MLA Style: Highlights

The Modern Language Association developed MLA Style, based on the older Chicago Style, for citation needs in English language and literature scholarship. MLA Style uses author-page citation in parentheses within an essay that corresponds to full citation in a page of works cited placed at the end of an essay.

Formatting Papers

First impressions mean a lot, and it is important to make certain that research papers follow the formatting guidelines established in Chapter 4 of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

- Use white 8½ by 11 inch paper and print in black.
- Use a standard typeface such as Times New Roman. Avoid unusual typefaces.
- Use either a 12-point font.
- Double-space between all lines of the manuscript.
- Don’t justify the right margin.
- Make one-inch margins all around: top and bottom, left and right sides of the text.
- Add page numbers in a header. Number pages consecutively throughout the paper in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. Type your last name and leave a space before the page number.
- A research paper does not need a title page. Instead, beginning one inch from the top of the first page and flush with the left margin, type your name, your instructor’s name, the course number, and the date on separate lines, double-spacing between the lines. Double space again and center the title. Do not underline, bold-face, or put your title in quotation marks.
- Indent the first line of each paragraph five spaces (one tab).

In-text Citations and the Works Cited Page

As always, you must cite material that you paraphrase, summarize, or directly quote in your paper. Document your paper throughout by citing the author (or phrase of title when the author is anonymous) and page number for the sources you have used in your research in parentheses at the end of the sentence containing the information you are citing. This author-page number style of citation briefly identifies the source for the readers and enables them to locate the source’s full citation in the alphabetical works cited list at the end of your paper. References cited in text must appear in the works cited list; conversely, each entry in the works cited list must be cited in text. Since the purpose of listing references is to give credit to the source and enable readers to retrieve sources, reference data must be correct and complete. The following example is typical of MLA Style with its author-page number parenthetical citation:

**Example:** Ancient writers attributed the invention of the monochord to Pythagoras, who lived in the sixth century B.C. (Marcuse 197).

Notice that the information in this example is paraphrased, not directly quoted, yet the information still requires a citation.

The citation (Marcuse 197) tells readers that you derived the information in the sentence from page 197 of a work by the author named Marcuse. If readers want more information about the source, they can turn to the works cited list, where, under the name Marcuse, they would find the following information:

Example In-text Citations

**The Bible:** When you cite passages of the Bible, you should provide parenthetical reference to the book, chapter, and verse. In the first citation, provide the name of the Bible version in standard abbreviation. Abbreviate the title of any book longer than four letters—for instance, “Gen.” for Genesis. Then give the chapter and verse(s) in Arabic numerals.

**Example:** According to the Bible, at Babel God “did . . . confound the language of all the earth” (Gen. 11.9, KJV).

**A literary work:** Novels, plays, and poems are often available in many editions, so you should provide information that will help readers find the passage you cite no matter what edition they consult. For novels, cite page number first, add a semicolon, and then give other traditional identifying information, using appropriate abbreviations.

**Example:** Raskolnikov first appears in Crime and Punishment as a man contemplating a terrible act but frightened of meeting his talkative landlady on the stairs (Dostoevsky 1; pt 1, ch.1).

**Poems and plays:** For poems that are not divided into parts, you can omit the page numbers and supply the line number(s) for the quotation. To prevent confusion with page numbers, precede the line number(s) with “line” or “lines” in the first citation; thereafter just use the number(s). For verse plays and poems that are divided into parts, cite the appropriate part or act (and scene, if any), plus the line number(s). Use Arabic numerals for parts, including acts and scenes.

**Example:** Later in King Lear Shakespeare has the disguised Edgar announce, “The prince of darkness is a gentleman” (3.4.147). The citation indicates that the quotation is from Act 3, Scene 4, line 147.

**Author named in text:** According to Gilligan, “women impose a distinctive construction on moral problems” (105).

**Author not named in text:** One researcher concludes that “women impose a distinctive construction on moral problems” (Gilligan 105).

**If you wish to cite an entire work**—whether a print source or a non-print source, it is usually preferable to include in your text, rather than in parenthetical reference, the name of the author and the title of the work.

**Example:** Francis Fukuyama includes many examples of this trend in her 2002 work, Our Post Human Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution.

**A work with no author listed:** In a parenthetical reference, you should include the full title (if brief) or an abbreviated title using the first keyword or key phrase, and then the page or section number. When abbreviating the title, begin with the word by which the title is alphabetized in your works cited page.

**Example:** “The barber shop was a relic of the 1880s” (“Cruelest Cut”). This work will be cited on the works cited page by the title “Cruelest Cut” since the author is anonymous.

