MLA Style Basics

MLA Style is the set of guidelines and rules developed by the Modern Language Association to assist students and researchers with the task of scholarly research and writing. *This guide is based on the 9th edition of the MLA Handbook, published in April 2021.* Before you begin your assignment, confirm with your instructor which edition of the MLA style rules to follow. The instructions below include standard formatting rules for MLA style. Always confirm with your instructor the preferred formatting for your assignment.

Formatting a Research Paper

The following formatting rules are found in the MLA Style Center’s webpage on “Formatting a Research Paper.”

- Format your paper with **1 inch margins** on all sides.
- Select an **easily readable font** (e.g. 12 point, Times New Roman)
- **Double-space** the entire paper. This should include text and the list of works cited.
- **Indent the first line** of each paragraph half an inch from the margin.
- At the top left margin of the first page, type your name, your instructor’s name, course name and number, and the date.
- Next, type the **title of your paper** in the top, center of the first page following the standard rules for titles in MLA Style (see below).
- Include your **last name and page numbers**, consecutively on all pages in the upper right-hand corner.
- Include a **list of works cited** beginning on a new page at the end of your paper (see further instructions below).

General Citation Guidelines

**Document all sources used to write your research paper.** Documentation is essential to demonstrate to your reader the quality of your research, to allow the reader to access the original source, and to avoid plagiarism by giving proper credit for the words, works, and ideas of others.

- For each source used in your project, **include a detailed entry in a list of works cited** on a new page at the end of the paper and a **brief in-text citation** which signals to the reader that the information provided is from a source other than yourself.
- Citations should follow the rules outlined in the *MLA Handbook* (examples following).
- Citations may not be necessary for information and ideas which are **common knowledge** or widely known by the average reader. If you are unsure whether information or ideas are common knowledge, consult with your instructor.

Works Cited List

For every source that you use in your project, you must include a full citation in a list of works cited. Here are instructions for compiling your works cited list and for structuring each citation. In the following pages, you will find examples of citations for different types of sources.

- The list of works cited should be located at the **end of your paper**.
- The list should begin on a **new page** with the title, **Works Cited**, centered at the top of the page.
- The works should be **arranged in alphabetical order** based on the first part of the citation (usually the author’s last name).
- The list should be double-spaced.
- For citations longer than one line, the second and all subsequent lines should have a **hanging indent** of half an inch from the margin (see examples beginning on page 4).
Core Elements Table

The following are the core elements of any entry in the works cited list. Note: Your source may not have all of these elements. Examine each source carefully to determine which elements to include. Ask a librarian for help if you are unsure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Punctuation following</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1  Author                   | Period                | The author refers to the person, persons or entity responsible for the work. This may include any of the following: authors, editors, translators, directors, producers, performers, screenwriters, pseudonyms, or corporate authors. For roles other than an author, list the person’s role after their name. If no author is listed, start with the title. Here are general examples for listing authors and other responsible persons.  
  ➢ Single author: Last name, First name. (e.g. Perry, Imani.)  
  ➢ Two authors: Last name, First name, and First name Last name. (e.g. Fujiwara, Lynn, and Shireen Roshanravan.)  
  ➢ Three or more authors: Last name, First name, et al. (e.g. Cunningham, Scott, et al.)  
  ➢ Editor: Andrist, Debra D., editor. |
| 2  Title of Source.        | Period                | The title and subtitle of the work are listed next. If the source is part of a larger work (e.g. an article in a periodical), then the title is placed in quotation marks. If the source is self-contained (e.g. an entire book or a full website), then the title is italicized. Capitalize the first word in the title, the last word, and all other words except the following parts of speech: articles, prepositions, and coordinating conjunctions. Here are examples of the formatting of a title:  
  ➢ Part of a larger work: “What’s Going On in a Graphic Novel?”  
  ➢ Self-contained work: *The Other Man Was Me: A Voyage to the New World.*  
  If the work does not have a title, provide a brief but informative description.  
  ➢ Wright, Frank Lloyd. Leaded glass skylight. 1908, Meyer May House, Grand Rapids. |
| 3  Title of Container,     | Comma                 | The container is listed when the source is part of a larger whole (e.g. an essay in a book, an episode in a TV series, an article in a newspaper, etc.). The title of the container is italicized and followed by a comma. An easy rule to keep in mind is that you will have a container in your citation only if the previous title is in quotation marks. Here is an example of the formatting for a container:  
  ➢ Container: *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine,*  
  At times sources are “nested” within more than one container (e.g. a journal in a database or a book of short stories on Google Books). In such cases, provide the relevant information from elements 3-9, then provide the second container with any relevant elements 3-9. Here is an example with the containers highlighted:  
  ➢ Two Containers:  
<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4 | Other Contributors, | Credit other contributors in a source if they are important to the identification of the source. Begin with a description of their role followed by their name. Common descriptions include: adapted by, directed by, edited by, illustrated by, or translated by (see *MLA Handbook* 5.43, p. 151). Examples of other contributors:  
  ➢ translated by Edith Grossman,  
  ➢ directed by Spike Lee,  
  ➢ edited by Stephen Orgel, |
| 5 | Version, | If the source has been released in more than one form, include a description of the version. For a book, this may be the edition. For media, this may be a description such as abridged, director’s cut, etc. Examples of versions:  
  ➢ Edition: 5th ed.,  
  ➢ Edition: Expanded ed.,  
  ➢ Version: English Standard Version,  
  ➢ Media: unabridged version,  
  ➢ Media: director’s cut,  
| 6 | Number, | If the source is part of a numbered set, include the corresponding number. Depending on the type of source this may be the volume number, issue number, season and/or episode number. Examples:  
  ➢ Item from a multivolume set: vol. 2,  
  ➢ Journal volume and issue: vol. 23, no. 4,  
  ➢ TV series: season 5, episode 10, |
| 7 | Publisher, | The publisher is the organization primarily responsible for producing the source. If multiple publishers or distributors are stated, use the organization with the main responsibility for the work. If more than one organization was equally responsible, list each of their names separated by a forward slash (/). Examples:  
  ➢ Oxford UP,  
  ➢ Penguin Press,  
  ➢ Universal / Forty Acres and Mule Filmworks,  
  ➢ BBC America,  
  Do not list a publisher for the following: a periodical, a self-published work, a website whose title is the same name as its publisher, or a website not involved in the creation of the content (see *MLA Handbook* 5.54, 164-165) |
| 8 | Publication date, | List the date that the source was published as you find it in the source. If a source has more than one date, cite the date that is most meaningful to the version you are using (see *MLA Handbook* 5.68, 173). Examples of how to format the publication date:  
  ➢ Year only: 2020  
  ➢ Month and year: Jan. 2020  
  ➢ Full date: 12 July 2019  
  ➢ Season: spring 2008, |
Include a location at the end of the citation to help the reader access the specific material cited. In a print source, you may include a page number (preceded by p.) or page range (preceded by pp.).

