4. MLA Style

The Modern Language Association (MLA) offers specific guidelines for formatting manuscripts and documenting sources used in your research. MLA style specifies a type of cross-referencing that uses parenthetical citations and a works cited list. Below you will find a general overview of MLA style rules. For more specific questions you should consult the most recent edition (presently the 7th) of The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers or the MLA section of your grammar or writing textbook.

CITING SOURCES IN YOUR TEXT

When you make reference to someone else’s idea through paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting, you should:

- give the author’s last name and the page number of the work in a parenthetical citation
- provide full citation information for the source in your Works Cited.

Paraphrasing and summarizing involve putting a source’s information into your own words and sentence structures, while quoting is copying the author’s words and structures exactly as written or spoken (see chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation of paraphrasing and summarizing).

PARENTHETICAL CITATIONS

Your parenthetical citation should give enough information to identify the source listed in your Works Cited. “References in the text must clearly point to specific sources in the list of works cited” (Gibaldi 238).

MLA style uses an author-page method of citation. When you quote, paraphrase, or reference an idea from a source, you must include the author’s name and the page numbers in your text. The author’s name may appear either in the sentence itself or in the parentheses following the quotation or paraphrase, while the page numbers always appears in parentheses.

Punctuation with parenthetical citations:

In the examples below, notice that the period goes after the parentheses and that you need one space between the author’s last name and the page number of the source. Also notice that the closing quotation mark goes before the parentheses and has no ending punctuation.

Commas go inside quotation marks; semicolons, colons, and dashes go outside. Question marks go inside when the quote is a question, outside when your entire sentence is a question.

- Although Watson’s theories have been “long-lived,” new ideas are born each day (Jones 29).
- Watson’s theories have been “long-lived”; however, new ideas are born each day (Jones 29).
- Jones asks, “Are these rules necessary?” (29).
• Is her theory that “children are receptive to colors and images only in 30-second intervals” really sound (Jones 29)?

**Author’s name in text:**
• Zinsser argued that clutter or wordiness is “the ponderous euphemism that turns a slum into a depressed socioeconomic area” (14).
• Chaucer depicts the Wife of Bath as a woman who is knowledgeable about “mariage” and “virginitee” (47).

**Author’s name in parenthetical citation:**
• Clutter or wordiness is “the ponderous euphemism that turns a slum into a depressed socioeconomic area” (Zinsser 14).

**No author given:**
If the work you are making reference to has no author, use an abbreviated version of the work’s title or the name that begins the entry in the Works Cited.

• An anonymous critic once argued that Zinsser’s own writing was full of clutter (“Get to the Point” 89).

**Indirect quotation:**
While you should always try to reference material from the original source, at times you may have to use a secondhand or indirect source, that is, a quotation you find in another source that was quoting from the original. Use “qtd. in” to indicate the source.

• Eco says that parody “must never be afraid of going too far” (qtd. in Hague 1).
• Sir Thomas Malory describes “the barons espied in the sieges of the Round Table” (qtd in Loomis 419).

**Two or three authors:**
In the case of two or three authors, all names must be cited in the text or in parentheses. If you cite them in parentheses, each name must be separated either by “and” in the case of two authors, or by commas in the case of three authors.

• “The democratization of mass media has led to a corresponding democratization of cultural production” (Laclau and Mouffe 102).
• “The bio/universal model of morality, in which ‘Good’ is equated with the survival or continuation of life in general, is far from humanist and may indeed prove tragically anti-human in the end” (Bine, Rickert, and Shapiro 102).
• “Thus, as a ‘handmaiden of thought,’ grammar knowledge is valuable because it facilitates the ability to learn other knowledge” (Benjamin and Oliva 4).

**More than three authors:**
For a work by more than three authors, you may use the first author’s name followed by the abbreviation _et al._ (meaning “and others”) or you may use all the last names.

- “In a self-effacing gesture, MFA candidates in poetry at Emerson College noted the historically high incidence of suicide amongst professional poets and thereafter began referring to poetry as ‘the Dark Art’” (Knott et al. 304).
- “In a self-effacing gesture, MFA candidates in poetry at Emerson College noted the historically high incidence of suicide amongst professional poets and thereafter began referring to poetry as ‘the Dark Art’” (Knott, Muldoon, Shapiro, and Zukofski 304).

**More than one work by the same author:**
If you use more than one work from the same author, you may need to include a shortened title for the particular work from which you are quoting: (Morrison, _Bluest Eye_ 58) and (Morrison, _Mercy_ 16).

