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Style Basics: MLA Format

MLA style is used primarily in the liberal arts and humanities. MLA style provides writers with a system for referencing their sources through parenthetical documentation and on a Works Cited page. This handout is a brief guide to citing the most common types of sources—for a complete guide to MLA style, please reference the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th edition.

General Guidelines

- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font like Times New Roman or Courier.
- 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. (Note: Your instructor may ask that you omit the number on your first page. Always follow your instructor's guidelines.)
- Use either italics or underlining throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.
- 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 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 and center the title. Don't underline your title or put it in quotation marks.
- 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. (Note: Your instructor or other readers may ask that you omit last name/page number header on your first page. Always follow their guidelines.)

Parenthetical Citations

In MLA style, you are required to acknowledge your sources with brief parenthetical citations. These citations include the **author's last name** and the **page number**. No comma is necessary to separate these two elements. For example:

Ancient writers attributed the invention of the monochord to Pythagoras, who lived in the sixth century BC (Marcuse 197).

This tells us that the information came from page 197 in a work by an author named Marcuse. If a reader wanted more information about the source, a complete bibliographical entry will be found in the Works Cited list.

A citation in MLA style contains only enough information to enable readers to find the source in the Works Cited list. If the author's name is included in the text, only the page number appears in the citation. "(197)." If more than one work by the author is in the list of Works Cited, a shortened version of the title should be given: "(Marcuse, *Survey* 197)"

Works Cited

- Begin your works cited list on a separate page from the text of the essay. Number each page, continuing the page numbers of the text. For example, if your essay ends on page 10, the Works Cited list will begin on page 11.
- Center the words Works Cited at the top of the page. Do not underline, italicize, or enclose in quotation marks.
- Double space all entries and do not skip spaces between entries.
- Use a hanging indent for all entries.
- Your list should be alphabetized by the author's last name. If the author's name is unknown, alphabetize by title.

Books

Books with a single author are the most common type of citation. This type of entry has three main divisions, each separated by a period.

Author's name. Title of book. Publication information.

The publication information includes the **city where the book was published, the publisher, and the year of publication**. For example:

Tan, Amy. The Bonesetter's Daughter. New York: Putnam, 2001.

Book with More Than One Author

First author name is written last name first; subsequent author names are written first name, last name.

Gillespie, Paula, and Neal Lerner. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*. Boston: Allyn, 2000.

If there are more than three authors, you may list only the first author followed by the phrase et al. (the abbreviation for the Latin phrase "and others"; no period after "et") in place of the other authors' names, or you may list all the authors in the order in which their names appear on the title page.

Wysocki, Anne Francis, et al. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2004.

Two or More Books by the Same Author

After the first listing of the author's name, use three hyphens and a period instead of the author's name. List books alphabetically by title.

Palmer, William J. *Dickens and New Historicism*. New York: St. Martin's, 1997.

---. *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993.

Book by a Corporate Author

A corporate author may be a commission, a committee, or any group whose individual members are not identified on the title page:

American Allergy Association. *Allergies in Children*. New York: Random, 1998.

Book with No Author

List and alphabetize by the title of the book.

Encyclopedia of Indiana. New York: Somerset, 1993.

For parenthetical citations of sources with no author named, use a shortened version of the title instead of an author's name. Use quotation marks and underlining as appropriate. For example, parenthetical citations of the source above would appear as follows: (*Encyclopedia* 235).

A Translated Book

Cite as you would any other book, and add "Trans." followed by the translator's/translators' name(s):

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1988.

Anthology or Collection

List by editor or editors, followed by a comma and "ed." or, for multiple editors, "eds."

Hill, Charles A. and Marguerite Helmers, eds. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

Peterson, Nancy J., ed. *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

A Part of a Book

Book parts include an essay in an edited collection or anthology, or a chapter of a book. The basic form is:

Lastname, First name. "Title of Essay." *Title of Collection*. Ed. Editor's Name(s). Place of Publication: Publisher, Year. Pages.

Harris, Muriel. "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers." *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*. Ed. Ben Rafoth. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. 24-34.

