MLA Style Guidelines

Example Essay

You can download a sample essay adhering to MLA Style (8th Edition) here:


General Layout

Title Page:

MLA does not require that you have a title page. (In fact, you should not make one unless you are specifically told to do so by your instructor.)

Instead, on your first page, you should list your name, your instructor’s name, the course title, and the date. This material is placed in the upper left-hand corner of the first page using double-spaced text.

Double space again and center your title using Title Case (standard capitalization). Do not underline, italicize, bold, increase the font size, use a different font, or place your title in quotation marks or in all capital letters. However, if your title references other works, you should use quotation marks and/or italics the same way you would reference them in your text (see below).

Double space between the title and the first line of the text.

Page Numbering:

Using the header feature, add page numbers to the top, right-hand corner of each page beginning with the first page of text. This information should include your last name, followed by a space with a page number. Number all pages consecutively using Arabic numbers, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: You may be asked by your instructor to omit this information on your first page. You would then begin the headers on page 2.)
Text Style:

Use a readable font (Times New Roman is the recommended standard); font size should be 12 pt.

In the text, longer works such as books and journal titles should be italicized. Shorter works such as articles and chapter titles should be in quotation marks.

Capitalize only true proper nouns. Apply a “minimalist” principle when determining what constitutes a proper noun or what should be capitalized.

Spacing:

- **Margins:** 1 inch on all sides.
- **Indent:** The first line of a paragraph should be indented by a half inch.
- **Headings:** Headings are not required in MLA.

Double-space text throughout.

Long quotes of more than four lines should be block indented one inch from the left margin, double-spaced, and printed without quotation marks. The parenthetical citation for block quotes appears after the final period, as in this example. (32)

**Citations and References**

The MLA style for providing citations consists of in-text citations and a Works Cited page. In-text citations are citations within the body of the paper that point to a Works Cited entry on a list at the end of the paper.

**In-Text Citations:**

Include the author of each source followed by the page number.

At the time, "he reflected on the decision" (Smith 100).

If you include an author's name in a sentence, you do not need to repeat it in your parenthetical statement: As Smith said, "he reflected on the decision" (100).

Please note the placement of the period. The quotation is concluded, the citation is listed, and then the sentence ends.
In MLA style, these in-text references need to be clear and brief. They are a way to link the cited material directly to the works cited page. The in-text citation should be at the end of the sentence where the material is quoted -- unless there are two quotations from different sources within the same sentence in which case your in-text citation should appear at the end of the clause.

When referencing web pages, page numbers are not normally used. (Pagination will change depending on individual computers and browsers.)

Recall that the standard format for any internal citation is (Author pg), but this may be shortened to (Author) or (Author, “Short Title”) for electronic sources.

If no author is given, use the title in your signal phrase (“Short Title”).

Seem simple enough? Here are some possible complications:

(Note that the titles below are examples and not based on actual publications.)

You are citing…

○ Two different sources by one author: (Smith, Writing Lyrics 100) (Smith, “The New Musical” 22) Note that the first example is a book, and the second example is an article.

○ Two authors with the same name: (R. Smith, Writing Lyrics 100); (B. Smith, “Cole Porter’s Creativity” 8)

○ A source with more than one author: (Cruz, Kim, Moore Staging a Musical 10)

○ A source without an author: (Memoirs of a Stage Manager 303)

○ A website: (Smith et al., “A Writer at Work”) (Moore, “Just Add Words”)

Works Cited (References):

○ The word “Works Cited” (no quotations) is centered at the top of a new page and is not bolded, italicized, or underlined.

○ Entries that are more than one line should have a hanging indent. (Every line except for the first line is indented by 0.5 inches.)

○ Capitalize each word in titles except for articles, prepositions, or conjunctions. However, the initial letter in the title’s first word should always be capitalized.

○ Italicize the titles of full-length works and put shorter works in quotations.

○ Alphabetize the list of entries by the first author’s last name.

MLA no longer requires writers to indicate the format of a source (Web, print, DVD, etc.) because all citations will contain the same core elements. They are as follows:
1) Author:
   • Begin each entry with the author’s last name, followed by a comma, the rest of their name as it appears in the work, and a period.
   • If there is more than one author, list them in the order they are presented in the work.
   • If there are more than three authors listed, list the first name presented in the work, and follow it up with et. al.
   • If there is no specific author, an editor or a translator may be used in his/her place.

2) Title of source:
   • Titles should be written out in full, including subtitles (separated by a colon).
   • A title is placed in quotations if it is part of a larger work. For example, an article in a magazine or a newspaper would be put in quotations.
   • A title is italicized if it stands on its own as a complete work. For example, a whole book, magazine, or website would be put in italics.

3) Title of container:
   • The container is what “holds” the source. In other words, it is the place where the source is located.
   • The title of a container is always italicized and followed by a comma.
   • If the container is part of another “larger” container – for example, if you were to cite an episode of a television series which is the sole property of Netflix – you would list the larger container at the end of the citation, listing subsequent relevant information if necessary.

4) Other contributors:
   • Other contributors who played in prominent role in composing or releasing the work, like an editor or a translator, should be included in the citation.
   • Each contributor’s name is written out in full and preceded by a description of their role.

5) Version:
   • If available, list the version or edition of a work.
6) Number:

- If you are citing a multivolume work, indicate the volume number.
- If you are citing a journal, indicate both the volume and issue number of the journal.
- If you are citing an episode in a series, indicate the episode number.

7) Publisher:

- The publisher is the organization responsible for making a work available to the public.
- Books, films and television series, websites, and blog networks should all have their publisher included in a citation.
- Publishers may be omitted for periodicals, a work published by its author or editor, and website who are not responsible for the content made by creators (for example, YouTube).

8) Publication date:

- If available, cite the date a source was published.
- Dates should be written out “Day Month Year”. The day and month may be excluded if it is not immediately relevant to your work.

9) Location:

- Cite page numbers if a work is part of a larger, published work.
- Cite URLs for websites.
- Physical locations (like a museum or a venue) should be cited if relevant.

10) Optional elements:

- Optional elements that may be mentioned in a citation include original year of publication, location of publication, “unusual” sources, prior publication information, and date of access.

You can skip over any information that is missing from a particular source, and in that way, this basic template becomes completely customizable based on the medium of your source.

Here are some example citations for common sources that you might use in your papers. The “core element” number is included next to each component of the citation, for reference.
An article in a scholarly journal:

A book:
Jacobs, Alan (1). The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction (2). Oxford UP (7), 2001 (8).

An article in a magazine or newspaper:

An article or page on a website:

A whole website:
Hollmichel, Stephanie (1). So Many Books (2). 2003-13 (8), somanybooksblog.com (9).

A video:

Visit https://www.mla.org/style_faq1 for more specific information or consult the most recent edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.