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Writing 101
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A Guide to MLA Style: Formatting a Paper

Students of writing, literature, and the humanities use a style developed by the Modern Language Association (MLA) to document sources and present arguments. The first manual for academic style was published in 1985. Since then, research has changed dramatically. The *MLA Handbook: 8th Edition*, published in 2016, explains that specific formats meant “a new medium could not be documented until MLA created instructions for it” (3). Now, nine core elements (see Appendix) give writers a set of guidelines rather than a set format. *MLA Style Center*, a website launched along with the print book, offers up to date advice and policy on the style.

Format

For papers, the basic format is one-sided, double-spaced, with one inch margins. Font color is black only, the size is 12 point (Times New Roman, Calibri, Arial etc. this is Arial). Use only one, do not mix fonts. Page numbers belong in the upper right corner with your last name in front of them. In Word, go to the Insert tab, click on Page Number then choose Top of Page and Plain Number 3. Type your last name and a space in front of the number. Make sure that the font matches the one used in the body of the document.

Heading and Title

In the upper left hand corner of the first page, one inch from the top, flush left, type your name, the professor’s name, course number, and the date. Give each one its own line and double-space. The title is on the next line, centered with key words capitalized.

Type the title in normal text; see the example above for a model. MLA does not often use headings in the body of undergraduate papers. We do so in this handout so that readers can quickly find the examples they need.

In-text Citation

Always indicate the source when presenting ideas or facts that are not your own, unless it is common knowledge, cite where it came from. Each in-text citation matches an entry listed in a Works Cited section. Only the first element of the entry (usually an author's last name) and a page number, if available, are used in the body of the paper as a key to an entry providing full details about the work.

Parenthetical citation is placed at the end of the relevant sentence before the period. Here is a paraphrase with a signal phrase: F. Scott Fitzgerald introduces an interesting metaphor with the green light at the end of the dock across the bay which then extends to the overall theme of striving in the book (26). Here is the same point without a signal phrase: The metaphor of the green light at the end of the dock across the bay then extends to the overall theme of striving in the book (Fitzgerald 26).

Poetry is quoted using special rules: The sonnet ends with a promise of immortality: "When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st. // So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (Shakespeare lines 12-14). A single slash with a space on either side indicates a line break, a double slash is for a stanza break. When a poetic quotation takes three or more lines of text, set it off as a block (MLA 77-78).

Footnotes or endnotes for bibliographic descriptions offering explanations or referring readers to relevant publications are also employed. Superscript notes are placed at the end of the relevant sentence in your text, like this: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."¹ For detailed information on notes, consult the *MLA Style Center* or *Purdue OWL* websites. The *Handbook* does not comment on footnotes or endnotes.

Block quotations: writers may be required to include a long passage from a source into their papers. For more than four lines of quoted material:

Set it off as a block indented half an inch from the left margin. Do not indent the first line an extra amount or add quotation marks not present in the original. A colon introduces a quotation displayed in this way except when the grammatical

¹ Charles Dickens. *A Tale of Two Cities*. p. 1.

connection between your introductory wording and the quotation requires a different mark of punctuation or none at all. A parenthetical reference for a prose quotation set off from the text follows the last line of the quotation. (Citation)

Be selective, the relevance and meaning of block quotations should be fully explained.

Citation should be thorough yet minimal and simple, “the goals of the in-text citation are brevity and clarity, guiding the reader . . . [efficiently] to the corresponding entry in the works-cited list” (116). The ellipsis in the quote means something was left out, the square brackets mean the words inside are not the exact ones from the source. The trick is to be as accurate and concise as possible so as to not distract from the essay's points.

Works Cited and Appendix

The works cited section lists all the sources used in the paper on a separate page after the body; see our sample on page seven. Type “Works Cited” centered in normal text at the top of the page, type “Work Cited” if you are only using one source. Double space and make an entry for each reference in alphabetical order by the author’s last name (or by title of the work when no author or organization is named). The first line of each entry is flush left, subsequent lines for that entry are indented one half inch. Here is one way to make a hanging indent in Word: in the View tab, check Ruler. Highlight the lines of the entry, then place the cursor on the bottom triangle only and pull it over ½ inch. The 8th edition introduces a list of nine “core” elements to include in an entry:

- 1) Author. 2) Title. 3) Container, 4) Contributors, 5) Version, 6) Number,
- 7) Publisher, 8) Date, 9) Location.

