthetical citation. Question marks and exclamation points should appear within the quotation marks if they are a part of the quoted passage but after the parenthetical citation if they are a 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: (a space should precede and follow the slash)

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

Long Quotations

Place quotations longer than four typed lines in a free-standing block of text, and omit quotation marks. Start the quotation on a new line, with the entire quote indented one inch from the left margin; maintain double-spacing. Only indent the first line of the quotation by a half inch if you are citing multiple paragraphs. Your parenthetical citation should come **after** the closing punctuation mark. When quoting verse, maintain original line breaks. (You should maintain double-spacing throughout your essay.)

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)

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 that they are not part of the original text

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 (...) preceded and followed by a space. For example:

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

Your Works-Cited List

This list, alphabetized by authors' last names, should appear at the end of your essay. It provides the information necessary for a reader to locate and retrieve any sources you cite in the essay. Each source you cite in the essay must appear in your works-cited list; likewise, each entry in the works-cited list must be cited in your text.

Basic Rules

Authors' names are inverted (last name first); if a work has more than one author, invert only the first author's name, follow it with a comma, then continue listing the rest of the authors.

If you have cited more than one work by a particular author, order them alphabetically by title, and use three hyphens in place of the author's name for every entry after the first.

When an author appears both as the sole author of a text and as the first author of a group, list solo-author entries first. If no author is given for a particular work, alphabetize by the title of the piece.

The first line of each entry in your list should be flush left. Subsequent lines should be indented one-half inch. This is known as a "hanging indent."

All references should be double-spaced.

Capitalize each word in the titles of articles, books, etc. (This rule does not apply to "a," "an," "the," or to conjunctions, unless they are the first word of the title.) Underline or italicize titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and films.

Basic Forms for Sources in Print

A book

Author (s). Title of Book. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of
Publication.

A part of a book (such as an essay in a collection)

Author(s). "Title of Article." Title of Collection. Ed. Editor's
Name(s). Place of Publication: Publisher, Year. Pages.

An article in a periodical (such as a newspaper or magazine)

Author(s). "Title of Article." Title of Source. Day Month Year:
pages.

An article in a scholarly journal

Author(s). "Title of Article." Title of Journal Vol (Year): pages.

Basic Forms for Electronic Sources

A webpage

Author(s). "Title of Page." Sponsoring Source. Date of Posting/Revision. Date of
Access. <electronic address>.

It is necessary to list your date of access because web postings are often updated, and information available at one date may no longer be available later. Be sure to include the complete address for the site. Also, note the use of angled brackets around the electronic address; MLA requires them for clarity. (Your teacher may allow use to use the hyperlinked electronic address which will appear in blue)

An article in an online journal or magazine

Author(s). "Title of Article." Title of Journal Volume. Issue
(Year): Pages/Paragraphs. Date of Access <electronic
address>.

Email, Personal Interviews or Personal Letters

Author. Email to the author. Date.

A listserv posting

Author. "Title of Posting." Online posting. Date.
Name of listserv. Date of access
<electronic address for retrieval>.

An electronic database (such as NewsBank, SIRS, Ethnic NewsWatch, or Broadcast News)

Author(s). "Title of Article." Title of Source, Day Month Year:
pages. Name of Database. <electronic address>