**A work with two or three authors:** If the source has two or three authors, give the last names for all of them in the text or in the citation. Separate last two authors’ names with “and.”

**Example:** (Smith, Jones, and Bailey 112).

**A work with more than three authors:** If the source has more than three authors, list the first author’s name followed by “et al.” (a Latin abbreviation for “and others.”)

**Example:** (Smith et al. 112).
Citing two or more works by the same author: When you reference multiple works by the same author, you need simply to add the name of the work after the author’s last name, placing a comma between the author’s name and an abbreviated title of his or her work, followed by the relevant page reference.

Example: (Durant, Age 214).

A personal interview: Indicate with a phrase in your sentence that the material comes from an interview.

Example: In a recent interview, Professor Smith indicated that . . . .

On the works cited page, list the interview in the following fashion:


Electronic sources: Cite online and all electronic sources as you would other sources, usually by author’s name or, if there is no author, by title. Do not use page numbers with electronic sources; you may use paragraph (par. or pars.) numbers if they are provided or if your instructor requires them.

Examples: Twins reared apart report similar feelings (Palfrey, pars. 6-7).

"The barber shop was a relic of the 1800s" ("Cruelest Cut").

Government publications or works with corporate authors: If the work is authored by or listed as a government body or a corporation, cite the work by that organization’s name. If the name is long, work it into the text to avoid an intrusive citation.


Long quotes: “Block quote” any quotation that runs to five or more lines in your paper. Set it off from your text by beginning a new line, indenting one inch (ten spaces) from the left margin and typing it double-spaced, without adding quotation marks. A colon generally introduces a quotation displayed in this “block quote” fashion, though sometimes the context may require a different punctuation mark, such as a comma. If you quote only a single paragraph or part of one, do not indent the first line more than the rest. A parenthetical reference to a prose quotation set off from the text follows the last line of the quotations. (The citation comes after the period with block quotes.)

Works Cited

As the heading indicates, the works cited page contains all the works that you cite in your text. The works cited page is double spaced and the second and subsequent lines of each source are indented five spaces (hanging indentation). The basic format for entries on the works cited page includes the following three elements: (1) **Author.** Use the author’s full name: last name first, followed by a comma, and then the first name and middle name or initial. End the name with a period and one space. (2) **Title.** Give the full title, including any subtitle. Italicize the title or use underlining (format consistently), capitalize the first letter of all important words, separate the main title and the subtitle with a colon followed by one space, and end the title with a period and one space. (3) **Publication information.** The city of publication, followed by a colon and one space, the name of the publisher, followed by a comma, and provide date of publication, ending with a period. MLA uses many standard abbreviations, such as UP for University Press.

A book by one author (for books with more than one author see below).


Two or more books by the same author: To cite two or more books by the same author, give the author’s name in the first entry only. Thereafter, in place of the name, type three hyphens, followed by a period and the title. The three hyphens stand for exactly the same name as in the preceding entry.


* * *

A work in an anthology (stories and essays collected in larger, bound collections): Follow the same procedure for books but include editor and page numbers for selection.

An article in a reference book: Treat an encyclopedia article or a dictionary entry as you would a piece in a collection, but do not cite the editor of the reference work. If the article is signed, give the author first; if it is unsigned, give the title first. If the encyclopedia or dictionary arranges articles alphabetically, you may omit volume and page numbers.

A pamphlet: Treat a pamphlet as you would a book. If there is no author, cite by title and give as much information as possible about the publisher and date of publication.

A government publication: If you do not know the author of the document, cite as author the government agency that issued it—that is, give the name of the government first, followed by the name of the government agency, using an abbreviation if the context makes it clear. In citing the *Congressional Record* (abbreviated *Cong. Rec.*), give only the date and page numbers (*Cong. Rec*. 7 Feb. 1973: 3831-51). In citing other congressional documents, include such information as the number and session of Congress, the house (S stands for Senate, HR for House of Representatives), and the type and number of the publication. The usual publication information comes next (place, publisher, and date). Most federal publications, regardless of the branch of government issuing them, are published by the Government Printing Office (GPO), in Washington, D.C.

The Bible: When citing the Bible, do not underline the title or the name of the version.
   **Example:** The Holy Bible. Authorized King James Version. 1611. Cleveland: World, n.d. (“n.d.” indicates that the source lists no date of publication.)

A signed article in a journal that pages issues separately or that numbers only issues, not volumes: Provide name of author, name of article in quotation marks, name of journal in italics, volume and issue numbers separated by a period, date, and inclusive pages.

A signed article in a journal with continuous pagination: Some journals number the pages of issues consecutively throughout a year, so that issue number 3 might begin on page 261. For this kind of journal, give the volume number after the title, omit issue number, and place the year of publication in parentheses.

