What Is an MLA-Style Essay?

MLA (Modern Language Association) style is used mostly for analyzing documents in English and other humanities courses. When using material from a source, MLA style emphasizes the author and the page number, if the source has stable page numbers.

The MLA document format requires the following elements (see fig. 1):

1. A running header in the top margin. It is your last name, a space, and the page number.
2. Below, on the first page only, is the heading: your name, instructor’s name, class, and date.
3. On the next line, the title of the essay is centered. Capitalize the first and last words of your title and all the words in between except articles, prepositions, FANBOYS, and to in infinitive verbs.
4. Everything except the header is double-spaced, left-justified, with one-inch margins. Use plain 12-point Times New Roman or Calibri, no decorative fonts, not even for your title.
5. Press the “Tab” key to indent the first line of each paragraph ½ inch, with no extra line spacing between paragraphs.

MLA In-text Citation

The first time you quote, summarize, or paraphrase ideas from a source, give the author’s full name and the title of the source in a signal phrase. After that, you may refer to the same author by his or her family name. Use a present tense or present perfect verb that indicates how the author says the information (the following example verb has bold added). Place periods or commas after a citation in parentheses.
Example of Verb Use

In her autobiography, Memoirs of a Seattle Girlhood, Elspeth Wetly describes growing up in Seattle as "a damp experience" (219).

If it is unnecessary to repeat the source information in a sentence, you can put the author’s last name and the page number in parentheses after the quotation or paraphrase. You do not need to write the title within the parentheses unless you cite more than one work by the same author (or works by authors with the same last name) in your paper. If you cite several facts from the same source, one after the other, you should include the author’s last name and the page number in the first citation. In the following citations, use only the page number. However, if you cite another work, then you need to write the author’s name again:

People who grew up there complain that Seattle is a damp city to live in (Wetly, Memoirs 219). This dampness, in fact, leads to frequent minor illnesses among the population in general (Wetly, Dripping 204). Often, these illnesses can last through the winter, and in at least one case, a common cold "dragged on for an entire hanky-soaked year" (274).

Cite both a quotation and the author of the work in which it is found when they are different people:

Peter Whybrow, a neuroscientist who examines America’s economy and culture in his book American Mania, says “‘Operating in a world of instant communication with minimal social tethers, . . . America’s engines of commerce and desire [have become] turbocharged’” (McKibben 123).

As in the above example, if you need to omit part of a quote, use three spaced periods to show where the words were left out. If you need to insert or substitute a word or words in a quote, put square brackets around the substitution.

If your source is electronic and has no page numbers, you may identify the author in your sentence and omit a parenthetical citation. Furthermore, if your source has no
author, you may put a shortened version of its title in the parentheses, formatted according to the source type, instead.

**Long Quotes**

If you have a quotation that is more than four lines when typed into your essay, write an introduction to the quote, then start the quote on the next line; if your introduction is a sentence, end it with a colon. Indent all lines of the quote one inch from the left margin. Put the parenthetical citation after the period at the end of the quote. Do not use quotation marks.

**MLA Works Cited Page**

After the essay, on a separate page, list the works named in the paper.

Center the heading “Works Cited” at the top of the page.

Then type out the entries for each work and arrange them in alphabetical order by each primary author’s last name. If there is no author named, use the title (not including a, an, or the for the alphabetizing).

Start a new paragraph for each work, but keep everything the same double line spacing as the rest of the paper. In Word, after typing out your works cited list, highlight the text and move (the bottom two portions of the slider) ½-inch to the right on the ruler, leaving the top part in place like this to create hanging indents.

(Figures 2 and 3 are illustrative examples of Long Block Quotes and MLA Works Cited Page Format.)
MLA STYLE DOCUMENTATION

This handout gives some examples of how to document (or cite) information sources in bibliographies, works cited, or reference pages using Modern Language Association of America (MLA) style. For more detailed information, consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition (call number REF LB 2369.G53 2009). You can also find more information at the MLA Style web page: http://www.mla.org.

A bibliography or works cited page appears at the end of a research paper. It informs the reader of the sources of quotes, facts and information used to formulate the opinions in your research paper. It is important to provide an accurate and complete bibliography to prevent plagiarism. Follow punctuation, capitalization, and italicizing as provided in the examples. Begin each entry even with the left margin. Subsequent lines for that entry are indented ½ inch from the left margin.

- **Double-space** within and between all entries.
- **Alphabetize** entries by author; if no author is given, begin with title, ignoring the articles a, an, the.
- Do NOT number the entries.
- MLA requires that you state in your citation whether items are in print format or web (electronic) format.

**NOTE:** The examples in this handout are NOT properly double-spaced as MLA formatting requires.

### PRINT BOOKS

**BASIC FORMAT**

Author last name, First name. *Book Title*. City of Publication: Publisher, copyright date. Print.

**ONE AUTHOR**


**TWO OR THREE AUTHORS**


**MORE THAN THREE AUTHORS**


**EDITOR**


**GOVERNMENT SOURCE**


### ARTICLES WITHIN PRINT BOOKS

**AUTHORED ARTICLE IN A BOOK**


**ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLE**


**ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLE (NO AUTHOR)**

PERIODICAL ARTICLES
If you can’t identify the author(s) of your periodical article, start the citation with the title of the article.

BASIC FORMAT (MAGAZINE ARTICLE)..................................Author last name, First name. "Title of Article." Title of Periodical Date of Source: page numbers. Print.


ARTICLES FROM DATABASES


INTERNET RESOURCES
If you can’t find a publisher/sponsor, type “N. p.” If you can’t find the date of publication, type “n. d.”

BASIC FORMAT..................................................................... Author. "Article Title." Title of Publication or Web Site. Publisher/Sponsoring Organization, Date of Publication/Update. Web. Date of Access.


E-BOOKS