University of North Alabama

INTRODUCTION TO MLA STYLE

Center for
WRITING EXCELLENCE

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Introduction to MLA Style

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Introduction to MLA Style

MLA Style was established in 1951 by the Modern Language Association; the first MLA handbook was established in 1977. This style is used primarily for publication in Liberal Arts & Humanities, especially Language and Literature journals. The information in this guide was taken from the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers: Seventh Edition.

The most important goal in writing an MLA-format research paper is keeping track of where your information came from and how it is relevant to your topic and argument. In this way, you will build credibility with the reader by citing respected and knowledgeable professionals.

Elements

Each paragraph or section of your research paper needs to have three distinct parts: **claim**, **evidence**, and **discussion**. The claim refers back to your thesis, the evidence supports the claim, and the discussion explains how the evidence given is relevant to the claim.

Typically, papers that use MLA do not conduct primary research such as surveys or questionnaires. Instead, they use a literary work or document as a primary resource. You will need to cite all sources used within your paper. The most important piece of information about any source is who produced it: the author.

Simply giving the evidence is never enough. You always need to explain how the source can be used to support your claim and the overall purpose of your paper. Always make connections to show your understanding of the subject matter and to help others understand your meaning. Thoroughly explaining and linking your evidence is often the best tool in your arsenal for writing research papers. It is better to have one or two sources that are thoroughly explained than to have three or four sources that have no context or explanation.

Components of an MLA Paper

Title page

Do not make a title page unless specifically requested by the instructor.

Body pages

All text should be double spaced. Standard font is 12 point Times New Roman. The first body page should provide the author's name, instructor's name, course, and date in the upper left hand corner.

All pages should include your last name and the page number in the upper right hand corner unless otherwise specified by your professor. The body text of the paper should always be left aligned.

Works Cited page

"Works Cited" centered at the top of the page. Uses hanging indent to separate individual references. This page should answer all the basic MLA questions.

Integrating Sources and In-Text Citations

Choosing Text to Integrate

1. Read the entire text, noting the key points and main ideas.
2. Summarize in your own words what the single main idea of the essay is.
3. Paraphrase important supporting points that come up in the essay.
4. Consider any words, phrases, or brief passages that you believe should be quoted directly.

All works used within the paper must be cited. If you use an idea or paraphrase information from another source without citing it, *you are plagiarizing*. All specific statements of fact that are not your own personal experience or general knowledge must be cited. In-text citations should always include the author's name and may require a page number. See the Writing Center's page on source integration for more information on specific types of in-text citation.

When deciding which information to integrate into your paper, you should first read the entire text. Make sure that the main ideas and key points within the source agree with what you wish to say. It is not acceptable to simply take a portion of the text and misrepresent the author's meaning.

Summarize any ideas or text that you believe to be important. Proper summarization should condense the main idea or text of several pages or even the entire source into a brief overview. By summarizing, you save many paragraphs or pages of unnecessary text. When using in-text citations for summaries, you must always cite the author. If there is no author listed, cite the article name. Summaries do not require page numbers; this is because the text summarized will usually cover several pages of text or information**.**

Some bits of text may be too important or detailed to summarize. If you are unable to summarize the information, then you should **paraphrase**. Paraphrasing involves putting the text into your own words. Paraphrased information is usually shorter than the original text, but it gives a more detailed view than simply summarizing. All ideas should be attributed to the original author, even though the words used are your own. For paraphrases, include the page number from the original source.

Quoting should only be used when the author's words are so precisely and accurately stated that they cannot be paraphrased or when you intend to dissect the meaning of a specific bit of text. Professors usually prefer students to avoid quotations unless they are absolutely necessary.

All quotes must be copied word for word from the original source. They should be enclosed in quotation marks (with the exception of block quotes) and cited.

When using a quote that is more than four lines, you must make it into a **block quote**. Quotations of poetry or verse should be blocked if they contain more than three lines. Block quotes contain no quotation marks. Generally, block quotes should be preceded by a short introduction and a colon. All lines of block quotes should be indented one inch. If more than one paragraph is used, the first line of each paragraph should be indented an additional quarter inch.

> to identify with their branch of the armed forces. The process of boot camp has grown along with the field of psychology. Research in the Navy found the following:
>
> > Psychological profiling in military situations has led to a decrease in the number of Basic Training dropouts wherever the practice has been instituted.
> >
> > Drugs to suppress incidents of "drill rage" were less successful than careful organization based on observed weaknesses and strengths. Scientists are currently conducting further research on the subject matter. (Masterson 248)
>
> After General Wilson instituted the 1972 Reform Act for

Citations in block quotes should always go outside of the ending punctuation.