A Multivolume Work

When citing only one volume of a multivolume work, include the volume number after the work's title, or after the work's editor or translator.

Quintilian. *Institutio Oratoria*. Trans. H. E. Butler. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard UP, 1980.

When citing more than one volume of a multivolume work, cite the total number of volumes in the work.

Quintilian. *Institutio Oratoria*. Trans. H. E. Butler. 4 vols. Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard UP, 1980.

When citing multivolume works in your text, always include the volume number followed by a colon, then the page number(s):

...as Quintilian wrote in *Institutio Oratoria* (1:14-17).

An Introduction, a Preface, a Forward, or an Afterword

When citing an introduction, a preface, a forward, or an afterword, write the name of the authors and then give the name of the part being cited, which should not be italicized, underlined or enclosed in quotation marks.

Farrell, Thomas B. Introduction. *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*. By Farrell. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993. 1-13.

If the writer of the piece is different from the author of the complete work, then write the full name of after the word "By." For example:

Duncan, Hugh Dalziel. Introduction. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*. By Kenneth Burke. 1935. 3rd ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984. xiii-xliv.

Periodicals

MLA style is slightly different for popular periodicals, like newspapers, and scholarly journals, as you'll learn below.

An Article in a Newspaper or Magazine

Basic format:

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

When writing the date, list day before month; use a three-letter abbreviation of the month (e.g., Jan., Mar., Aug.). If there is more than one edition available for that date (as in an early and late edition of a newspaper), identify the edition following the date (e.g., 17 May 1987, late ed.).

Poniewozik, James. "TV Makes a Too-Close Call." *Time* 20 Nov. 2000: 70-71.

An Article in a Scholarly Journal

Author(s). "Title of Article." *Title of Journal* Volume. Issue (Year): pages.

Bagchi, Alaknanda. "Conflicting Nationalisms: The Voice of the Subaltern in Mahasweta Devi's Bashai Tudu." *Tulsa Studies in Literature* 15.1 (1996): 41-50.

Electronic Sources

Provide as much of the following information in your citation as is available:

- Author's name (if not available, use the article title as the first part of the citation)
- Article Title
- Periodical Name
- Publication Date
- Page Number/Range
- Database Name
- Service Name
- Name of the library where or through which the service was accessed
- Name of the town/city where service was accessed
- Date of Access
- URL of the service (but not the whole URL for the article, since those are usually very long and won't be easily re-used by someone trying to retrieve the information)

EXAMPLES:

Peterson, Susan Lynn. The Life of Martin Luther. 1999. 9 Mar. 2001
<<http://pweb.netcom.com/~supeters/luther.htm>>.

United States. Environmental Protection Agency. Values and Functions of Wetlands. 25 May 1999. 24 Mar. 2001 <<http://www.epa.gov-owow/wetlands/facts/fact2.html>>.

Exploring Ancient World Cultures. Ed. Anthony F. Beavers. 1997. U of Evansville. 12 Mar. 2001
<<http://eawc.evansville.edu/index.htm>>.

Block, Marylaine. Home page. 5 Mar. 2001. 12 Apr. 2001 <<http://www.marylaine.com>>.

Rawlins, Gregory J. E. Moths to the Flame. Cambridge: MIT P, 1996. 3 Apr. 2001
<<http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-books/Moths/contents.html>>.

Swift, Jonathan. "A Modest Proposal." 1729. Eighteenth-Century Studies. Ed. Geoffrey Sauer. The English Server. U of Washington. 7 Mar. 2001
<<http://eserver.org/18th/swiftmodest.txt>>.

Jacobs, Harriet Ann. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Boston, 1861. Documenting the American South: The Southern Experience in Nineteenth-Century America. Ed. Ji-Hae Yoon and Natalia Smith. 1998. Academic Affairs Lib., U of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. 14 Mar. 2001 <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/jacobs/jacobs.html>>.

Handout developed using the following resources:

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL). Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Format. 2003. 13 Feb. 2003.
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html>

Hacker, Diana. MLA LIST OF WORKS CITED. 2002. 13 Feb. 2003. <<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/humanities/list.html>>