MLA Style Guidelines – 9th Edition


Please note: your institution or instructor may still be using the 8th Edition of MLA. Be sure to carefully review your syllabus, assignment instructions, and professor expectations to determine which edition you should be using. If you need to use the 8th Edition of The MLA Handbook, you can consult the Brainfuse MLA Style Guide – 8th Edition for help.

Example Essay

You can download a sample essay describing and adhering to MLA Style (9th Edition) here:

MLA 9th Edition – Sample Student Paper

Quick Links

Use the links below to quickly jump to the location in the guide that you need:

General Layout
Titles of Other Works
Quotations
Lists
Tables and Figures
Inclusive Language
In-Text Citations
Works Cited
Works Cited Examples
General Layout

Title Page: MLA does not require a title page unless the paper is a group project or otherwise requested by your instructor. Instead, MLA requires a heading on your first page. This should include your name, your instructor’s name, the course title, and date (Day Mon Year or Mon Day Year). Place the heading in the upper left-hand corner of the first page using double-spaced text. After the heading should be your title using Title Case (standard capitalization). A heading will look as follows:

Name (First & Last)
Instructor Name (include all instructors on separate lines if more than one)
Course Name & Number
Date [ex: 8 August 2021]

Title in Title Case: No Special Formatting Required

For group projects: MLA recommends a title page for group projects. Simply use the same format for the heading as above on its own page. Instead of placing the title one line below the heading, center the title on the title page.

Page Numbering: Add page numbers, along with your last name, to the top, right-hand corner of each page beginning with the first page of text. For typed works, this is usually done with the Header function of the word processing program, and therefore would not be individually written on each page. Configure the header so that your header is placed a half inch from the top of the page. Begin with your last name, followed by a space with a page number. Number all pages consecutively using Arabic numerals. For example:

Name (First & Last)  Last Name #

Text Style: Use a readable font (Times New Roman is the recommended standard) in 12 point size. The font should use default color (black) and remain consistent throughout your paper.

Spacing:
Margins: 1 inch on all sides.
Indent: The first line of a paragraph should be indented by a half inch.
Double-space text throughout.

Spacing should also remain consistent throughout your paper.

Headings: MLA does not require headings or subheadings, though they can be useful to organize your paper. MLA requires consistency in headings (e.g. all level 1 headings should be the same; all level 2 headings should be the same, etc.). Every heading should have more than one instance if used. Headings should also be flush with the left margin with no indentation. Avoid using all capital letters,
letters, or numbers within your headings. An example of a heading style that maintains MLA recommendations is below:

**Heading Level One**

*Heading Level Two*

*Heading Level Three*

**Noun Capitalization:** Only true proper nouns (name, place, organization, etc.) should be capitalized. Apply a “minimalist” principle when determining what constitutes a proper noun or what should be capitalized. Use capitalization sparingly.

**Numbers:** MLA uses words for numbers that can be written in one or two words (e.g. two, thirty-five, one hundred). In addition:
- Any number that begins a sentence should be written out.
- A hyphen should be used with compound numbers or fractions (e.g. forty-five, two-fifths, etc.).
- Do not mix written numbers with symbols; instead, write out the symbol (e.g. nine percent).
- It is acceptable to mix numerals and words for large numbers (e.g. 9.3 million)

When using numerals, include the comma for thousands, millions, etc. However, do not use this comma for page numbers, streets, or years. Use numerals to represent numbers in the following instances:
- When three or more words are necessary to convey the number. Number-heavy contexts, including measurements and ratios (e.g. 4000 feet, $3 \times 10^4$ m/s)
- Decimal fractions (e.g. .001, .05)
- When referring to a number series (e.g. chapter 9, page 55)
- Range of numerals up to 99 should be included in full (e.g. 62-78)
- Range of numerals over 100 should only include the last two digits unless required for clarity (e.g. 1,050-179, 101-205, 1,500-75)

**Titles of Other Works**

When introducing sources, quoted material, or other published works you will have to appropriately title them. Depending on length or source of the work, different font rules apply. Larger works that contain sections, chapters, or smaller works within them are typically italicized (like the name of The MLA Handbook mentioned above).

**Italicized Titles**

- Book
- Website
- Online Database
- Magazine
- Play
- TV/Movie
- Court Cases
- Apps
For titles of smaller sources, you would use quotation marks. Some (not all) examples are listed below:

“Quoted Titles”:
- Book chapter
- A poem, essay, or other small work from a collection
- Specific episode of TV/podcast or similar
- A single digital source such as a Tweet, blog post, or similar

Laws, specific books, and certain music that are already catalogued do not follow these rules listed above and do not require italics or quotes. Review specific rules for these sources.