**Two or more authors with the same last name:**
If you have two or more authors with the same last name, you may need to use first initials or first names in addition to the last name: (Rebecca Wells 354), (R. Wells 345), and (H.G. Wells 78).

**For Web/Electronic Sources:**
Some electronic sources will not have page numbers. However, if paragraphs are numbered or have sections, you may refer to the paragraph or section instead. Include the abbreviation _par(s)._ for paragraphs, or _sec(s)._ for sections.

- Alston describes three types of rubrics for evaluating customer service (pars. 2-15).
- Hilton and Merrill provide examples of effective hyperlinks (sec 1).

If there are no obvious breaks or no numbered paragraphs, simply use the author’s last name.
- One researcher argues, “The Salem witch trials were the manifestation of overactive imaginations, fueled by unbridled religious fervor” (Harris).

If an electronic source includes no numbers distinguishing one part from another, cite the entire source.
- As the public becomes aware of the importance of each species on the planet, they exert more pressure on their representatives to vote responsibly: “Endangered species were protected in the last session of Congress by a five to one margin” (“Endangered”).
- While Angelina Jolie’s success in the film industry is evident by her ever-growing fame, “she has had her biggest commercial successes with the action-comedy _Mr. and Mrs. Smith_ and the animated film _Kung Fu Panda_” (“Angelina”).

**LONG OR BLOCK QUOTATIONS**

Sometimes you will want to use long quotations. If your quotation is longer than four typed lines, you will omit the quotation marks and start the quotation on a new line. This block quote should be indented one inch from the left margin throughout and should maintain double spacing.
throughout. With a block quote your ending punctuation will come before the parenthetical citation.

**Prose block quote:** (For other types of block quotes, see sections below.)

---

Although two small studies have produced evidence to refute Dr. Jones’s claim, the most respected studies support his findings:

> While not always popular with working parents who are too busy not to set their children in front of *Barney* all day, most pediatricians agree that children should abstain from watching television at least until age two, and even then, television time should be limited and closely monitored. Parents should remember that not all programs advertised as “children’s shows” are appropriate for all ages. (Wilson 29)

As parents, we owe it to our children to err on the side of caution.

---

**QUOTING FROM POEMS, PLAYS, FILMS, AND SACRED TEXTS**

When quoting from a poem, play, or sacred text, provide the numbers of lines, acts, and scenes, or chapters and verses. Doing so allows readers to consult your source in multiple editions. Act, scene, and line numbers are separated by periods with no spaces between them. Biblical chapters and verses are also separated by periods, though some writers prefer colons. In every case, however, the citation will progress from larger to smaller units.

**Poems:**

When quoting one, two, or three lines from a poem, individual lines should be separated by a backslash with a space on either side ( / ). The backslash does *not* replace any other punctuation that may appear on that line.

- The extraordinary elegance of Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” derives from the poem’s sharp juxtaposition of urban and natural imagery in the lines, “The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet black bough” (1-2).

Note: Include the word *line* or *lines* in the parentheses the first time you quote a poem. Thereafter, you may omit the word.

**Poetry block quote:**

If you quote more than three lines of a poem (or a play written in verse), you will need to use the block quote format. As with the prose block quote, omit the quotation marks and start the quotation on a new line. The quote should be indented one inch from the left margin and should
maintain double spacing throughout. Periods or other quotation marks will precede the parenthetical citation. Because the line is an essential unit of poetry, block quotes of poems must maintain the original line breaks and include the appropriate line numbers.

Emily Dickinson’s poem “I’m Nobody! Who Are You?” concludes with the bittersweet stanza:

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong June
To an admiring bog! (5-8)

Plays and Films:
When quoting from a play or film script you must include the Act, Scene, and Line numbers in the parentheses following your quote. For example, the following citation shows that Shakespeare’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy appears in Act 3, Scene 1, lines 56-58 of Hamlet.

- In Hamlet, Shakespeare presents the most famous soliloquy in the history of the English theater: “To be or not to be…” (3.1.56-89).

If you quote dialogue between two or more characters in a play or film, set the quotation off from your text. Begin each part of the dialogue with the character’s name indented one inch from the left margin and written in all capital letters and followed by a period: HAMLET. Indent all subsequent lines in that character’s speech a further quarter inch. Follow the same guidelines every time the dialogue switches to another character.

