MLA Style Guide

Many of the papers that you write for college courses require you to do some independent reading, whether that means doing a search of all the articles and books available on a given subject or simply reading a novel. Usually, you will use some facts, ideas, or quotations from your reading when you write your papers. When you use information from your reading and research—and that means ideas that are paraphrased as well as direct quotations—you must cite (give credit to) the sources in which you found the material.

There are a number of different ways to cite information; which one you use will depend on your discipline. MLA (Modern Languages Association) style is most commonly used in English and humanities courses. The complete reference for this format is the Rules for Writers, 7th ed., copies of which are available in the Library’s Reference section as well as the Academic Support Center.

This handout is not intended to replace the MLA Handbook, 8th ed. It attempts to highlight the most essential aspects of MLA style documentation. The MLA Handbook, 8th ed. is available in the upper section of the Library, in the Writing tutoring section.

Just a reminder: always follow your professor’s guidelines regarding your assignment.

POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT MLA STYLE

- The body of your paper and the Works Cited page is double-spaced.
- Use Times New Roman size 12 font, unless professor states otherwise.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks.
- Margins should be 1” on all sides. Indent the first line of paragraphs by using the Tab key.
- Number all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, 1 ½” from the top. Type your last name before the page number. Use the header function.
- MLA style requires in-text citations in the body of your paper when you quote, paraphrase, summarize, or use other borrowed material. (See In-Text Citations page 5)
- The Works Cited page is a separate page and carries the heading Works Cited. (Or Work Cited if you are only using one source.) List your sources alphabetically.
- Follow the citation forms illustrated in the next section. Each citation should be formatted with a half inch hanging indent.
- Italicize the titles of books, films, web sites and periodicals.
- Use quotation marks around titles of articles, stories, poems, and essays.
WHAT IS A SOURCE?

A source can be a book, a magazine, a scholarly journal article, a film, a web site, or a personal interview, to name a few. They generally fall under print sources, non-print sources, and electronic sources.

A print source can be a periodical or a non-periodical. A periodical is a publication that is issued periodically, such as a newspaper (The Boston Globe), a magazine (Newsweek), or a journal (Journal of Naturopathic Medicine). A non-periodical most often refers to books.

A non-print source is a television or radio program, a film or a personal interview, a class lecture or a recording, for example. An electronic source can refer to a source found on the Internet, such as a personal or professional Web site. There are some electronic sources that originally appeared in print form. (Databases such as EbscoHost and Infotrac republish articles in an electronic database that originally appeared in print form.)

Below are specific examples for citing sources on your Works Cited page and include many of the above. Determine what kind of source you have, and follow the formats given below.

PERIODICALS

- Article in a scholarly journal: pages numbered consecutively through each volume:

- Article in a scholarly journal: each issue paged separately:

  \[(36 = \text{volume number};\ 2 = \text{issue number};\ (2000) = \text{year of publication})\]

- Magazine article:

- Newspaper article:

- Unsigned article or editorial:
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BOOKS

- One author:
  

- Two authors:
  

- Edited Book:
  

- Author and editor:
  

- Work in an anthology:
  

- Book with no author:
  

- Translated book:
  

- Book in a Series:
  

- Multivolume work:
  
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- Government publication:

MULTIMEDIA SOURCES

- Film or Video:
  Paramount, 2002. DVD.

  When you cite a Videocassette or DVD, include also the medium, the name of the distributor, and the date of the recording.


- Television or radio program:
  9 July 2000.

- Sound Recording:

- Interview:
ELECTRONIC SOURCES

- Professional site:

  The first date listed is the date of the web site posting or the date that the web site was last updated. The second date is the date that you accessed the web site for your information.

- Personal site:

- Article in an online magazine:

- Article in a reference database:

- Work in an online database or subscription service:
  EbscoHost and Infotrac are two popular electronic databases that carry articles that have originally appeared in print form (magazines, journals, newspapers, etc.). When citing an article that you retrieved from one of these databases, use the same format as if you had read the article in its print form, but add the name of the database (italicized) from which you retrieved the article and the date of retrieval.

IN-TEXT CITATIONS

What to Cite:

- All facts, statistics, and pieces of information from your reading—unless they are common knowledge and are accessible in many sources.
- Exact words from your source, enclosed in quotation marks.
- Somebody else's ideas, opinions, and theories—even if you restate them in your own words in a paraphrase or summary.

Quotations: When you quote, you borrow an author’s exact words. Use a quotation when the wording is so memorable or expresses a point so well that you cannot improve or shorten it without weakening it; when the author is a respected authority whose opinion supports your own ideas; or when an author challenges or disagrees profoundly with others in the field.

