

# Making Sense of MLA

Correct citation formatting is a very important part of a paper, but it isn't always easy to understand how to accomplish this. However, when the documentation is incorrect or unclear, we run the risk of confusing the reader, or even worse, plagiarizing. While MLA cannot really be memorized, using other resources to cite research correctly can make the process a little easier. See chapter 35 in *The Handbook for Writers* for more details.

## When do I cite sources?

You should cite a source in the paper (parenthetical citation) and on the works cited page **any** time you borrow words, ideas, images, etc. This includes:

- Directly quoting a source: copying a source word-for-word;
- Summarizing a source: discussing the source's main ideas; and
- Paraphrasing a source: putting the source's ideas into your own words.

Think about it this way. It takes a lot of time, energy, and research to come up with ideas and get them published, just like when you write an essay for your English class. You wouldn't want anyone to take credit for your ideas, especially since you worked so hard for them. The same goes when you use sources; you want to give that person credit for his/her hard work.

When in doubt, cite the source! Unless the information is something like, "The sky is blue," which everyone knows, don't take the chance by not citing the information. Also, ask yourself if the idea is completely your own. If it's not, cite it!

## Terms to know

**Anthology:** a collection of works by different authors (like your Literature book).

**Article:** a small work published in an anthology, magazine, journal, newspaper, or other collection.

**Author:** the actual creator/writer of a work.

**Compiler:** the person who gathered various documents to be published together in a single publication.

**Database:** searchable collection of publications, usually articles, accessed electronically.

**Editor:** revises and edits another's work.

**Journal (scholarly):** publication containing articles written and reviewed by confirmed experts in a particular field of study (example: *Journal of the American Medical Assoc.*, *Eighteenth Century Studies*).

**Library subscription service:** electronic databases for which the library must pay a subscription fee for access (e.g. Gale, Academic Search Premier). Access restricted to an institution's students and faculty.

**Website:** Electronic site owned, operated, and maintained by private parties (e.g. CNN.com, Google.com, peta.org). Available for public access.

## Read the MLA sections in your handbook!

Granted, this probably isn't your idea of a good time. However, unless you take the time to read and understand MLA citation concepts and look at sample citations, you won't understand how to look up the citations for your sources. Citation is a big issue and you will be expected to understand MLA, whether or not you find it interesting.

## How do I cite sources in the Works Cited?

Sometimes, it's difficult to interpret the *MLA Handbook*, or even to understand the whole "citation thing." However, by following this process, citations can be relatively easy. (Helpful pages: *Handbook for Writers* p. 575 and A-2 – A-3; *MLA* Section 5)

1. Start by identifying the type of source. Is it a:
  - a. Book?
  - b. Journal?
  - c. Website?
  - d. Magazine?
  - e. Newspaper?
  - f. Government report?
  - g. Television show?
  - h. Film?
2. Next, try to identify the information you have available. Look for items such as:
  - a. Author
  - b. Editor
  - c. Title of article or chapter
  - d. Title of book, journal, magazine, or newspaper
  - e. Place of publication (city)
  - f. Publisher (company)
  - g. Date of publication
  - h. Page numbers
3. Now, using your textbook or an *MLA Handbook*, look in the citation index for information on how to correctly cite that type of source. For instance, if you were going to cite a journal article, you would look for "journal" in the *MLA Handbook's* index. Then you would turn to the page listed.
4. Look through the correct section, and try to find the citation that best fits your source. For example, you may have accessed your journal article from a library subscription service (*Gale, Academic Search*). You would look for the sample citation for the article from a library subscription service.
5. Use the information you gathered in Step 2 to fill in the blanks in the citation. Be sure to follow the rules for punctuation you see in the book. If you are missing any information, go back to the source and look for it. If you cannot find it, check to see what the book says about missing information. You may want to read the beginning of the section for details (i.e. the introduction to citing articles).

