Modern Language Association (MLA) Format and Documentation

In April 2016, MLA replaced the seventh edition handbook with an updated eighth edition. This handout covers the basics of MLA format and documentation as discussed in this updated handbook. Refer to the MLA Handbook Eighth Edition for more complete and up-to-date information.

General Guidelines

- **Margins**: Set margins to one-inch all sides.
- **Header**: Create a header that includes your last name and the page number in the upper right hand corner of the page.
- **Spacing**: Double-space the text of your paper.
- **Indenting**: Indent the first line of every paragraph five spaces or one tab.
- **Font**: Use a legible font, such as Times New Roman. Font size should be 12 point.

Formatting the First Page

- **Title Page**: A title page is not required unless specifically requested by your instructor.
- **Heading**: In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Use double-spaced text.
- **Title**: Do not italicize or underline your title, put it in quotation marks or boldface, or type it in all capital letters. Do not use a period after your title. Double space and center the title.

![Figure 1. Sample first page of a research paper. Source: “The Top of the First Page of a Research Paper.” The MLA Style Center, 2016, https://style.mla.org/formatting-papers/.](image-url)
The Works Cited Page

When writing a research paper using MLA format, you must have a works cited page at the end of your paper in which you document the outside sources that you have used. All entries in the Works Cited page must correspond to an in-text citation in the paper.

Formatting the Works Cited Page

- **Location:** Begin the works cited list on a new page at the end of your paper.
- **Header:** Use the same header as the main body of your paper. Also continue the page numbering sequence.
- **Margins:** Use the same margins as the main body of your paper, one-inch on all sides. Begin your entries at the left margin.
- **Title:** Center the title “Works Cited” an inch from the top of the page. Do not italicize or underline the title, put it in quotation marks or boldface, or type it in all capital letters. Do not use a period after the title.
- **Spacing:** Double-space the entire list.
- **Indenting:** Use hanging indent for all entries that are longer than one line.
- **Order:** Alphabetize the list according to the author’s last name. If the author’s name is unknown, alphabetize by title.
- **Entries:** You must include an entry for every source that you use in your paper.

Figure 2. Sample works cited page.
General Guidelines for Creating Citations

The updated handbook no longer emphasizes following specific guidelines for formatting citations. The MLA eighth edition now recommends a universal set of guidelines that writers can apply to any source, in any field. This means that writers create entries by consulting MLA’s list of core elements and compiling them in the recommended order. An element should be omitted from the entry if it’s not relevant to the work being documented.

These core elements are those basic pieces of information that should be common to all sources regardless of genre. The MLA core elements are as follows:

- Author.
- Title of source.
- Title of container,
- Other contributors,
- Version,
- Number,
- Publisher,
- Publication date,
- Location.

Each element is followed by the punctuation mark shown unless it is the final element in the citation, which should end with a period.

Example 1


Breakdown of Core Elements in Citation

- Author: Michael Joyce
- Title of Source: Othermindedness: The Emergence of Network Culture
- Publisher: U of Michigan P
- Publication Date: 2000

Example 2


Breakdown of Core Elements in Citation

- Author: Joy Williams
- Title of Source: “Rogue Territory”
- Title of Container: The New York Times Book Review
- Publication Date: 9 Nov. 2014
- Location: pp. 15-17
Key Differences in MLA 8th Edition

- One citation format applies to every source.
- The ability to use pseudonyms, including online usernames, for author names.
- The addition of the abbreviations “vol.” and “no.” to periodical citations.
- Inclusion of URLs in web citations and DOIs when possible.
- Omitting of city and medium of publication from citations.
- Punctuation has been simplified, and only commas are used to separate the container title, version, number, publisher, publication date, and location.
- Citing the date when an online work was consulted is now optional.
- Placeholders for unknown information like n.d. ("no date") are no longer used.
- When an organization is both author and publisher of a work, the organization’s name is now given only once, usually as the publisher. No author is stated.

NOTE: These changes are highlighted in the examples below.

Sample Works Cited Page Entries

The update to MLA has streamlined the process of creating citations. All entries should be uniform and simple, yet include enough information so that readers can locate your sources.

PRINT PUBLICATION EXAMPLES

A Book by a Single Author

Last name, First name. Title of Book. Publisher, Year of Publication.


NOTE: The city and medium of publication is no longer needed when citing a book.

A Book with Two Authors

Author A Last name, First name, and Author B Full Name. Title of the Book. Publisher, Year.


A Book with Three or More Authors

Last name, First name, et al. Title of Book. Publisher, Year of Publication.


NOTE: You do not need to list all authors’ names in the citation.
Two or More Books by the Same Author (List works alphabetically by title)

Last name, First name. Title of Book. Publisher, Year of Publication.

---. Title of Book. Publisher, Year of Publication.


Book by a Corporate Author

Organization Name. Title of Book. Publisher, Year of publication.


Book with No Author (List and alphabetize by the title of the book)

Title of Book. Publisher, Year of Publication.


A Book with an Editor, Translator, or Other Contributors

Author’s name. Title of Book. Other Contributors, Publisher, Year of Publication.


A Work in an Anthology, Reference, or Collection

Author’s name. “Title of Source.” Title of Container, Edited by Editor’s Name(s), Publisher, Publication Date, Page range of entry.


Journal Article

Author’s name. “Title of Article.” Journal Title, Volume, Number, Publication Date, Page range of entry.


NOTE: The volume, number, and page numbers are now identified in the citation. Punctuation has also been simplified to use only commas to separate these elements.
**Newspaper or Magazine Article**

Author’s name. "Title of Article." *Title of Periodical*, Publication Date, Page range of entry.