Paraphrases: Paraphrasing is putting material (including major and minor points) into your own words and sentence structure. You can paraphrase a theory, an idea, the results of a study, or a passage in an original source, as long as you use your own words to describe it. A paraphrase is often the same length as the original, but it is in your own words.

Summaries: Summaries are often less detailed than paraphrases. In a summary, you provide your reader with the gist of the most important sources you find. Summaries give readers basic information and are always in your own words. When you include a summary in your paper, introduce the author’s name and/or the work.

In-Text Citations (also called Parenthetical Citations): When you include quotations, paraphrases, facts, statistics, etc. in your paper, you must give credit to the author. This is called citing a source. You do this with in-text or parenthetical citations. There are only two essential pieces of information that need to be included in the citation: the author’s last name and the page number. This is the only information that goes inside the parentheses, and it will refer to the full bibliographic information on the Works Cited page. (Note: If there is no author, use the first word of the title. If there are no page numbers, use paragraph numbers.)

Signal Phrases: With practice, you will learn to integrate your research smoothly into your paper. Avoid dropping quotations or paraphrases without warning. Signal phrases will help you to transition from your words and ideas to the words and ideas of others. The following verbs will be very useful to you as you write your research paper: One can write that someone…acknowledges / adds / admits / argues / asserts / claims / comments / confirms / believes / declares / implies / insists / notes / observes / points out / reports / thinks / writes. Consider the following examples, and note the signal phrases used:
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- One author, named in your introductory phrase:

  The sociologist Ruth Sidel’s interviews with young women provide examples of what Sidel sees as the “impossible dream” (19).

  *When the author’s name does not appear in the signal phrase, place the author’s name, the date, and the page number in parentheses at the end of the quotation.*

  Many young women, from all races and classes, have taken on the idea of the American Dream, however difficult it might be for them to achieve it (Sidel 19-20).

  *For electronic sources that do not provide page numbers, use the paragraph number, if available, preceded by 'par.‘*:

  An article that appeared in Research Quarterly states that, “Their recovery process parallels the steps taken by those recovering from other afflictions” (Russo par. 3).

  *When a quote includes a question mark or an exclamation point, also include a period after the citation:*

  Mrs. Bridge wonders. "Is my daughter mine?" (Connell 135).

- Two or more authors:

  The adult mountain lion population in California is now estimated at four to six thousand (Reyes and Messina B1).

- Work cited indirectly in another source:

  We generate words unconsciously, without thinking about them; they appear, as James Britton says, "at the point of utterance" (qtd. in Smith 108).
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• Quotation of more than 40 words:

Newcomb lays some blame on the teacher and uses the sentence fragments to make a strong point about the way the teacher neglected to discuss the specifics of the assignment:

It seems like a “teachable” moment that endangered a hard-line response and such debacles happen across the US. Why no open discussion of what’s acceptable? Or specifics: a horror story, children, but no guns or chain saws allowed. Or show me the difference between horror and tension. (13)

_The quote is indented 10 spaces on the left, and the period is placed before the parenthesis. Do not use quotation marks for these long, set-off quotes._

• Paraphrase:

Original Text from James C. Stalker, “Official English or English Only”

“If any language group, Spanish or other, chooses to maintain its language, there is precious little that little we can do about it, legally or otherwise, and still maintain that we are a free country. We cannot legislate the language of the home, the street, the bar, the club, unless we are willing to set up a cadre of language police who will ticket and arrest us if we speak something other than English.”

Paraphrase

Stalker points out that in a democracy like the United States, people of all ethnic and language background are always free to speak their own language without any interference. It is not feasible to have laws against the uses of language because it certainly would not be possible to make police enforce such laws in homes, on the streets, and in public places (21).
PLAGIARISM

It is fine to bring the words and ideas of other writers into your paper. However, when you do so, you must acknowledge your debt to the writers of these sources. If not, you are guilty of plagiarism, a serious academic offense.

The most blatant form of plagiarism is putting your name as the author of a paper that you did not write. The Internet has certainly made it easier for students to find papers on any number of topics. However, professors also know how to use the Internet, and many are quite adept at searching the same sites that students use to find what they suspect to be plagiarized work.

Other types of plagiarism are more subtle and include (1) the failure to cite quotations and borrowed ideas; (2) failure to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks; and (3) failure to put summaries and paraphrases into your own words. Most students who plagiarize are simply unaware of the proper way to document sources in academic writing.

In order to avoid plagiarism, be sure that you not only give credit where credit is due, but that you follow the appropriate format, in this case, the MLA style of documentation. While this handout has attempted to give a brief introduction to MLA, it cannot cover all aspects of it. If you still have questions, it is best to consult the Rules for Writers, 7th ed., which is a complete and comprehensive guide.