**Quotations**

Quotes from sources should be concise, used sparingly, and have direct significance to the argument or topic being discussed. When crafting quotes, use double quote marks around “content.” Single quotations marks such as this ‘example’ are used on quoted material within a source you quote.

Quotes should strive to blend in seamlessly with text, adding emphasis to arguments or ideas in a concise manner. You should not end paragraphs with a quote since there should be analysis of the quote after its introduction. There are certain instances where you will have to quote large sections of texts called block quotes.

**Block quotations** are quotes of more than four lines. Block quotations should start on a new line and be indented half an inch from the left margin (same as a new paragraph indentation), double-spaced, and printed without quotation marks. The indentation should be maintained throughout the entirety of the quote. The parenthetical citation for block quotes appears after the final period, as they would appear in-text in MLA format (author, page or line number). Block quotations of works such as poetry should aim to keep the original formatting of the text as much as possible. For example:

High on a bright-rayed emerald throne sublime

I see a white-robed figure. Her white hand

Points to where commerce, spreading far and wide,

Shapes her broad course across the boundless tide,

And scatters plenty’s blessing o’er the land;

(Rankine, lines 5-9)
Other quotation guidelines:
For poetry quotes less than four lines, use “/” to designate new lines between prose and keep the quote material in-text.

Use of [brackets] in quotes designates missing information or implied meaning in the quote that you include to provide clarification. (e.g. “I missed it [the meteor].”)

When you start a quote in the middle of a sentence or leave off the end of a sentence use ellipses “…” to identify the left-out material. In most cases, this is done to omit irrelevant material to your argument or discussion. (e.g. “… showed a 27% increase in effectiveness.”)

Lists
MLA does not require lists, though it can help to organize information in your paper. There are three types of lists recommended by MLA.

Integrated in writing: MLA prefers and recommends incorporating lists in your writing. Use a colon to introduce the list unless it is grammatically incorrect. You may choose to use numerals in parentheses if needed. Examples are below for reference.

(No Colon) American tourist attractions include Times Square, Mall of America, Central Park, and Union Station.

(Colon) More than thirty million people visit the top tourist attractions in America: Times Square, Mall of America, Central Park and Union Station.

(Integrated Numerals) There are five steps in the research process: (1) select a topic, (2) search for sources, (3) evaluate sources, (4) reading sources, and (5) refine the topic.

Introduced with complete sentences: Lists that are introduced by complete sentences can be composed of complete sentences or fragments, though MLA requires consistency for the list (use one or the other). If you use complete sentences, capitalize the first word and use appropriate punctuation. If using fragments, use appropriate punctuation and use and or or before the final item. Bulleted lists should not use punctuation and should start with lower case letters.

(Complete Sentences) Participants were asked to respond to two questions:
  Do you have any allergies?
  How often do you visit restaurants?

(Incomplete Sentences) The research focused on the health of individuals by gathering a number of personal details:
  frequency of eating out;
  allergies; and
  frequency of allergic reactions.
(Bulleted List) The research focused on the health of individuals by gathering a number of personal details:

- frequency of eating out
- allergies
- frequency of allergic reactions

Continuing sentences: If the list items continue the sentence that introduced the list, do not use a colon after introducing the list. You may choose to use numerals for your list if need. Use semicolons between parts of the list and use and or or before the final item. The list should end with a period. Bulleted lists should not use punctuation and should start with lower case letters.

(Incomplete Sentences) The research asked participants about their frequency of eating out; allergies; and frequency of allergic reactions.

(Bulleted List) The research focused on the health of individuals by asking about their
- frequency of eating out
- allergies
- frequency of allergic reactions

Tables and Figures

Any images or figures used in-text should be included next to its relevant discussion. However, do not break up any paragraphs or put these items in the middle of a sentence. Each figure or table should be numbered, starting with “Figure 1” or “Table 1,” and continuing upwards.

Tables: Tables are generally used to note data sets (think numbers). If used, tables should be referred to in text and placed near their reference in-text (see table 1). Tables should always be left-aligned. The table number and title (using Title Case) should precede the table and be double spaced, with the source and any notes following the table. Use internal lines as needed in your table.