## How do I cite sources using parenthetical citation?

Parenthetical citation gives your reader critical information about where you found your information. Let's say you make a particularly interesting point; your reader may want to know more about that subject. He/she can use the information in the parenthetical citation to look up the full citation on your Works Cited page. The Works Cited information will help him/her to locate a copy of the original source. (Helpful pages: *Handbook for Writers* p. 571; *MLA* section 6)

1. Think about how you are using the source in the paper
  - a. Paraphrased or summarized source
  - b. Short quotation
  - c. Long quotation
  - d. One author
  - e. Title only (no author)
  - f. Entire work
  - g. Electronic source

2. Now, using your textbook or an MLA Handbook, look in either the directory for parenthetical citations (like a table of contents at the beginning of that section in the book) or in the index to find the page that contains the correct parenthetical citation. This is very similar to the process you followed for your Works Cited page.
3. Look through the section and find the citation that best fits your source.
4. Use the information you have about the source (and how it is being used) to fill in the blanks in the parenthetical citation. Pay close attention to the punctuation and the location of the citation within the sentence.

## Formatting Your Paper

### Introduction

While it may seem trivial, the format of your paper is very important to its overall appearance and organization. The format enhances readability, which allows your reader to navigate the document quickly and easily. The Modern Language Association (MLA) has adopted specific formatting rules to complement the citation process. Correct formatting produces the impression of a well organized, well written document.

### Important Handbook Pages

Important Pages in The Handbook for Writers

1. Appearance
  - a. Works Cited page (p. 616 & A-16)
  - b. Page Setup (p. 598)
  - c. Title Page (p. 597)
2. Works Cited
  - a. List of source types (p. 575-576)
  - b. Articles from the library databases (p. A-3 #1)
  - c. Internet sources (A-2)
  - d. Selection from an anthology: (p. 578 #10)
  - e. In text citations (p. 561-562)

### Page Format

**Format** applies to the appearance of the paper (margins, spacing, indents, citations, etc.).

- Set margins to 1 inch.
- The paper is double-spaced; go to “Format,” then “Paragraph,” and select double-spacing.
- Each paragraph is indented 5 spaces (hit the Tab key once); do not hit enter twice between paragraphs. In addition, there is only one space after punctuation (commas, periods, etc.).
- Page numbers: go to “Insert” and then “Page Numbers;” they go in the top right corner.
- Last name: go to “View,” and then “Header/Footer;” you will be able to see the header. Be sure you are using right alignment and type your last name. Close the header. Your name will now appear on every page.
- Heading: this appears on the first page of the paper. It includes the student’s name, the professor’s name, the class and section, and the date. It is also double spaced.

*See page 598 in the handbook for an example of a correctly formatted page.*

## Works Cited Page

**Citations** are the entries on the Works Cited or Bibliography pages. They usually consist of: Author. "Title of Article." Source. Publication information. However, there are several different documents that involve citations and it is important to understand each one. A **Bibliography** is a list of all the sources that were consulted during the paper writing process; this list may include sources that are not directly used in the paper. \**Note: Bibliographies are uncommon in English classes.*\* An **Annotated Bibliography** is a pre-drafting research tool; it is a list of possible sources for the paper. Under each citation appears a short paragraph that describes the source and its relevance to the paper topic. A **Works Cited Page** is an alphabetical list of all the sources used (summarized, paraphrased, quoted) in the paper. This is the most common source document for English classes.

### The Works Cited page:

- Is the last page of the paper (it should have a page number). Do not save it as a separate document.
- Is alphabetized.
- Is double-spaced like the paper.
- Has Works Cited centered at the top of the page.
- Has hanging indents (each citation is the opposite of how a paragraph is indented). Go to "Format," then "Paragraph," and under "Special" select "Hanging."

*See pg. 616 and A-16 in the handbook for an example of a Works Cited page.*

## Parenthetical Citations

These appear after any borrowed material and usually include: (Author pg #).

- Should match the first word of the works cited page entry, and can therefore only be an author's last name or an article title.
- Should always appear after any summarized, paraphrased or directly quoted material.

