

# **MLA Basic Formatting and Citation Style Quick Guide (8<sup>th</sup> Edition)**

The following sources were referenced:  
*MLA Handbook*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., The Modern Language Association of America, 2016.  
Purdue Owl. *MLA Formatting and Style Guide*.

## **Basic MLA Formatting**

<b>Margins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimum of 1" margin on all sides.</li><li>• Left Alignment.</li></ul>
<b>Font and Font Size</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a legible font (i.e. Times New Roman).</li><li>• The font size should be 12 point.</li></ul>
<b>Spacing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You should double-space the text of your paper.</li><li>• Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks.</li></ul>
<b>Header</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You should create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner of your paper.</li><li>• Your header should be flush with the right-hand margin of your paper, as well as one-half inch from the top of the paper.</li><li>• Your header should also include your last name.</li></ul>
<b>Indentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You should indent the first line of paragraphs 0.5" from the left-hand margin.</li><li>• MLA recommends that you use the "Tab" key as opposed to pushing the "Space" bar five times.</li></ul>

You should prioritize the formatting recommendations of your instructor over the guidelines listed above.

## **Formatting the First Page of Your Paper**

You should not make a specific section of your paper dedicated to your title page unless your instructor specifically requests you to.

In the upper left-hand corner of your first page, you should list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. **Formatting Reminder:** Make sure that your text is double-spaced.

Double-space again and center the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks. You should write the title of your paper in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.

Double-space between the title and the first line of the text. **Formatting Reminder:** Make sure you indent the first line of your paragraph 0.5" from the left-hand margin.

## **Citing Sources in the Text of Your Paper**

When you refer to someone else's idea(s) through paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting, you should:

- Give the author's last name, as well as the page number of the work in a parenthetical citation.
- Provide full citation information for the source on your Works Cited page.

Paraphrasing and summarizing involve putting a source's information into your own words and sentence structures. Quoting, on the other hand, is copying the author's words and sentence structures exactly as they are written or spoken and placing them within quotation marks.

Citations have two parts:

- There is a parenthetical citation (also known as in-text citation).
- A corresponding entry in your Works Cited page.

## MLA In-text Citations

Your parenthetical citation should give enough information to identify the source listed on your Works Cited page. “The goals of the in-text citation are brevity and clarity, guiding the reader as unobtrusively as possible to the corresponding entry in the works-cited list” (MLA 116).

MLA style uses an author-page method of citation. When you quote, paraphrase, or reference an idea from a source, you must include the author’s name and the page numbers (if applicable) in your text.

*A “signal phrase” introduces a quotation in order to help the reader understand why it is important and how it fits into the rest of the paper. In the first example below, “Robertson maintains that ...” is the signal phrase.*

### IF THE AUTHOR IS NAMED IN SIGNAL PHRASE:

*If the author is named while introducing the quotation, or if the author can be easily assumed from surrounding material (as is often the case in literature papers), then only a page number is necessary in your citation:*

#### *Quotation:*

MLA has stated that an “element [of the core entries related to the works-cited list] should be omitted from the entry if it’s not relevant to the work being documented” (20).

#### *Paraphrase:*

According to MLA, if an essential part of information commonly used in most works-cited entries is irrelevant, then do not include it in the final works-cited entry (20).

*Note that the above source is paraphrased and not quoted. When paraphrasing specific information from a source, that source still must be cited in the paper and in the Works Cited list.*

### IF THE AUTHOR IS NOT NAMED IN SIGNAL PHRASE:

#### *Quotation:*

In most instances of many pieces of literature, “the author’s name is usually prominently displayed in a work, often near the title” (MLA 21)

#### *Paraphrase:*

The writer of a specific piece of literature can usually be found near the title of the specific work one is looking at (MLA 21).

### IF USING TWO OR MORE WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

In *Double Vision*, Northrop Frye claims that one’s death is not a unique experience, for “every moment we have lived through, we have also died out of into another order” (85).

*The above example includes the book title in the signal phrase, and therefore only a page number is necessary in the citation. In the example below, the title of the book is not used, and so a recognizable abbreviation of the title belongs within the citation. The abbreviated title is not punctuated.*

For Northrop Frye, one’s death is not a unique experience, for “every moment we have lived through, we have also died out of into another order (*Double Vision* 85).

### IF USING AN INTERNET/ELECTRONIC SOURCE WITH NO AUTHOR OR PAGE NUMBER:

#### *Author Unknown:*

Use the complete title in the signal phrase or an abbreviated title in the citation: (“Lawmakers” 2).

#### *Page Number Unknown:*

When the pages of a web source are fixed (as in PDF files) supply a page number. Although printouts from websites

sometimes number their pages, MLA recommends that you treat them as if they did not have pagination and allows the omission of the page number all together. If a web source numbers its paragraphs, give the abbreviation “par.” or “pars.” In the parentheses: (Smith, par. 4).

### INDIRECT QUOTATION:

While you should always try to reference material from the original source, at times, you may have to use a secondhand or indirect source, that is, a quotation you find in another source that was quoting from the original. Use “qtd. in” to indicate the source.

Sir Thomas Malory describes, “the barons espied in the sieges of the Round Table” (qtd. in Loomis 419).

### LONG OR BLOCK QUOTATIONS

Sometimes, you will want to use long quotations. If your quotation is longer than four typed lines, you will omit the quotation marks and start the quotation on a new line. This block quote should be indented one inch from the left margin throughout and should maintain double spacing throughout. With a block quote, your ending punctuation will come before the parenthetical citation.

