

MLA Formatting and Style Guide

The MLA (Modern Language Association) format is the writing and documentation system used primarily in the Arts and Humanities. As with any referencing system, it is important to remember that this is an entire system of organizing the practical elements of your paper. That means there are specific ways to number your pages, create your title page, and establish headings, in addition to citing material from other authors. Always check with your professor to find out how closely he or she wants you to follow these guidelines. For complete guidelines for MLA format, as well as for specific issues not covered here, see:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

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1. General Formatting Notes

- Print your essay on 8.5-by-11-inch white paper.
- Double-space the entire text of your essay (including the information on the first page, block quotations and the Works Cited page).
- Use a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman or Courier) and type size (e.g., 12 point).
- Leave one space after periods or other punctuation.
- Do not include a separate title page (see example and details below).
- Use one side of the paper only.
- Set all margins (top, bottom and sides) to 1-inch (2.5cm).
- Include your last name and page number on the top right-hand corner of every page. Use a header and ensure that your name and page number are 0.5 inches (1.25cm) from the top and flush with the right margin.
- The first line of each paragraph should be indented 0.5 inches (5 spaces).

2. The First Page of Your Essay

- Do not include a separate title page (unless specifically requested by your instructor).
- One inch from the top of the first page and flush with the left margin, include the following information on separate (double-spaced) lines: your name, your instructor's name, the course name, and the date.
- After the date, double-space and type your title. The title should be centred. Do not underline or use quotation marks or use a special font. Only capitalize the first letter of important words (i.e., use Title Case).
- After your title, double-space and begin the body of your essay, indenting 0.5 inches (5 spaces) from the left margin.
- The first page of your MLA-formatted essay should look like this:

John Doe

Dr. Smith

English 101

December 1, 2007

Postcolonial Adventures in Shakespeare's Othello

The politics of postcolonialism did not begin in the 1960s. Many of the same concerns and issues we see in contemporary postcolonial literature and criticism are present in Elizabethan drama.

A good example of an Elizabethan play that . . .

3. Parenthetical Citations

When you use MLA style, you must acknowledge other people's work through what is known as parenthetical citations. Each of the parenthetical citations in your text is "keyed" to an alphabetical list of texts (the Works Cited page) included at the end of your essay. A parenthetical citation includes the author's last name followed by a space and the appropriate page number or numbers. You must include a citation after every quotation or paraphrased idea from another source.

There are essentially three different ways to provide the necessary information for a citation in MLA style. In all three options, you need to include both the author's name and a page number. The following are examples of the different ways to cite your source in MLA style:

- a) Weedon argues that the "power of fiction lies in its ability to construct for the reader ways of being and of understanding the world" (144).
- b) Contemporary feminist critics insist that the "power of fiction lies in its ability to construct for the reader ways of being and of understanding the world" (Weedon 144).
- c) Weedon promotes the idea that fiction is a powerful political tool that helps readers understand their place in the world (144).

In each of the examples above, the reader knows that the relevant information can be found on page 144 of a text by Weedon. The reader can consult the Works Cited at the end of the essay to get more information about the source. In the Works Cited, the reader would find the following entry:

Weedon, Chris. Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

4. Formatting Quotations

Short Quotations: If you are using a quotation that is less than four lines long (in your essay), put it in double quotation marks and incorporate it into the text of your paper. Provide the parenthetical citation immediately following the quotation. All punctuation except question marks and exclamation marks should appear after the parenthetical citation; question marks and exclamation marks that appear in the original source should be within the quotation marks. Consider the following example:

The narrator notes that “some of this territory is claimed by both the Haisla and the Tsimshian nations – this is called an overlap and is a sticky topic of discussion” (Robinson 4). This conflict between nations over land ownership highlights the importance of landscape and setting in the novel.

Long Quotations: If you include any quotations that are over four lines long, they should be typed into a block quotation, indented 1-inch (10 spaces) from the margin, double spaced, and without quotation marks. Block quotations are typically introduced by a colon. Place your parenthetical citation after the final punctuation mark of the quotation. Consider the following example:

The narrator highlights the importance of setting in the novel through her detailed description of the area around Kitamaat.