For an online work, you may include the doi,permalink, or URL. If you include a URL remove the http:// or https:// at the beginning.

For a journal article you may include a digital object identifier (DOI) if one is available. (Note: A DOI is an identifier assigned to online publications such as journal articles. The DOI may be listed on the bottom of the article or on the database or website where the article was found.)

Core Elements in Basic Format:

Author’s Last Name, First Name. “Title of Source.” Title of Container, Other Contributors, version, number, Publisher, publication date, location.

Supplemental Elements

There are several elements, which may be included in a works cited entry at the writer’s discretion. Supplemental elements may include: date of access (for works lacking a publication date or works that may be altered), date of original publication, city of publication, or other facts about the source. Some elements are added at the end of the entry while others are placed in the middle of the entry following the title. Consult the MLA Handbook pp. 208-219 for detailed instructions.

Some professors prefer the date of access be included for websites without a clear publication date. Check with your instructor to see what they prefer!

Works Cited Examples

The next several pages provide citation examples, which include the core elements listed above. Please note that your Works Cited list should always be double-spaced, but in the interest of conserving paper, this handout shows examples that are single-spaced.

Single author


Two authors


Three or more authors


Multiple works by one author

Multiple works by coauthors

Editor

Multiple editors

Translator (if your focus is on the translator of the work rather than the original author)

Translator (if your focus is on the original author of the work)

Entry in an Encyclopedia

Entry in an eBook Encyclopedia

Essay in a collection

Chapter in an edited book

eBook from a database

eBook from a website

eBook alternate edition

Article in a print newspaper

Article in a newspaper from a database

**Article in a newspaper from a website**


**Article in a print magazine**


**Article in a magazine from a database**


**Article in a magazine from a website**


**Article in a print journal**


**Article in a journal from a database with a DOI**


**Article in a journal from a database and without a DOI**


**Article from a specialized database (CQ Researcher)**


**Webpage (single page on a website)**


**Website**


**Documentary film DVD format**


**Feature film DVD format**


**Film from database**


**YouTube video**

TV episode from a Streaming service like Hulu or Netflix

TV episode from an app

Government document/Corporate author

Government document/House of Representatives committee report

Tweet
@POTUS. “I have long said America is a nation that can be defined in a single word: Possibilities. In America, everyone should be able to go as far as their hard work and God-given talent will take them. Even to the Supreme Court of the United States of America.” *Twitter*, 8 Apr. 2022, twitter.com/POTUS/status/1512576340062621706.

Email
Perez, Rochelle. E-mail to April Austin. 18 Mar. 2022.

