

MLA STYLE

The Modern Language Association (MLA) style guidelines presented here have been adapted from the *MLA Handbook* 9th ed., 2021. This handout focuses on documentation, but the manual addresses a variety of issues and should be consulted for additional examples and information. (A copy of the handbook is available in the Writing Center but is not to be taken from the center).

MLA style is often used in the humanities. In an MLA-style paper, the writer identifies the author and page of each source in parentheses after every reference. That information then directs the reader to more detailed entries on a Works Cited list at the end of the paper.

■ Citing Sources in Your Paper

1. **Direct quotations and paraphrases.** Show the source of every thought or word you borrow. In general, introduce any direct quotation or paraphrase with the name of the author. Then identify the page number by putting it inside parentheses directly before the first punctuation after the quotation. Don't use commas or the abbreviation "p." (*MLA* 242).

Lawrence Stone describes "the new companionate marriage among the upper classes of the eighteenth century" (372).

Claudia Johnson argues that the novel resists any such reading (96-97).

If you don't use the author's name to introduce the quoted or paraphrased material, put the author's last name with the page number in parentheses at the end of it (*MLA* 242).

Gambling was another vice targeted by the reformers (Shoemaker 135-36).

2. **Page numbers.** If your citation comes from two pages next to each other, list both. If the page numbers have two digits, list all digits for both (ex. 51-59). If the page numbers have three digits and the first digit is the same in both, repeat only the final two (ex. 372-78 [*MLA* 242]).

If your source has no page numbers but does have other reference numbers (ex. paragraphs, chapters, or sections), then use those instead, following an abbreviated description of the kind of number it is. Put a comma between the author's name and the description (*MLA* 244):

(Nguyen, par. 1)

(Jones, ch. 3)

(Kellogg, sec. B)

(Bradstreet, pars. 5-6)

(Swenson, chs. 7-8)

(Camacho, secs. 2-4)

If a source has no page numbers or other kinds of reference numbers, just cite the work as a whole. Your parenthetical citation may just contain the author's name (*MLA* 248).

3. **Names.** The first time you mention a person in a sentence, use their full name as it appears in your source, whether it's C.J. Cregg or Jean-Marie Formentin de la Maisoneuve Jr. Don't include academic degrees or titles like "Dr." or "Miss." After that, refer to the person by last name only (*MLA* 230-32).

When you name authors in a parenthetical citation, use their last names only. Don't put initials in parenthetical citations unless that's the only possible way of distinguishing between two different sources. (*MLA* 234-35).

Austen's novels have been described both as politically radical (C. Johnson 217) and as socially conservative (M. Johnson 59).

4. **Multiple authors.** If your source has two authors, put each author's last name in parentheses (*MLA* 232).

The novel attacked the nation's monetary policy (Diaz and Polanski 134).

If your source has three or more authors, include only the first author's name with "et al." Note that "et al." is not italicized and that there is a period after "al." (*MLA* 232-33).

A recent study found a strong correlation between positive parenting behaviors and reduced school violence (Larsen et al. 39).

5. **Organizations as authors.** When the author of your source is an organization, you can put its full name inside citation parentheses using common abbreviations—although you can also work a long name into a signal phrase instead (*MLA* 233-34).

One study argues that an increased minimum wage would have significant effects (Natl. Labor Relations Board 124).

A study sponsored by the National Labor Relations Board argues that an increased minimum wage would have significant effects (124).

6. **No author.** When you don't know the name of your source's author, use the words of the noun phrase by which the title is alphabetized on your Works Cited page. Do not include "a," "an," or "the." If the title does not begin with a noun phrase, use the word it does begin with. Italicize the title of a periodical, book, or report; use quotation marks for an article (*MLA* 237).

<i>The End of the Beginning</i>	→	(<i>End</i> 43)
"Ten Great Uses for Baking Soda"	→	("Ten Great Uses" 2)
"Now It Begins"	→	("Now" 3)

The pamphlet's attack on the tax hike was vicious ("Murderous Legislators" 24).

7. **One author, multiple works.** If you have two works by the same author, identify each by its author, abbreviated title, and page number. Abbreviate the title based on the rules in item #6, above. If you name the author in the text, give only a title and page reference in your parentheses (*MLA* 235-37).

Just as Tilney follows the "dictate of conscience" (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 243), Ferrars places his fate in the hands of the abominable Lucy Steele as a matter of "duty," as he later explains, "independent of my feelings" (Austen, *Sense* 356).