Table 1

Example Table Using MLA Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation Style</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenthetical</td>
<td>(Author Page)</td>
<td>. . (Freeman 10).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Modern Language Association, The MLA Style Handbook . . . (you will need to finish the reference)
Figures: In MLA, figures include any images, illustrations, or visuals that are not tables or examples (only musical illustrations are considered “examples” and not “figures”). The figure should be referenced in text and placed as near to the text as possible (see figure 1). The figure number (Figure or Fig. may be used), figure title, and source are all written on the same line and should remain double-spaced. If you include all of the source information with the figure caption and it is not cited in text, you do not need to include the source on the Works Cited page.

Incredible Hulk  Credible Hulk

Fig. 1. A citation meme from [source details] . . .

Inclusive Language

MLA uses seven principles to guide the use of inclusive language in order to be respectful of others without exclusion or bias. These principles are guidelines only, it is up to writers to consider the context and audience in order to make a judgement about the language used.

Use Relevant References: MLA encourages writers to carefully consider the necessity of including the ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, economic, or social status of a subject. Noting the status may make the characteristic seem outside the norm and doesn’t often add to credibility or lack thereof of the reference. In addition, use gender neutral terms when possible (e.g. “humankind” instead of “mankind”, “people” instead of “men”).

Be Specific: MLA recommends that writers use specific and preferred terms when referring to a population to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or conflating traditions (e.g. “Catholic” instead of “Christian,” “Sunni Muslims” instead of “Muslims,” etc.). In addition, avoid generalizations about group identities by rephrasing the idea (e.g. instead of “Rich people think...,” consider “A belief held by some of the wealthiest individuals...”)

Use Respectful Terms: Person-first language or identify-first language is permitted in MLA. Person-first language emphasizes the person (e.g. “a youth with epilepsy”), whereas identify-first language emphasizes the disability (e.g. “an amputee”). MLA encourages writers to use the form that reflects the preferences of individuals or groups. If no preference is provided, MLA recommends either form depending on the context, case by case.
Be Consistent and Thoughtful: MLA recommends using the preference of the community when capitalizing identities. If the preference is not known, writers should review the preferred dictionary for capitalization of identities. In instances where an identify may be used in both the capitalized or lowercased form (e.g. “black” vs. “Black” or “white” vs. “White”), choose one and be consistent. In addition, avoid using language or punctuation that undermines a subject’s identify. For example, do not place quotations around an individual’s pronoun or italicize an identity, even if the term is not in your preferred dictionary.

Minimize Pronoun Exclusion: Rather than using both feminine or masculine pronouns to remain inclusive, MLA recommends revising to make the subject plural to avoid gendered pronouns.

For example:
Instead of stating, “Every teacher must make sure that her students complete their homework,” state, “Teachers must make sure that students complete their homework.”

MLA allows writers to use singular they when preferred by an individual or to help avoid exclusionary language. In cases where it is not the subject’s preference, singular they is less desirable than using a plural subject. In addition, avoid making assumptions about the readers identify, beliefs, or background in your language.

Avoid Negative Judgments: MLA encourages writers to avoid descriptions that may evoke emotions or imagery that may not be accurate. “Suffers from,” “afflicted with,” “victim of,” and similar language may make assumptions about a person or groups experiences that are not accurate. These are added bias which writers should strive to avoid.

Check Terms for Offense: MLA recommends that writers always double-check their preferred, up-to-date dictionary about terms that may be offensive or questionable. If an offensive term is featured in a work quoted or reviewed, writers should take care to never repeat it as their own word. If integral to the understanding or reference of a source, use the term with clear quotations to show it is not your own words. Writers may choose to add a note about the offensive term or may choose to use a dash to avoid reproducing the term in full (e.g. “d—”). Writers may also identify a respectful alternative for use in discussions.

In-Text Citations

In-text citations are citations within the body of the paper that point to a Works Cited entry at the end of the paper. In-text citations should be included anytime you reference the work of another individual or organization. (However, you do not need to include a citation if you are only referring to a work generally, such as introducing a title in your paper.)

By using in-text citations, students avoid plagiarism. Other reasons for citation use include giving readers the ability to review the sources for a deeper understanding or to inform their own arguments.

In MLA style, in-text citations should be clear and brief. The basic format for MLA in-text citations is (Author Page). Note that MLA does not require a comma between these source elements. For example:

As a result, we are led to believe that the dog was a cat all along (Smith 29).
In-text citations can be included in your paper in two different ways, so long as you provide the proper elements after the mention of your sourced material.

1. You can provide a citation directly after quoted material, for example:

   She describes it as, “...[a town with] no artful towers or cornices” (Jemisin 9).

2. Alternatively, you can include an author’s name in the sentence, meaning that you do not need to repeat it in your parenthetical statement. This is known as a Signal Phrase and is used to signal the source for your reader. In this case, you only need to include the page number in the parenthetical citation. For example:

   Jemisin describes a town, “...[with] no artful towers or cornices” (9).