Personal interview

In-Text Citations

The second part of your citation is a brief citation in the text of your paper, which is made any time you reference information from your source. An in-text citation is required when you quote or copy word-for-word from a source and also when you paraphrase or restate information you learned from a source. Suggestion: You might find it useful to create your Works Cited entry before creating your in-text citations in order to ensure that they agree.

The information included in your in-text citation is always the first part of your Works Cited entry plus the related page number or other identifying marker if available. For most sources, include the author’s last name and the page number from where you got the information using the following format e.g. (Menendez 2374). For sources without an author, the in-text citation and corresponding Works Cited entry will begin with the title of the work. An in-text citation may be placed at the end of the quoted or paraphrased section using the format listed above. Or the author’s name may be introduced in the sentence with the page number listed in parenthesis at the end of the sentence. See the examples below for a variety of in-text citation examples.

Quote (parenthetical in-text citation)

Their book mentions that these “notions of sisterhood, as expressed in the current women’s movement, offer some insights into the alienation many black women have expressed about the movement itself” (Guidroz and Berger 27).

Corresponding Works Cited


Quote (author introduced in sentence and page number listed in parenthesis)

As reported by Holland, the Department of Defense “issued a directive telling senior leaders they must now assess and plan for the risks posed by climate change” (60).

Corresponding Works Cited


Paraphrased source (parenthetical in-text citation)

This court case between Jack Kirby and Marvel Comics over the rights to many major comic book characters including the Avengers and Captain America was eventually decided in Marvel Comics favor, to the outrage of many fans (House 933).

Corresponding Works Cited


Paraphrased source (author introduced in sentence and page number listed in parenthesis)

According to Mattessich, the documentary *Grizzly Man* is a good example of the idea of the global man or animal (53).

Corresponding Works Cited

Source with no author listed (parenthetical in-text citation): In the case of a work with no author, use a shortened version of the title in quotes instead.

It seems that “despite women’s gains, a large gender pay gap still exists” (“Gender Pay Gap” 1).

Corresponding Works Cited


Media and/or Website: When citing media or a website, it is fine to use a shortened version of the title in your in-text citation. For self-contained or longer sources, the title of the source should be italicized (see Core Elements #2- Title of Source). Media or websites may not have page numbers to include in the in-text citation; however, you may include other identifying markers such as paragraph or section numbers (e.g. sec. 8) or time-based markers (e.g. 01:28:3-7) for audio or video recordings.

In his last few months in office, “President Obama will not be satisfied until every American who wants work can find a job” (“Jobs & the Economy”).

Corresponding Works Cited


Block Quote: For quotations that are more than four lines, place the quotations in a block of text without quotation marks. The entire quotation should be indented 1 inch from the margin and should maintain double-spacing. The in-text citation should be placed in parentheses after the period at the end of the quoted section.

Of course, it can always be said that:
if we define Afroturism as African American cultural production and political theory that imagine less constrained black subjectivity in the future and that produce a profound critique of current social, racial, and economic orders, then there can be no doubt that Monâ€‘e stands at the center of a new form of Afroturism. (English and Kim 217)

Corresponding Works Cited


MLA Style Resources

For more information on MLA Style citation rules including useful examples and guides, check out the following:

➢ MLA Style Center (style.mla.org/). This website, published by the Modern Language Association, provides writing tips and quick reference information for formatting your citations.
➢ MLA Style Guide from the OWL@Purdue (owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html). This online writing lab provides detailed instructions for writing a research paper and formatting it according to MLA style.

Works Cited in this Guide


Works Cited

Sample

Colon, David A. “Heroic Insecurity in Junot Diaz’s *Drown* and *This is How You Lose Her.*” *Contemporary Immigrant Short Fiction*, edited by Robert C. Evans, Salem Press, 2015, pp. 134-147.


How to Create a Hanging Indent

The Works Cited list should be double spaced and is formatted with a hanging indent (the second and all subsequent lines are indented). To format a hanging indent in Microsoft Word:

➢ Put your cursor at the front of the second line of the citation
➢ Right click and select “Paragraph” from the menu
➢ In the middle “Indentation” panel under “Special:” select “hanging” from the drop-down menu

![Microsoft Word hanging indent settings](image)

To create a hanging indent in a Google doc:

➢ Highlight the text you want indented. You can select a single citation or multiple citations at a time
➢ On the ruler at the top of the page, drag the **Left Indent** (light blue inverted triangle) to the right five spaces. You will notice, the **First Line Indent** marker (light blue rectangle above the triangle) will come along for the ride and the entire citation will move to the right.
➢ Drag that **First Line Indent** marker (light blue rectangle above the triangle) back to the left margin. It should move independently of the triangle and will create your hanging indent.