Austen's character Elinor Dashwood suppresses her own feelings (*Sense* 356).

8. **One citation, multiple sources.** If you refer to several sources within the same parentheses, use a semicolon to separate last names and put them in the same order in which they're listed on your Works Cited page (*MLA 251*).

Others insist that the policy is misguided (Rodriguez 134; Cohn 57).

9. **One paragraph, multiple references to same source.** You can show that you found all the information in your paragraph in a single part of one source by mentioning the author's name at the beginning of the paragraph and giving the parenthetical citation at the end (*MLA 262*).

By watching the cottagers, Shelley's creature both learns about family and learns how isolated he is in not having one. His observations teach him the difference between children and parents, and they show him how parents interact with children at different ages. As he sees the warm relationships between Felix, Agatha, and the old man, he "groans" to realize that he has no siblings or parents of his own (130).

If, however, you are discussing both your own ideas and your source's, you'll need to show where your ideas end and the author's ideas begin by repeating the author's name every time you come back to it (*MLA 262*).

Kennedy sees Sister as the victim of her family's bad behavior (45). This portrayal is unconvincing, however, because Sister's own actions, like taking the radio that had been a joint gift to her mother, are so outrageous. While it may be true that she was driven out of the household (Kennedy 46), Sister's attitude towards Stella-Rondo was hostile from the beginning.

10. **Indirect quotations.** If an idea or quotation that you want to use is quoted in another source (also called a "secondary citation"), use the original source if you can. If not, name the original source in a signal phrase and then use parentheses and the abbreviation "qtd. in" to identify the place where you found it (*MLA 284-85*).

Both characters are judged by standards founded, according to Anthony Fletcher, "upon an inner self discipline" (qtd. in Shoemaker 35).

11. **Major works.** Major works like the Qur'an and *The Odyssey* have standard numbering systems that cross all editions and translations, so use those systems instead of page numbers. The words "Bible," "Qur'an," and "Talmud" are not italicized when they stand alone, but they are when part of a specific edition's title. If you are referring to the Bible, identify the version you're using when you first refer to it. Books of the Bible and the titles of famous literary works may be abbreviated; see the list of the accepted abbreviations (*MLA 247, 293-301*).

(*New English Bible*, 2 Sam. 2:1-10)
(*Ado*, 2.4.15)

12. **Long quotations.** If your quotation is longer than four typed lines, set it off from the rest of your paper by indenting it ½ inch (one tab space). Double space it and don't use quotation marks (*MLA 254-55*).
13. **How much can I quote?** As a general rule, not more than 10% of your paper should consist of direct quotations.

■ The Works Cited List

The Works Cited list at the end of your paper contains the sources you cited in the paper. (Less often, it can list the sources you consulted while writing and be titled "Bibliography.") Its purpose is to help readers find the materials you used, so each entry must be complete and accurate.

14. **Page format.** Every line should be double-spaced, without extra spaces between entries. The words "Works Cited" should be centered at the top without bolding, underlining, italics, or quotation marks. The pages should be numbered as part of your paper.
15. **Indentation.** Use the "hanging indent" format: start the first line of each entry at the left margin but indent all subsequent lines one tab space (five spaces).
16. **Order of references.** List each source alphabetically by the last name of its first author. If there is no author, alphabetize by the first word of its title excluding *a*, *an*, and *the* (MLA 219-24).
17. **One author, multiple works.** When you have more than one work by the same author, list the author's name for the first entry only. For other works by the same author, substitute three hyphens and a period for the author's name and list titles alphabetically (MLA 221).

Hou, Haixia. *A Dream Deferred*. Random House, 2001.
---. *Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. Doubleday, 1998.
18. **Names.** List names as they appear in your source but don't include degrees or titles. Reverse the first and last names of the first author; **don't** reverse any other names in the entry, even a co-author's. If a source has two authors, don't change the order in which they're named. If a source has three or more authors, list the first author as normal and then have et al. It's fine if the author's name is a pseudonym, such as an online username (MLA 111-13).
19. **Italics and quotation marks.** Titles of books, periodicals, web sites, online databases, albums, television shows and movies (longer works bought individually) are italicized. Titles of stories, essays, poems, web pages, songs, and television episodes (shorter works often collected with others in books, websites, CDs, etc.) are put in quotation marks. Don't italicize a title within a title that's already italicized, even if the results look strange. (MLA 66-76).
20. **Required components.** Book citations include the author, title, publisher, and year. Journal citations include the author, title, journal, volume, issue, date (including month or season, if given), and page numbers. If an element is missing but the information is in another source, put it in square brackets; if you can't find it, just skip it. MLA's online resources say that no placeholder (like "n.d." for "no date") is required. (MLA 105-6).
21. **Dates.** A book's date is usually on the copyright page behind the title page. For full dates, abbreviate the month if 4+ letters) and put the day first: 15 Mar. 2015. (MLA 185-87, 295).