**Prose block quote:** (For other types of block quotes, refer to an MLA style guide.)

Although two small studies have produced evidence to refute Dr. Jones’s claim, the most respected studies support his findings:

While not always popular with working parents who are too busy not to set their children in front of *Barney* all day, most pediatricians agree that children should abstain from watching television at least until age two, and even then, television time should be limited and closely monitored. Parents should remember that not all programs advertised as “children’s shows” are appropriate for all ages. (Wilson 29)

As parents, we owe it to our children to err on the side of caution.

## MLA Works Cited Page

*The basic format for all MLA works cited entries, no matter what the source, includes the following core elements (if relevant to your specific piece of literature). Not all Works Cited entries will contain every one of these elements!*

**Formatting Reminder:** Please pay close attention to the punctuation used at the end of each entry in the list below.

1. Author.
2. Title of source.
3. Title of container,
4. Other contributors,
5. Version,
6. Number,
7. Publisher,
8. Publication date,
9. Location.

*Indent all lines after the first one and include a period (.) at the end of all citations.* **Formatting Reminder:** Your Works Cited page must also be double-spaced.

**AUTHOR:***Single Author:*

The name of the author can usually be found near the title of a work. You should begin the entry with the author's last name, followed by a comma and the rest of the name (as presented in the work). End this section with a period.

*Two Authors:*

If your piece of literature has two authors, include them in the order that they were presented in the work. You should reverse the first name as described above, follow it with a comma and *and*, and give the second name in normal order. (e.g: Michael Dorris & Louise Erdrich → Dorris, Michael, and Louise Erdrich)

*Three (+) Authors:*

If your piece of literature has three or more authors, you should reverse the first name as described and follow it with a comma and *et al.*

**TITLE OF THE WORK:**

The next element of your works-cited entry should be the title of work. Your entry should include the title of the work in full, including subtitles (capitalization and punctuation are standardized between the title and subtitle) if applicable. Your title will be placed in quotation marks if the work is part of a larger work (like an article from a scholarly journal); italicized if the source is self-contained and independent (like a book).

More specific examples of when to use quotation marks and when to use italics can be found in the latest edition of the MLA handbook.

**TITLE OF CONTAINER:**

When the work you are citing is part of a larger whole/document (i.e. an anthology or magazine). You should cite title of the container next!

**OTHER CONTRIBUTORS:**

Aside from the author listed as the main contributor to the work you have cited, there may be additional people to credit; this is where they would go!

Possible entries can include the following: adapted by, directed by, edited by, illustrated by, introduction by, narrated by, performance by, translated by, etc.

You should choose the most relevant entry applicable to your work. Most collegiate papers you will be writing will potentially use "edited by;" this information – as well as most of the following entries – can be found on the frontispiece or colophon (the page in a book or journal with the publishing and copyright information) or at the very bottom of the web page.

**VERSION:**

If the container has an indication that there are different versions available, this is where you would put that information. This section is simply the edition of the respective text that you are utilizing.

**NUMBER:**

If the container you are citing is part of a numbered sequence (i.e. volume set), you would put that information following the version number in your works cited entry.

**PUBLISHER:**

The publishing information follows next. The publisher is simply the organization that is primarily responsible for publishing the container.

**PUBLICATION DATE:**

For print sources you should use either the most current copyright (i.e. ©) or the most meaningful date associated with the source that you find listed on the frontispiece or colophon of your respective container

For online sources you should cite the date on which the article/periodical/etc. was published. If no specific date was given, you should use the website's most current copyright date.

**LOCATION:**

Depending on the medium of publication, the location of your source should simply be where/when you got the information. For example, print documents should use page numbers while online documents should use the URL.

**MORE THAN ONE CONTAINER?**

While the above are all the core elements, many sources may have a second or even third container. For example, if you watched an episode of television series on Netflix, then the first container would be the title of the television series, and the second container would be Netflix. Another example would be a scholarly article found via a database. The first container would be the scholarly journal the article was originally published in, the second would be the name of the database, i.e. Academic OneFile.

**OTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENTS:**

- If a cited work does not have a known author, alphabetize by the title of the work and use a shortened version of the title in the parenthetical citation.
- Capitalize each word in the titles of articles, books, films, etc. This rule does not apply to articles, short prepositions, or conjunctions unless one of these is the first word of the title or subtitle (e.g., *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*).
- Italicize the titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, films, and album or CD titles.
- Place quotation marks around the titles of articles in journals, magazines, newspapers, and web pages, as well as short stories, book chapters, poems, songs, and television shows.
- For numbers with more than two digits, use only the last two digits of the second number (e.g., if you refer to a magazine article that appeared on pages 150 through 175, list the page numbers on your Works Cited page as 150-75; 201 through 209 would be listed as 201-09).

## Sample Works Cited

Grob, Allan. "Tennyson's 'The Lotos-Eaters': Two Versions of Art." *Modern Philology*, vol. 62, no. 2, The University of Chicago Press, Nov. 1964, pp. 118-29. *JSTOR*, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-8232%28196411%2962%3A2%3C118%3AT%22LTVO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-L>

McGuinness, Alexandra, director. *Lotus Eaters*. MsGuinnessLee & Fastnet Films, 2011.

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "The Lotos-Eaters." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, the Major Authors*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Shorter 9<sup>th</sup> ed., W.W. Norton & Company. 2013, pp. 2030-34.