Always introduce sources that you are summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting. When you introduce a source with the author's name and/or the date, this information does not need to be repeated in the parenthetical citation at the end. Introducing sources in this way is called **signal phrasing**.

When using signal phrases, always remember that what is not signaled at the beginning of the sentence must be cited in parentheses at the end.

When using signal phrases, always remember that what is not signaled at the beginning of the sentence must be cited in parentheses at the end. Here are some examples of various in-text citations:

> In 1985, Williams reported that some tribes in South America . . . (103).
> According to Williams, "The Waodani and Auca of Ecuador . . ." (103).
> Some tribes in South America . . . (Williams 103).

Your name, your instructor's name, the class name, and the date. This date is formatted: Day Month Year.

Your last name and the page number always appear at the top right-hand corner of every page.

The entire paper must be double spaced.

Smith 1

John Smith

Dr. R. Koch

English 111

12 August 2011

Letting Go:

How Boot Camp Conditions Soldiers to

Leave Their Homes

For many soldiers, the most memorable aspect of their training was boot camp. Boot camp is the transitional period wherein troops learn to identify with their branch of the armed forces. The process of boot camp has grown along with the field of psychology, and so a comparison between boot camp methods and psychological

interesting series of questions.

Smith 8

Works Cited

Bronte, Emily. *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Margaret Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

"How to Make Vegetarian Chili." *eHow.com*. eHow, n.d. Web. 24 Feb. 2009. <http://www.ehow.com/how_10727_make-vegetarian-chili.html>

Jacobson, Will, and Brick Davis. "A Big Adventure in Central Park." *Educational Psychology* 11.1 (2006): 144-155. Print.

Williams, Ron, and Harrison Ford. *A Large, Boring Book*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. Print.

Author's names should be listed in alphabetical order.

Use a hanging indent after the first line of each citation.

Cite each source according to its specified parameters.

Works Cited

The final page of your paper should be the list of all the sources you cited. The works cited portion of your paper will always begin on a new page. The words "Works Cited" should be centered at the top with no font changes (see page 3 for an example).

The list of references that you use should be in alphabetical order by the author's last name. If you have a source without an author, use the title of the work. This page should also be set for a hanging indent, or lines of each reference indented after the first. You can see examples of this below.

Who. What. Where. When. How.

The box above shows general formatting for MLA citations. Each type of citation will look a little different. However, the important thing to remember is that all of the available information should be included. Think about what each word means in relation to your citation. Then you can format the information appropriately.

Citations can sometimes seem complicated, but they can be simple as long as you follow the instructions and examples. Do not rely on automatic formatting or citation machines; these are often incorrect.

The first piece of information that you include should be **who** wrote the information; therefore, you will list the author's name first in your citation. Sometimes, an author may be a company or organization. If there is no author listed, skip to the second item.

Anderson, Iain. *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. Print.

The second item is **what** the information is. Usually, this will be the specific title of the source. For pieces published within other works, like journal articles, newspaper articles, and webpages, the title will be in quotation marks. Chapters, poems, or short stories published in books may also be put in quotations. If your source is an entire book, a film, or other large work, then it will be italicized.

Anderson, Iain. *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. Print.

The **where** of your citation is where your source is located. This may be the title of a journal, newspaper, or website. If you are citing one chapter out of a larger book, than the book is where your source is found. Always italicize the names of journals, magazines, and books. In the case of books, the **where** will also include the city of publication and the publisher. For websites, you will include the URL if the source would be difficult to locate without it. See the examples below for further clarification.

Anderson, Iain. *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. Print.

When tells the year of publication. The date of publication should be included whenever possible. For journal articles or online journal articles, the year should be enclosed in parentheses. For books, the year of publication will be listed after the publishing company. Websites will list this as the date that the information was posted; you will cite this after the name of the company or organization responsible for the website. See the examples below for a better idea of how to properly cite the date.

Anderson, Iain. *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. Print.

Note: Page numbers may be considered "where" because they tell your reader where to find the specific information that you are referencing; however, they come after the year of publication. This is important

when you are referencing a specific edition or version of the item in question. The year helps to clarify in which version these pages may be found.