She begins her story by providing a visual map of the terrain where most of the action in the novel occurs:

Find a map of British Columbia. Point to the middle of the coast. Beneath Alaska, find the Queen Charlotte Islands. Drag your finger across the map, across the Hecate Strait to the coast and you should be able to see a large island hugging the coast. This is Princess Royal Island, and it is famous for its kermode bears that are usually white. Princess Royal Island is the western edge of traditional Haisla territory. During land claim talks, some of this territory is claimed by both the Haisla and Tsimshian nations – this is called an overlap and is a sticky topic of discussion. (Robinson 4)

Quoting Poetry: If you are quoting a single line of verse (or less), place it in quotation marks and incorporate it into the text of your essay. If you quote two or three lines of verse, you must separate each line with a forward slash [/], place the passage in quotation marks and incorporate it into the text of your essay. When you use slashes to separate lines of quoted verse, be sure to put a space before and after the slash. Include a parenthetical reference to the author (unless the author’s name is in the text of your essay immediately before the quotation) and to the line number(s) of the poem. Consider the following examples:

Example 1: The persona of Plath’s poem is “poor and white” (3) and feels claustrophobic. She has “always been scared of” (41) her father.

Example 2: Sylvia Plath’s poem “Daddy” opens with a metaphor that conveys the speaker’s sense of claustrophobia. She compares herself to a “black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot / For thirty years” (2-4).

If you are quoting more than three lines of verse, you should type them into a block quotation indented 1 inch (10 spaces) from the left margin. Block quotations of poetry should accurately reproduce the line breaks, spacing and punctuation found in the original. Do not use quotation marks for block quotations unless they appear in the original. Your parenthetical reference should appear at the end of the last line of poetry; if the parenthetical reference cannot fit on the

last line of poetry, place it on the following line, flush with the right margin of your essay. The following is an example of a blocked verse quotation:

In his poem "i have found what you are like," Cummings uses unconventional line breaks and syntax but traditional images and rhyme patterns:

deeds of green thrilling light
with thinned
new fragile yellows
lurch and press
—in the woods
which
stutter
and
sing (8-16)

Here, Cummings uses pastoral imagery combined with fragmented syntax in an effort to . . .

Quoting Drama: If you are quoting the words of a single character in a prose play, follow the guidelines for a standard prose quotation; if you are quoting the words of a single character in a verse play, follow the MLA guidelines for quoting poetry. If you are quoting dialogue between two or more characters, you should type the passage into a block quotation indented 1 inch (10 spaces) from the left margin. Characters' names should be in capital letters followed by a period and then followed by the text as it appears in the original. Subsequent lines of the character's dialogue should be indented an additional three spaces. When the dialogue shifts to another character, start a new line indented 1 inch (10 spaces) from the left margin. Follow this pattern throughout the block quotation. As with all block quotations, do not include quotation marks unless they appear in the original. Consider the following examples:

Example of short, integrated quotation (drama):

Some of Lear's greatest insights come when he discusses metaphysical issues with Kent and the Fool. For example, when these three characters take refuge from a storm in a hovel, Lear notes that "When the mind's free / The body's delicate" (3.4.11-12). He elaborates on this point by observing that the "tempest in my mind / Doth from my senses take all feeling else, / Save what beats there" (3.4.12-14). This metaphor suggests . . .

Example of block quotation (drama):

Some of Lear's greatest insights come when he discusses metaphysical issues with Kent and the Fool:

LEAR. Let me alone.
KENT. Good my lord, enter here.
LEAR. Wilt break my heart?
KENT. I had rather break mine own. Good my lord, enter.

LEAR. Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm

Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee;

But where the greater malady is fixed,

The lesser is scarce felt. (3.4.3-9)

Adding or Changing Words in Quotations:

If you need to add a word or change a word in a quotation, you must indicate this by placing square brackets around the words that are not part of the original text. Consider the following example.

Jones argues that "the voting structure of the [United Nations] Security Council" (45) renders it incapable of resolving international conflict.

The words "United Nations" were added here to clarify the argument; the square brackets indicate that they were not part of the original text.

Omitting Words in Quotations:

If you omit words from a quotation, you must indicate this by using ellipsis marks (three spaced periods). Ellipses must be used any time you omit material from a quotation that appears to be a sentence or a series of sentences. Consider the following example:

Original Text: "Every space is filled with life: delicate, poisonous frogs war-painted like skeletons, clutched in copulation, secreting their precious eggs onto dripping leaves. Vines strangling their own kin in the everlasting wrestle for sunlight. The breathing of monkeys. A glide of snake belly on branch. A single-file army of ants biting a mammoth tree into uniform grains and hauling it down to the dark for their ravenous queen." (Kingsolver 5)

Quotation with ellipsis: Kingsolver addresses the reader in second person, telling her to imagine a violent forest "with . . . frogs . . . secreting their precious eggs" (5), "[v]ines strangling their own kin" (5) and "ants . . . hauling [a tree] down to the dark for their ravenous queen" (5).

(from Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.)