Appendixes are used for supplementary material; place them on their own page(s) as the last section of a paper.

Core Elements

1) Author: The person, people or organization responsible for the creation of a work. For one author, list the last name first, then first name:

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. 1859, edited by Gillian Wood, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003.

For two authors the order is, Last name, First name and First name Last name:

Yori, Hari and Barry Proseguy. "A 'Fake Title' Theory: Something Manga Related." *Manga Journal*, vol. 8, University Press, 2013, pp. 123-45. *Project Muse*, doi:12.345fakedoi/12345

For three or more authors, list the first one then et.al. -- Last name, First name, et al.

Betall, Ahmet, et.al. "Graphic Novels in Class." *English Language Teaching*, vol. 8, Canadian Center, 2016, pp. 123-45. *ERIC*, www.elt/madeupurl.thatwontwork

2) Title: Capitalize key words. If the work has a subtitle, use a colon to indicate where the title ends and the subtitle begins. The font used depends on the work used: parts of works are placed inside quotation marks, titles of a whole work are italicized. Here are titles for a website, a book, and an article with the journal containing it:

American Library Association. "Top Ten Most Challenged Books List." *Banned & Challenged Books: A Website for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association*, ala.org/advocacy/bbaooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10.

Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me, Ultima*. Grand Central Publishing, 1999.

Johnson, David. "Fanon's Travels: Fake Subtitle Here." *College Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2013, pp.52-80. *EBSCOHost*, doi:12.345fakedoi/12345.

3) Container: When the source used is part of a larger work, that whole is referred to as its container. A perfect example is a journal article. The container of the article is the journal. Other examples are textbooks, television series, or websites. These may then also be contained within a database like *EbscoHost*, or a streaming service like *Amazon Prime*. Containers help the reader "know where you found your sources since one copy of work may differ from other copies" (MLA 31).

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Sweat." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Paul Lauter, 6th ed., vol. D, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2010, pp. 1831-39.

Johnson, David. "Fanon's Travels." *College Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2013, pp.52-80. *EBSCOHost*, doi:12.345fakedoi/12345.

“The Impossible Astronaut.” *Doctor Who*, created by Sydney Newman, C.E. Webber, and Donald Wilson, performances by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, and Arthur Darvill, series 6, episode 1, 2011, *Amazon Prime*, www.madeupurl.won/twork.

4) Other Contributors: Creators other than an author may be included, especially if who they are, or what they did in a work is relevant to your paper (MLA 37). Describe the role they played here. Some common explanations are: adapted by, directed by, introduction by, edited by, translated by, illustrated by etc. For multiple people filling the same function, separate the descriptive phrases for each contribution with a comma. If this category is not necessary for identifying the source, leave it out. Here are example entries with contributors:

Hurston, Zora Neale. “Sweat.” *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Paul Lauter, 6th ed., vol. D, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2010, pp. 1831-39.

Shakespeare, William. “Sonnet 18.” *Folger Digital Texts*, Edited by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 22 March, 2018. www.folgerdigitaltexts.org.

“The Impossible Astronaut.” *Doctor Who*, created by Sydney Newman, C.E. Webber, and Donald Wilson, performances by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, and Arthur Darvill, series 6, episode 1, 2011, *Amazon Prime*, www.madeupurl.won/twork.

5) Version: Edition is primarily used for versions of a book - it can be descriptive or numeric (e.g. revised ed., 8th ed.). Descriptions like authorized version, director's cut, or unabridged can apply to many sources. If this category falls after the title section, capitalize the first letter.

Hurston, Zora Neale. “Sweat.” *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Paul Lauter, 6th ed., vol. D, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2010, pp. 1831-39.

Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook*. 8th Ed. Modern Language Association, 2016.

6) Number: Mark multiple volumes/issues with numbers or letters, the examples below are a scholarly journal and a series. The abbreviations “vol.” and “no.” are used. If citing a video or show, use words such as season, series, or episode.

Betall, Ahmet, et.al. "Graphic Novels in Class." *English Language Teaching*, vol. 8, Canadian Center, 2016, pp. 123-45. *ERIC*, www.elt/madeupurl.thatwontwork

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Sweat." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Paul Lauter, 6th ed., vol. D, Wadworth/Cengage Learning, 2010, pp. 1831-39.

7) Publisher: The organization responsible for producing or making something available to the public. For print works, check the title or the copyright page. For films and television it is the company or person responsible for its production. For websites, or blogs it would be the person or entity responsible for its creation and/or maintenance.

Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me, Ultima*. Grand Central Publishing, 1999.

Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook*. 8th Ed. Modern Language Association, 2016.

Shakespeare, William. "Sonnet 18." *Folger Digital Texts*, Edited by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 22 March, 2018. www.folgerdigitaltexts.org.

8) Publication Date: Some sources such as journals or newspapers require a full date, but usually a year alone is sufficient. For a work with more than one date, the trick is to choose the date that is most relevant to the research presented (MLA 42-43).

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. 1859, edited by Gillan Wood, Barnes & Noble Classics, New York, 2003.

Menand, Lous. "Drop Your Weapons: What Happens When You Outlaw War." *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2017, pp.61-66.

9) Location: For a section in a book or journal article it will most likely be a page range; digital sources may not have numbered pages. It may also be a publisher's city. The location may also be a URL or DOI.

Betall, Ahmet, et.al. "Graphic Novels in Class." *English Language Teaching*, vol. 8, Canadian Center, 2016, pp. 123-45. *ERIC*, www.elt/madeupurl.thatwontwork.

Yori, Hari and Barry Proseguy. "A 'Fake Title' Theory: Something Manga Related." *Manga Journal*, vol. 8, University Press, 2013, pp. 123-45. *Project Muse*, doi:12.345fakedoi/12345.

Works Cited

- American Library Association. "Top Ten Most Challenged Books List." *Banned & Challenged Books: A Website for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association*, ala.org/madeupurl.thatwontwork.
- Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me, Ultima*. Grand Central Publishing, 1999.
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- Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. 1859, edited by Gillan Wood, Barnes & Noble Classics, New York, 2003.
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- Menand, Louis. "Drop Your Weapons: What Happens When You Outlaw War." *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2017, pp.61-66.
- Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook*. 8th Ed. Modern Language Association, 2016.
- Shakespeare, William. "Sonnet 18." *Folger Digital Texts*, Edited by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, 22 March, 2018. www.folgerdigitaltexts.org.
- "The Impossible Astronaut." *Doctor Who*, created by Sydney Newman, C.E. Webber, and Donald Wilson, performances by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, and Arthur Darvill, series 6, episode 1, 2011, *Amazon Prime*, www.madeupurl.won/twork.
- Yori, Hari and Barry Proseguy. "A 'Fake Title' Theory: Something Manga Related." *Manga Journal*, vol. 8, University Press, 2013, pp. 123-45. *Project Muse*, doi:12.345fakedoi/12345.

Appendix

Core Elements Template

If an element does not apply or is not useful for your audience, leave it blank.

Author Last name, First name.■

Title “Article/Chapter/Web Page” or *Whole Work*.■

Container Title of the Container of the Source - *Textbook/Website/Journal*,

Contributors Describe how people participated; edited/ illustrated/ performance by,
First name Last name - if after Title capitalize the first letter,

Version Expanded ed./authorized version/8th ed.) If after Title capitalize the first letter,

Number Which part of a series: vol. 2/no. 3/season 4/episode 5 - if after Title capitalize
the first letter,

Publisher Organization that made the source available,

Date Choose date and level of detail relevant to your purpose,

Location Page range: p. 1 or pp.1-10 / URL / DOI / City.■