- In a wicked satire, Shakespeare’s Henry IV Part 1, Falstaff deflates the Puritan doctrine of a divinely sanctioned “calling” or vocation:
PRINCE. I see a good amendment of life in thee—from praying to purse-taking.
FALSTAFF. Why, Hal, ‘tis my vocation, Hal; ‘tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation. (1.2.79-82)

Sacred Texts:
If you are quoting from a sacred text, give the name of the book (in a biblical citation), and the pertinent chapter and verse numbers. The first time you cite a sacred text, include the name of the version you are using in your citation. In subsequent citations, you may omit the version.


ADDING OR OMITTING WORDS IN QUOTATIONS
MLA guidelines allow you to alter quotations either by adding or omitting words. However, you are required to maintain the meaning of the original quote. **Do not** add or omit words that alter the meaning of the text.

**Adding words to a quotation:**
If you find it necessary to add a word or words in a quotation, you should put square brackets around the words to indicate that they are not part of the original text.

- In “Crimes Against Humanity,” Ward Churchill admonishes the American people to reconsider their treatment of Indians in popular culture: “Know that it [the real situation of American Indians] causes real pain and real suffering to real people” (446).

**Omitting words in a quotation:**
If you find it necessary to omit a word or words in a quotation, you should use an ellipsis—three periods in a row with spaces in between (…) to indicate the deleted words. Whenever you omit words from a quotation, you should make sure that the sentence is grammatically correct.

- Churchill says, “It is likely that the indigenous people of the United States will never demand that those guilty of such criminal activity be punished for their deeds. But the least we have the right to expect . . . is that such practices finally be brought to a halt” (446).

**Errors in a quotation:**
If the quoted material contains an error, MLA style documentation suggests using the Latin word *sic*, meaning *thus or so*. If you use *sic* at the end of the quote, place it in parentheses; if you use *sic* in the quote, near the error, place it in square brackets.

**PREPARING YOUR WORKS CITED**

The Works Cited should appear at the end of your essay. It provides readers with the necessary information to locate and read any sources you cite in your text. Each source you use in your essay **must** appear in your Works Cited; likewise, each source in your Works Cited **must** have been cited in the text of your essay.

Here are some basic guidelines for your Works Cited:

- Begin your Works Cited on a separate page at the end of your essay. This page should have the title Works Cited centered at the top of the page (with no quotation marks, bolding, or underlining).
- Make the first line of each entry flush left with the margin. Subsequent lines in each entry should be indented one-half inch. This pattern is called a hanging indent.
- Maintain double spacing throughout your Works Cited. No extra spaces are necessary between entries.
• Alphabetize the Works Cited by the first major word in each entry (usually the author’s last name). Do not use articles for determining alphabetical order.

Here are some basic guidelines for your citations:
• Author’s names are inverted (last name first, e.g., Presley, Elvis). If a work has more than one author, invert the first name only, follow it with a comma, then continue listing the rest of the authors (e.g., Harrison, George, John Lennon, and Paul McCartney).
• If you have cited more than one work by the same author, order the works alphabetically by title, and use three hyphens in place of the author’s name for every entry after the first.
• If a cited work does not have a known author, alphabetize by the title of the work and use a shortened version of the title in the parenthetical citation.
• Capitalize each work in the titles of articles, books, films, etc. This rule does not apply to articles, short prepositions, or conjunctions unless one of these is the first word of the title or subtitle (e.g., Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology).
• Italicize the titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, films, and album or CD titles.
• Place quotation marks around the titles of articles in journals, magazines, newspapers, and web pages, as well as short stories, book chapters, poems, songs, and television shows.
• For numbers with more than two digits, use only the last two digits of the second number (e.g., if you refer to a magazine article that appeared on pages 150 through 175, list the page numbers on your Works Cited citation as 150-75; 201 through 209 would be listed as 201-09).
• MLA allows some abbreviations in citations such as state names, common scholarly words, publishers’ names, months, and so on. See section 7 in the *MLA Handbook* for a complete list of abbreviations.
• For sites that are not easily accessible, give URLs or database names (e.g., InfoTrac or LexisNexis) for websites and other online sources, which will be indicated by angled brackets in your citation. Break URLs only at slash marks to fit your margins. Your works cited page should not include hyperlinks. To remove the hyperlink that recent versions of Word convert URLs to, right click on the URL, click “Hyperlink,” then click “Remove Hyperlink.”
• You should also give the date of access for online sources.
• If a Web site does not provide all of the information usually included in a works-cited entry, list as much as is available.
• Include the media publication for all sources (e.g. Print, Web, Television, etc.).