22. **Pages.** On your “Works Cited” page, **although not in your paper**, you’ll put “p.” in front of a single page number and “pp.” in front of a page range (*MLA* 189-193).
23. **URLs and DOIs.** URLs are required for online sources. Do not include the <http://> or <https://> at the beginning and do put a period at the end. If a DOI is available, use it instead (note: DOIs have the <http://> or <https://> at the beginning [*MLA* 194-95]).
24. **Databases.** If your source is from a database (ex. EBSCOhost or JSTOR), name that database in your reference entry after the page information and give the URL for your source (*MLA* 201).

■ Sample References

- A. Book with two authors and a subtitle (*MLA* 313).
Emanuel, Paul, and Lucy Snowe. *Instruction: Small Groups*. Doubleday, 2004.
- B. Book with editor instead of authors (*MLA* 314).
Casaubon, Edward, editor. *World Mythologies*. Wilson, 1992.
- C. Book with editor and author, second edition (*MLA* 314, 315).
Garth, Mary. *Collected Essays*. Edited by Sheila Kelly, 2nd ed., Patriot, 1974.
- D. Essay, chapter or section in edited work (*MLA* 318).
Linville, Cynthia. “Editing Line by Line.” *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, edited by Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth, 2nd ed., Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2009, pp. 116-31.
- E. Journal article with three or more authors, originally published online (*MLA* 321).
Bertram, Thomas, et al. “Part-time Parent, Part-Time Power.” *Persuasions*, vol. 35, no. 1, Winter 2015, www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol35no1/bertram.html.
- F. Journal article from a database with permalink and DOI (*MLA* 320).
Lee, Wendy Anne. “Resituating ‘Regulated Hatred’: D.W. Harding’s Jane Austen.” *ELH*, vol. 77, no.4, 2010, pp. 996-1014. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40963117.pdf?_=1471459730771.
Bockelman, Brian. “Buenos Aires *Bohème*: Argentina and the Transatlantic Bohemian Renaissance, 1890-1910.” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 23, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 37-63. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2016.0011>.
- G. Printed magazine article accessed through a database (*MLA* 323).
Paumgarten, Nick. “The \$40 Million Elbow.” *The New Yorker*, vol. 82, no. 34, 23 Oct. 2006, pp. 32-33. *Literature Resource Center, EBSCOhost*, eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=e7ad1937-1a54-4b4b-be8b0f77200cd371%40sessionmgr106&hid=113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU%3d#AN=edsgcl.153259512&db=edsglr.

- H. Printed magazine article accessed online (*MLA 323*).
- Worrall, Simon. "Pilgrims' Progress." *Smithsonian*, Nov. 2006, www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/pilgrims-progress-135067108/?no-ist.
- I. Magazine article originally published online (*MLA 323*).
- Harford, Tim. "Charity Is Selfish: The Economic Case against Philanthropy." *Slate*, 14 Oct. 2006, www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_undercover_economist/2006/10/charity_is_selfish.html.
- J. Online article from institutional website, author and date unknown (*MLA 325*).
- "The Life of Theodore Roosevelt." *Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site*. National Parks Service, www.nps.gov/thri/theodorerooseveltbio.htm.
- K. Lecture or Speech (*MLA 335*).
- Jackson, Jesse. "With Justice for All: Human Rights at Home and Abroad." ASISU Program Board and Pocatello NAACP. 28 January 2004. Pocatello, Idaho.
- L. Personal Interview (*MLA 336*).
- Al Nasr, Hashim. Personal interview with the author. 12 Mar. 2006.
- M. Personal E-mail or Text (*MLA 337*).
- Pierson, Collette. E-mail to the author. 1 June 2019.
- Lemuelson, Erik. Text message to the author. 3 May 2018.
- N. Movie, with emphasis on whole and not the director or a particular performance (*MLA 328*).
- The Wizard of Oz*. Directed by Victor Fleming, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939.
- O. Movie, with emphasis on a particular performance (*MLA 334*).
- Garland, Judy. *The Wizard of Oz*. Directed by Victor Flemin, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939.