5. Works Cited Page

Your MLA-formatted essay must have a Works Cited page that begins as a separate page at the end of your essay. The basic formatting features of the Works Cited page are as follows:

- Use same 2.5cm margins and same last name and page number header as the rest of the essay.
- Use title Works Cited (in a standard font, not underlined, not in quotation marks or italics); the title should be centred on the first line of the page.
- Everything on the page should be double-spaced; do NOT put extra lines between entries.
- Capitalize every word in the titles of texts except articles, prepositions and conjunctions.

- List entries alphabetically.
- Use italics **or** underlining for the titles of independently published works (books or journals); use quotation marks for the titles of texts published as part of collections (poems, articles).
- Use a hanging indent (second and following lines of each entry indented 1.25cm) for each entry.

Common Entries in a Works Cited Page

The following are common entries likely to be used by undergraduate students writing research essays. For more details or other, less common entries, consult the MLA Handbook.

1) Book with One Author:

Smith, John. *Great Dogs of North America*. Toronto: Dog Press, 2003.

Last Name, First Name. *Title of Work*. City: Publisher, Date.

2) Book with Two or More Authors:

Smith, John, and Ralph Jones. *Dogs I Have Known*. Toronto: Dog Press, 2003.

Last Name, First Name, and First Name Last Name. *Title of Work*. City: Publisher, Date.

3) Journal Article:

Smith, John. "Great Labradors." *Dogs Illustrated*. 14.3 (1994): 12-50.

Last Name, First Name. "Title of article." *Title of Journal*. Volume Number.Issue Number (Date): Page Range.

4) Work in Anthology or Edited Collection:

More, Hannah. "The Black Slave Trade: A Poem." *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era*. Ed. Paula R. Feldman.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997. 472-82.

Last Name, First Name. "Title of Chapter." *Title of Work*. Ed. First Name Last Name.

City: Publisher, Date. Page Range.

5) Entire Anthology or Edited Collection:

Weisser, Susan, ed. *Women and Romance: A Reader*. New York: New York University

Press, 2001.

Last Name, First Name, ed. *Title of work*. City: Publisher, Date.

6) Book by a Corporate Author:

Canada Research Council. *Canadian Business in 2010*. Ottawa: Academic Publishing

House, 2007.

Corporate Author. *Title of Work*. City: Publisher, Date.

7) Article with No Author in Reference Book (familiar reference books, such as dictionaries or encyclopedias)

"Postmodernism." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1998.

"Entry Name." *Title of Work*. Edition. Year.

8) Film or Video Recording:

It's a Wonderful Life. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell.

RKO, 1946.

Name of Film or Video Recording. Dir. Director's Name. Perf. Important Actors' Names. Distributor, Release Date.

9) On-line Sources in a Works Cited Page:

Because there is no consensus on how to organize and present electronic works, and because electronic texts tend to change over time, references to on-line sources require more information than is necessary for print sources.

Wherever possible, provide the following pieces of information about the on-line source you are citing.

Author's name. "Title of Document." Information about printed version of publication.

Information about electronic version of publication. Date of access information.

If you are using peer-reviewed, authoritative sources, most of this information should be available.

10) Document from On-line Academic Journal:

Zeki, Semir. "Artistic Creativity and the Brain." Science 6 July 2001: 51-52. Science Magazine. 2002 American Association for the Advancement of Science. 24 Sept. 2002 <<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/293/5527/51>>.

Last Name, First Name. "Article's Name." Information about Print Version of Publication.

Information about Electronic Version of Publication (including name of sponsoring institution which is normally at the bottom of the site's home page). Date of Access and URL of page (or of database's search page).

Article from On-line Dictionary or Encyclopedia:

Ross, Don. "Game Theory." 11 Sept. 2001. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Fall 2002 ed Center for the Study of Lang. and Information, Stanford U. 1 Oct. 2002 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/game-theory/>>.

Last Name, First Name. "Article's Name." Information about Electronic Version of Publication. Date of Access and URL of page.

An Entire Internet Site:

Postmodern Culture. Ed. Lisa Brawley and James F. English. 2002. 1 Oct. 2002 <<http://iath.virginia.edu/pmc/>>.

Title of Site. Name of Editor of Site. Electronic Information (including last update and sponsoring institution). Date of Access and URL.

An On-line Book:

Austen, Jane. Pride and Prejudice. Ed. Henry Churchyard. 1996. Jane Austen Information Page. 6 Sept. 2002 <<http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/pridprej.html>>.

Author's Name. Title of Work. Name of editor, compiler or translator. Electronic Publication information (including date of electronic publication and name of sponsoring institution. Date of Access and URL.