**BASIC FORMS FOR PRINT SOURCES**

**Books (includes brochures and pamphlets):**
Author’s name. *Title of Book*. Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication. Publication medium.

Two books by the same author:
Author’s name. *Title of Book*. Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication. Publication medium.

---. *Title of Book*. Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication. Publication medium.


Book with two or more authors:
Authors’ names. *Title of Book*. Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication. Publication medium.


NOTE: The first author’s name should be listed last name first, and all other authors should be first name then last name. Use the first author’s last name to place the entry alphabetically in the Works Cited.

Anthology or collection:
Editor’s Name(s), ed(s). *Title of Book*. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication. Publication medium.


Work within an anthology:
Author’s name. “Title of Work.” *Title of Anthology*. Ed(s). Editor’s name(s). Edition. Place of publication: Publisher, date. Pages. Publication medium.


Article in a scholarly journal with continuous pagination:
Author’s name. “Title of Article.” *Journal title* volume number (date of publication): pages. Publication medium.

Article in a scholarly journal that pages each issue separately:


Newspaper articles:
  Author’s name. “Title of Article.” Newspaper Title day month year: pages. Publication medium.


Reviews:
  Reviewer’s name. “Title of Review.” Rev. of Title of Work, by name of author (editor, director, etc.). Journal day month year: pages. Publication medium.


Sacred Texts:
  Title of Work. Name of editor, gen. ed. Place of publication: Publisher, date. Publication medium.

  NOTE: You can give the title of the book within the Bible as well as chapter and verse information in your parenthetical citation (e.g., The Holy Bible John 3:16).


Dictionary Entry:


BASIC FORMS FOR ONLINE SOURCES
Web sites:
  Author’s name. Name of Web site. Name of institution or organization associated with the site. Date of posting/revision. Publication medium. Date of access.

**Article on a website:**
Author’s name. “Title of Article.” *Name of Web site.* Name of institution or organization associated with the site. Date of posting/revision. Publication Medium. Date of access.


**Online article with no obvious author:**
“Title of Article.” *Name of Web site.* Name of institution or publication. Date of posting/revision. Publication medium. Date of access.


**Online newspaper or magazine:**
Author’s name. “Title of Article.” *Title of Online Publication* Date of publication. Publication medium. Date of access.


**Online journal article:**


**NOTE:** If page numbers are not provided, write “n. pag.” in place of the page numbers to indicate no pagination.

**Article from a library or subscription service such as InfoTrac or LexisNexis:**
Author’s name. “Title of Article.” *Journal Title* Vol. issue (date of publication): pages. *Name of the database.* Publication medium. Date of access.


**Online video:**
Director’s name, dir. Title of Video. Institution/distributor, Year of original release. Title of Web site. Name of organization associated with site, Year made available online. Publication medium. Date of access.


BASIC FORMS FOR OTHER TYPES OF SOURCES
Television or radio program:
“Title of episode or segment.” Title of Program. Name of network. Call letters and city of the local station (if applicable). Broadcast date. Medium.


NOTE: To highlight a specific contributor, begin the entry with the name and note the nature of the contribution (e.g. “narr.” for narrator).

Film:
Title. Dir. Director’s name. Distributor, year of release. Medium.


NOTE: You may include other relevant data, such as the names of the writer, performers, and producer, between the title and the distributor.

DVD:
Title. Screenplay by screenwriter’s name. Dir. Director’s name. Original film release date. DVD release company, DVD release date. Medium.


Advertisements:
Name of product, company, or institution. Advertisement. Publisher, date: page number. Medium.


NOTE: If an advertisement does not provide all of the works-cited entry information, use what is available.

Interview:
Name of person interviewed. Type of interview. Date of interview.

NOTE: If you did not conduct the interview, after the name of the person interviewed provide the name of the interviewer, a descriptive title, and the name and place of the source.


A sound recording on CD:
Artist. Title of Album. Manufacturer, date. Medium.

Young, Chris. Chris Young. RCA, 2008. CD.

NOTE: For a sound recording on another medium, identify the type (Audiocassette, LP, etc.).

Paintings, sculptures, or photographs:
Artist’s name. Title. Creation date. Medium. Institution that houses the work or Individual who owns the work, City.


NOTE: Artwork found in textbooks should not be cited as original art or reprints. The textbook’s citation information should be used in its appropriate format.

SAMPLE WORKS CITED PAGE

Works Cited


Stanley, Sally. “Sabotaging a Child’s Education: How Parents Undermine Teachers.”