A signed article in a monthly or bimonthly magazine: Abbreviate all months except May, June, and July. Do not place the date in parentheses, and do not provide a volume or issue number.

A signed article in a weekly or biweekly magazine (date includes a day).

An unsigned article: The article is cited by keyword or the title if there is no author.
A signed article in a daily newspaper: The name of the paper appears without A, An or The. If the newspaper lists an edition at the top of the first page, include that information. If the paper is divided into lettered or numbers sections, provide the section designation. Use a + sign to indicate that the story begins on one page and is continued on a later page.


Electronic sources

Internet sites, such as information databases, scholarly projects, professional Web sites, and online periodicals, vary significantly in the publication information they provide. Electronic publication information usually includes the title of the site (italicized or underlined), the date of electronic publication or the latest update, and the name or any institution or organization that sponsors the site. If an editor’s or version number is stated, give that information directly following the title of the site. The date of electronic publication is required in addition to a date of print publication because the Internet version may differ from the print version. This list shows most of the possible components of an entry for an Internet publication and the order in which they are normally arranged.

1. The name of the author, editor, compiler, or translator of the source (if given), last name first for alphabetizing and, if appropriate, followed by an abbreviation, such as ed.
2. Title of the article, poem, short story, or similar short work in the Internet site (enclosed in quotation marks). Or title of a posting to a discussion list or forum (taken from the subject line and put in quotation marks), followed by the description Online posting.
3. Title of a book (underlined).
4. Name of the editor, compiler, or translator of the text (if relevant and if not cited earlier) proceeded by the appropriate abbreviation, such as Ed.
5. Publication information for any print version of the source.
6. Title of the Internet site (e.g., scholarly project, database, online periodical, or professional or person site [underlined] or, for a professional or personal site with no title, a description such as Home page.
7. Name of the editor of the site (if given).
8. Version number of the source (if not part of the title or, for a journal, the volume number, issue number, or other identifying number.
9. Date of electronic publication, of the latest update, or of posting.
10. For a work from a subscription service, the name of the service and—if a library or a consortium of libraries is the subscriber—the name and geographical location of the subscriber.
11. For a posting to a discussion list or forum, the name of the list or forum.
12. The number range or total number of pages, paragraphs, or other sections, if they are numbered.
13. Name of any institution or organization sponsoring the site (if not cited earlier).
14. Date when the researcher accessed the site.
15. URL of the source or, if the URL is impractically long and complicated, the URL of the site’s home page. Or, for a document from a subscription service, the URL of the service’s home page, if known; or the keyword assigned by the service, preceded by Keyword; or the sequence of lines followed, preceded by Path. Note that the URL is enclosed in angle brackets followed by a period.

An Entire Internet Site
1. Title of the site (underlined)
2. Name of the editor of the site (if given)
3. Electronic publication information, including version number (if relevant and if not part of the
title), date of electronic publication or of the latest update, and the name of any sponsoring
institution or organization.
4. Date of access and URL.

A personal web page: Cite by name of author (if given) or by title of the page, or, if there is no title, the
description Home Page. Follow with the web address and date of access.

An article in an online periodical: The typical entry for a work in an online periodical consists of the
following seven items: (1) author’s name (if given), (2) title of the work in quotation marks, (3) name of
the periodical (italicized or underlined), (4) volume number, issue number, or other identifying number,
(5) date of publication, (6) number range or total number of pages, if they are numbered, (7) date of
access and URL address. If the journal is included within a database, state the name of the database. If
you cannot find some of this information, cite what is available.

A publication on CD-ROM or Digital Disk: Citations for these publications are similar to those for print
sources, with the following three differences: (1) include publication medium (CD-ROM, for example), (2)
include vendor’s name, and (3) include publication date.

A work from an online service: Provide a URL if the material is accessed through the URL. If you retrieve
the material by entering a keyword or similar designation, complete the citation by writing Keyword and
the word itself following the name of the service and date of access.
   Example: “Table Tennis.” Compton’s Encyclopedia Online. Vers. 5.0. 2007. America
   Online. 4 July 2008. Keyword: Compton’s.

An E-mail communication: To cite electronic mail, (1) give the name of the writer, (2) the title of the
message (if any), taken form the subject a line and enclosed in quotation marks, (3) a description of the
message that includes the recipient (e.g., “E-mail to the author”), and (4) the date from the message.

A source found from a database:
   EBSCO Host. 12 May 2009.

For additional details on citations of electronic sources, please refer to the following guides:
   ● ONLINE! By Bedford/St. Martin’s Press: http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite5.html
A Sample Works Cited Page

Works Cited