The period should be placed after the citation, so that the citation is included in the sentence it refers to.

**Digital Sources:** When referencing web pages, blogs, or other online media, page numbers are not normally provided. While standard MLA format is (Author Page), this can be shortened to just (Author) for digital sources. As an example:

   “Twenty percent of students prefer e-books to physical textbooks” (Greenberg).

**Sources Without an Author:** If no author is given, replace the author in the in-text citation with a shortened title of the work. For articles, the title should be in italics (“Short Title”); for books, the short title should be italicized. For example:

   Despite this convenience, another online survey found that thirty-five percent of students do not like required texts that include a “supplemental digital material unavailable on the used book marketplace” (“Textbooks and Students”).

There are other special rules to consider when dealing with specific sources. Formatting for in-text citations are unique in the following circumstances:

- **Two different sources by one author:** In these instances, include the “Short Title” of the work in the citation to avoid confusion. For example:
  - (Smith, *Writing Lyrics* 100) - *Notes that this is a book*
  - (Smith, “The New Musical” 22) - *Notes that this is an article*

- **Two authors with the same name:** Include the first initial to distinguish between the two authors. For example:
  - (R. Smith 100)
  - (B. Smith 8)
A source with two authors: Includes names separated by “and.” For example:
   ○ (Cruz and Kim 10)

A source with three or more authors: Only include the first listed author’s last name, and replace the remaining authors with “et al.” Be sure to include the period with “al.” For example:
   ○ (Yoo et al. 218)

A source without an author: Replace the author component with the short title of the work. For example:
   ○ (Memoirs of a Stage Manager 303)

A website or blog: If the digital source does not include page numbers, only include the author or the short title if no author is provided. For example:
   ○ (Smith et al.)
   ○ (Just Add Words)

Works with nonstandard number: Use the numbering noted in the source for your citations if it is non-standard (such as page B2 in a newspaper or Roman numerals for a preface). For example:
   ○ (Johnson B2-B4)

Works in verse: Rather page numbers, use the divisions noted with the work (e.g. act, scene, book, line, part, etc.). For example:
   ○ (Macbeth 1.5.17)
   ○ (Homer, bk. 17, lines 1-5)

A time-based source: In place of the page number, provide the time or time span for audio or video citations. Provide the hours:minutes:seconds as displayed on your player. For example:
   ○ (Dinner for Schmucks 00:05:30-06:47).

Works Cited

The Works Cited page is the collection of all the sources you referenced in your text.

The MLA Handbook focuses on elements of a citation that universally apply to sources. The elements are categorized as core or optional elements. If you encounter an element that is missing or does not apply to your source, simply do not include it in your citation.

Your Works Cited page should be formatted as follows:

○ The words Works Cited 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).
Double-space the entire list without extra spaces between entries.

- Capitalize each word in titles except for articles, prepositions, or conjunctions (the same as within the paper). However, the initial letter in the title's first word should always be capitalized regardless.
- Italicize the titles of full-length works and put shorter works in quotations, as shown earlier in formatting titles.
- Alphabetize the list of entries by the first author’s last name.

### Table 2

**Elements of Works Cited Entries (MLA)**

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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title of Source</td>
<td>Title of Container</td>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>Version</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Publication Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Supplemental Elements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 displays the order of each element in a works cited entry. Below is an explanation of every element and its rules. If your citation does not include one of these items, simply omit it from your entry.

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 organization, editor, or translator may be used if applicable.
- If the author is an organization, do not include initial articles (a, an, the). In addition, do not reverse the name.
- If an author has a different online handle than their actual name or account, include the handle in square brackets like this [example].

2) **Title of source:**
- Titles should be written out in full, including subtitles (separated by a colon).
- If the work does not have a title (e.g. a tweet), provide a short description of the source.
- 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. Titles follow the same rules as they do in-text.
- In general, use the same formatting for the title in your Works Cited that you would use in the body of your writing.
3) Title of container:
   - The container is what “holds” the source. In other words, it is the place where the source is located and where you found it, such as a website hosting videos, a book full of essays or short stories, or a journal with articles. It is also known as where you have accessed this information, like through a streaming service.
   - The title of a container is almost always italicized and followed by a comma.
   - Sometimes sources can have more than one container. If the container is part of another “larger” container – for example, if you were to cite an episode of a television series which you access on Netflix – you would include the larger container (Netflix) after the smaller container (the TV series).
   - Apps (like the Hulu or the Spotify) and databases can be containers, but not always. Check with your professor if they want you to include the database(s) you used to access an article (e.g. EBSCOhost or JSTOR).