How is a relatively new addition to MLA citations. This specifies how you accessed the information. This will simply be one word followed by a period. The most common options are "Print.", "Web.", or "Film." If you accessed a web source, you should include your date of access after **how**.

Anderson, Iain. *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. Print.

The following is a list of some of the most common resources used within research papers. Fill in the appropriate blanks with the corresponding information from your source.

Documenting Authors

Generally, authors are listed by their last names. The format for one author should be: last name, first name.

If you have more than one work by the same author, be sure to specify which one is used with in-text citations by using the title of the work.

Ex. (in-text): Frye says that… (*Anatomy* 237).
One critic states that…(Frye, *Double Vision* 85).

On the works cited page, start with the author's name first. Then list the citations in alphabetical order by title. The second article will have dashes in place of the author's name.

Frye, Northrope. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princton UP, 1957. Print.

---. *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. Print.

When you have a source with more than one author, list the first author's last name, first name, then the second and subsequent authors' first and last names. Examples of this can be seen below.

Within the text, use authors' last names only. If the source has three or more authors, it may be referenced with the first authors last name followed by the words "et al"; otherwise, list all of the authors' last names. All authors must be listed on the works cited page.

Documenting Books

Author A's last name, first name, and Author B's first name last name. *Title of Book.* City: Publisher, Year. Medium of Publication

Williams, Ron, and Harrison Ford. *A Large, Boring Book*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. Print.

If the place of publication is a well-known city, list only the city. If it is not a well-known city, list the city and state or city and country.

Documenting Editions and Books with Editors

Edition of a Book:

Author A's Last Name, Author A's First Name, and Author B's First Name Last Name. *Title of Book.* #th ed. City of Publication: Publisher, Year. Medium of Publication.

Williams, Abby, and John Williams. *The English Bulldog*. 7th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Print.

Book with an Editor:

Author's Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Ed. Editor's First Name Last Name. City of Publication: Publisher, Year. Medium of Publication.

Bronte, Emily. *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Margaret Smith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

Documenting Journal Articles

As long as a journal article is in print somewhere, you may cite it as a printed article, with the exception of adding "Web." if you accessed it online. This includes most articles that are found on databases.

Author A's Last Name, Author A's First Name, and Author B's First Name Last Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal* Volume.Issue (Year): pages. Medium of Publication.

Jacobson, Will, and Brick Davis. "A Big Adventure in Central Park." *Educational Psychology* 11.1 (2006): 144-155. Print.

Documenting Online Journal Articles

The "n. pag." used in this type of citation simply means that there is no pagination for an article of this type. Also, note that the "Day Month Year" mentioned is the date of access.

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Online Journal* Volume.Issue (Year): n. pag. Medium of Publication. Day Month Year

Davis, Alan. "A Nuclear Fusion Program." *Science Today* 70.11 (2008): n. pag. Web. 9 January 2009.

Documenting Websites

The methods for documenting websites differ depending on whether or not you use the entire website or just one page. Try to find as much information as possible to include in your citation. However, sometimes websites do not offer the information needed. Authors and publication dates can sometimes be difficult to find.

MLA does not call for a URL unless the website is particularly hard to find or your professor asks for one. You should include a URL if your reader may not be able to find the website without one.

Citation for an entire website:

Author/Creators Last name, First name. *Title of Web Site*. Version number. Name of organization associated with the site. Date of Posting on Website. Medium of Publication. Day Month Year accessed.

The Purdue OWL Family of Sites. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2008. Web. 23 Apr. 2008.

Citation for a single webpage:

Author's Last name, First name. "Name of Page on Website." *Main Website*. Name of organization associated with the site. Medium of Publication. Day Month Year accessed.

"How to Make Vegetarian Chili." *eHow.com*. eHow, n.d. Web. 24 Feb. 2009. <http://www.ehow.com/how_10727_make-vegetarian-chili.html>

Additional Information

Additional information, such as punctuation, numbering rules, abbreviations, and proper citations for more obscure sources, can be found in the MLA Handbook. This handbook can be accessed in the Center for Writing Excellence during hours of operation. If you have any questions or problems, please schedule an appointment with one of our consultants.

Submitted by Amber Huett (2011)
UNA Center for Writing Excellence

Contributors:

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Works Cited

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Stolley, Karl. "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." The OWL at Purdue. 10 May 2006. Purdue University Writing Lab. Web. 1 March 2008 <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>.