*See pg. 561 for an example.*

## Punctuation

Punctuation of citations and parenthetical citations is also important. In the paper:

- Quotation marks only go around the quoted words; then put the parentheses and then the period. The parenthetical citation is actually part of the sentence. Example: "Direct Quote" (Author pg. #).
- Quotes that are longer than four lines are "blocked" (indented). There are no quotation marks around these types of quotes, and in this case the period goes before the parentheses (see pg 439 in the handbook).
- On the Works Cited page:
  - Titles of articles are put in "Quotation Marks."
  - The period always goes inside the "Quotation Marks."
  - Titles of Articles are Capitalized, even if the original is not.
  - Titles of books, magazine and journals are underlined.

Formatting **Step 1:** Under “Page Setup,” set all margins to 1 inch. Under “Format” and “Paragraph,” select double-spacing and choose an appropriate font and type size.

Firstname Lastname

Instructor Name

English 0000-01

Paper Due date

**Step 3** Heading: See the 4 lines to the left.

Course & section #

Date format = day month year. Ex: 01 January 2006

Paper Title

**Step 2** Header & pg numbers: Go to “View” and select “Header/Footer.” Right justify and type your last name and one space. Then click the page number icon on the header toolbar. Then close the view.

Lastname #

**\*Notice** that there are no extra enter/return spaces anywhere. You only need to hit enter to go to the next line.\*

This is the first sentence of my introduction. Introductions are very important, as they are the only chance to make a good first impression on the audience. I do not want to be too vague in my introduction, or bore or confuse the reader by being too brief. In this paragraph I should get my reader’s attention with an interesting fact, statistic, story, or analogy. I should also make sure that I identify my paper’s topic and scope; this may involve my thesis statement. I want to give the reader a good idea of what aspects I will be covering and why I will be covering those. I will avoid clichés and purpose statements, and use meaningful attention getters instead. It is also very important that my introduction reflect the rest of my paper; after I draft my body paragraphs and conclusion I will need to go back and re-read and revise my introduction to make sure everything fits.

In my first body paragraph I will develop my first point, which will probably require me to incorporate some of my research. When I quote a source in my paper, it is as if I am inserting someone else’s voice into my monologue. If I do this without the proper transition, my writing will not flow smoothly and may not make sense to the audience. I will want to be sure to introduce sources properly before quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing by referring at least to the name of the author, if not the title of the source, as well. As one of our handouts says, “Writers should incorporate quotations into sentences, keeping in mind that the grammar of the quotation needs to connect to the grammar of the sentence” (“Using Sources” 1).

Parenthetical citation example

In my next paragraph, I could also paraphrase or summarize a source. To do this, I would restate the idea(s) presented in my source, but I would use my own words to express those ideas (Wexler 142).

Another parenthetical citation example

**Works Cited Tips:** It is the last page of your paper, not a new document, and is double-spaced like the paper. Again, only use the enter key to go to the next line, not to add spaces between lines.

↓  
Lastname #

## Works Cited

A  
↓

Anderson, John. "Why I Love to Write." The Local Newspaper 16 Jan. 2006: A14.

Bailey, Joe. "College English Saved My Life." Scholarly Journal 1.2 (2005): 23. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO Host. Blinn Coll. Lib., Bryan, TX. 26 Jan. 2006  
<<http://persistentlink>>.

Carter, Jane. "The Writing Center and Success in College: A Study." CNN.com 3 July 2004. 2 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.cnn.com>>.

"Using Sources Handout." The Writing Center: Bryan Campus 2006. 6 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.blinn.edu/brazos/humanities/writingcenter/handouts.htm>>.

Wexler, Bruce. "Poetry Is Dead. Does Anybody Really Care?" Dialogues: An Argument Rhetoric and Reader. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Gary Goshgarian and Kathleen Krueger. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006. 141-143.

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**Hanging Indents:** Go to "Format," then "Paragraph," and under the "Special" drop down menu, select "Hanging."