4) Contributors:
   - Contributors who played a prominent role in composing or releasing the work, like an editor, translator, or uploader should be included in the citation.
   - Each contributor’s name is written out in full and preceded by a description of their role. Ex: “uploaded by”, “translation by, “edited by,” “directed by,” or similar terminology.

5) Version:
   - If available, list the version or edition of a work. This can be a number (e.g. second edition), a description (e-book edition, director’s cut, etc.), or a common name (e.g. Revised Standard Version).
   - When including the version, ordinal numbers should use numerals without superscript (e.g. 2nd ed.).
   - Use “rev.” as an abbreviation for “revised” and “ed.” as an abbreviation of “edition.”

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.
   - Roman numerals such as “Volume V” need to be rewritten using Arabic numerals (e.g. “vol. 5”).

7) Publisher:
   - The publisher is the organization responsible for making a work available to the public.
   - Books, films and television series, websites, and blogs should all have their publisher included in the citation.
   - Publishers may be omitted for periodicals, a work published by its author or editor, and websites who are not responsible for the content made by creators (for example, YouTube, Twitter).
   - If a source has co-publishers, include all of them using a forward slash (“/”) to separate each of them.
   - Initial articles and legal corporate status can be excluded from publisher names (e.g. Inc., Ltd., etc.).
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. The date may also include a season (e.g. Fall) or a range of dates.
- If a year is provided in roman numerals, convert it to Arabic numerals (e.g. “III” should be “3”).

9) Location:
- Cite page numbers if a work is part of a larger, published collection.
- DOIs are preferred for online sources. When citing a DOI, include “http://” or “https://”
- Cite full URLs for websites, try to find the most concise URL location of the website.
  - You can exclude “http://” or “https://” with your URLs
  - If a URL is 1) longer than the entry or 2) longer than three full lines, you can shorten it by removing the path. For example, the following would be shortened to:

```text
http://chart.apis.google.com/chart
```
  - Physical locations like a museum or venue should be cited if relevant to your work (such as if you were asked to visit one of these locations and analyze items).

10) Supplemental elements:
- These optional elements that may be mentioned in a citation include medium of sources, prior publication information, and date of access (date of retrieval).
- At times, you may need to include a supplemental element before the container. You might do this to note a key contributor, the original publication date of the source, or the section title.

You can skip any information that is missing from a particular source. As a result, this basic template becomes completely customizable based on the individual reference. You can also use specific elements to tailor your citation to a section of a work. If you only discuss one episode of a series, or even one aspect of the production, be specific with what elements would best cite this.

**Works Cited Examples**

Below are some example citations for common sources that you might use in your papers. Numbers are included next to each component of the citation for reference. Table 2 has been included below again for easy reference.

**NOTE: Do not include the element numbers in your actual Works Cited page; they are included below for easy reference only.**
Table 2

Elements of Works Cited Entries (MLA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Publication Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Supplemental Elements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An article in a scholarly journal:

A book:
Jemisin, N.K. (1) The Fifth Season. (2) Orbit (7), 2015 (8).

An article in a magazine or newspaper:

A journal article:

A journal article on a database:

A whole website:

A song:
A video:
Astrum. (1) “How Bad is the Radiation on Mars?” (2) YouTube (3), uploaded

A TV show:
Rodenberry, Gene, creator. (1) “The Best of Both Worlds (Part 2)” Star Trek: The Next
www.netflix.com/title/70158329 (9).

A blog:
Josifovic, Igor, and Judith de Graaff. (1) Urban Jungle Bloggers (3). 2013-2020 (8),
www.urbanjunglebloggers.com/ (9).

An individual blog post:
Josifovic, Igor and Judith de Graaff. (1) “Green Hotspots in New York City.” (2) Urban Jungle
Bloggers (3). 2013-2020, (8) www.urbanjunglebloggers.com/green-hotspots-in-
new-york-city/ (9).

A tweet:
@chartdata. (1) “@iamcardib and @theestallion’s #WAP hits #1 on the global Spotify chart for
the first time with a new daily high in streams (4.77 million).” (2) Twitter (3), 12 Aug
2020, 7:12 am, (8) twitter.com/chartdata/status/1293505572659224577 (9).

Need additional assistance?
Access a live tutoring session from your Brainfuse homepage to connect with a writing tutor who can help you with MLA format. Alternatively, visit style.mla.org for specific information. You may also consult the 9th edition of the MLA Handbook.