**NOTE:** Whether you give the year alone or include the month and day depends on your source. Write the full date as you find it in the source.

**ELECTRONIC PUBLICATION EXAMPLES**

**Entire Web Site**

Author(s). *Title of Site*. Publisher, Publication Date, URL.


**NOTE:** Since the author and the publisher are the same, the name is only given once as the publisher. No author is needed.

**A Website Page**

Author(s). “Page Title.” *Name of Site*. Publication Date, URL.


**NOTE:** The date of access of a web source is now optional. You should carefully consider the source you are documenting as to whether you should include the date you accessed the online material. For example, if the source does not provide a publication date, then supplying a date of access may help your reader locate the information.

**Article in an Online Scholarly Journal**

Author(s). “Article Title.” *Name of Journal*, volume, number, Publication Date. *Database*, DOI.


**NOTE:** Articles in journals are often assigned DOIs. When possible, cite a DOI instead of a URL.
Article in an Online Newspaper or Magazine Article

Author’s Name. “Title of Article.” Title of Periodical, Publication Date, Website URL.


Online Book

Author’s name. Title of Book. Publisher, Publication Date, Title of Internet Site, Date of electronic publication, Website URL.


NOTE: This online book did not give the date of electronic publication; therefore, this information has not been included.

Part of an Online Book

Author’s name. “Title of Section.” Title of Book, Publisher, Year of Publication, Location, Title of Internet Site. Date of electronic publication, Website URL.


A Song or Other Piece of Music

Author’s name. “Title of Song.” Title of Album, Publisher, Publication Date, Website URL.


NOTE: Even if you have a physical copy of the music you are citing, locating the piece online will enable your reader to locate the source easier.

A Film or Television Series

Director’s or Producer’s name, title. Movie Title. Organization, Production date.

A Blog Post

Author’s name. “Title of Post.” Title of Blog, Publisher, Publication Date, URL.


A Video on a Web Site

“Video Title.” Website, uploaded by Poster’s Name, Publication Date, URL.


An Email Communication

Author’s Name. “Email Subject.” Received by Name, Date Received.


A Post on Social Media

Poster’s Name. “Message text.” Twitter, Publication Date, Publication time, URL.

@persiankiwi. “We have report of large street battles in east & west Tehran now - #Iranelection.” Twitter, 23 June 2009, 11:15 a.m., twitter.com/persiankiwi/status/229810672.

NOTE: Pseudonyms, including online usernames, are acceptable as author names. If a work is published without an author’s name, do not list the author as “Anonymous.” Instead, begin the entry with the work’s title.
Parenthetical or In-Text Citations

In addition to providing full citations for every source that you use within your paper, you must also provide in-text citations that direct your reader to the entry in your works cited list.

General Guidelines for In-Text Citations

Overall, the principles behind MLA in-text citations remain unchanged with the update. Any important information will be noted below.

- You must provide an in-text citation for every source that you quote, summarize, or paraphrase within your essay.
- A typical in-text citation is composed of the element that comes first in the entry in the works-cited list (usually the author’s name) and a page number.
- With short quotations – no more than four lines of prose or three lines of verse – the cited material should be incorporated within the text.
- When a quotation is longer than four lines, the cited material should be set off from the text as a block indented half an inch from the left margin.

Example of Long Quotation

The forms of writing that accompany reading

Can fill various rolls. The simplest is to make parts of a text prominent (by underlining, highlighting, or adding asterisks, lines, or squiggles). More-reflective responses are notes written in the margins or in an eternal location – a notebook or a computer file. (Baron 194)

All these forms of writing bear in common the reader’s desire to add to, complete or even alter the text.

Note: No quotation marks are needed when a quotation is set off in a block indent. Insert the parenthetical citation after the ending punctuation mark.
Sample In-Text Citations

In-text Citations for Sources with Known Author

According to Naomi Baron, reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.

Or

Reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (Baron 194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.

Works Cited


NOTE: If you provide the author’s name in the sentence, you do not need to include it in the parenthetical citation. The page number should not be mentioned in the text.

In-text Citations for Sources with No Known Author or Organization as Author

Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literacy in America notes that despite an apparent decline in reading during the sample period, “the number of people doing creative writing – of any genre, not exclusively literary works – increased substantially between 1982 and 2002” (3).

Or

Despite an apparent decline in reading during the same period, “the number of people doing creative writing – of any genre, not exclusively literary works – increased substantially between 1982 and 2002” (*Reading* 3).

Works Cited


In-text Citations for Sources by More than One Author with the Same Last Name

For example, you cite one source by Naomi Baron and another source by Sabrina Alcorn Baron. You should add the author’s first initial to your citation so that your reader will know which author you are referring to.

Reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (N. Baron 194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.
In-text Citations for Multiple Sources by the Same Author

If you are citing more than one source by the same author, include a short form of the source’s title in your parenthetical citation.

Reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (Baron, “Redefining” 194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.

In-text Citations for Sources with No Page Numbers

If you are citing a source with no page numbers or part numbers, no number should be given in a parenthetical citation. Do not count unnumbered paragraphs or parts.

According to Hollmichel, “as we read we . . . construct the terrain of a book.”

In-text Citations for Multiple Sources in the Same Sentence

While reading may be the core of literacy, literacy can be complete only when reading is accompanied by writing (Baron 194; Jacobs 55).

Note to Readers

This handout is intended as a supplement to the MLA Handbook Eighth Edition. All of the information, and many of the examples, were obtained from the MLA Handbook or the Modern Language Association (MLA) website (www.mla.org). Please refer to these resources if you need more in-depth information that is not covered in this handout.