MLA Eighth Edition: What's New and Different

**Summary:**

MLA (Modern Language Association) style is most commonly used to write papers and cite sources within the liberal arts and humanities. This resource, updated to reflect the *MLA Handbook* (8th ed.), offers examples for the general format of MLA research papers, in-text citations, endnotes/footnotes, and the Works Cited page.

**Contributors:**Tony Russell, Allen Brizee, Elizabeth Angeli, Russell Keck, Joshua M. Paiz, Michelle Campbell, Rodrigo Rodríguez-Fuentes, Daniel P. Kenzie, Susan Wegener, Maryam Ghafoor, Purdue OWL Staff  
**Last Edited:** 2016-08-24 10:54:47

In April 2016, MLA replaced its seventh edition resources with a new eighth edition. This updated version reflects the ways in which digital publication has changed how writers and researchers document sources. Therefore, the new edition includes significant shifts in the approach to source documentation in academic writing. While earlier editions emphasized the importance of following specific guidelines for formatting, the eighth edition focuses on the practice and process of scholarly documentation. The logic here is basic: a style guide should offer a method that is widely applicable. Rather than insisting that writers follow strict citation formulas, this handbook outlines the principles of MLA documentation and explains how writers can use them in many different situations.

For this reason, the new edition focuses on the writer’s strategy and individual decisions. Not all scholarly prose is the same, and every writer should evaluate her/his readers and determine how to best engage them. The writer’s goal should be to provide a document and list of sources that is easy for readers to use, so that the reading experience is informative and enjoyable.

Like earlier editions, this handbook includes information on evaluating sources, avoiding plagiarism, using quotations, constructing abbreviations, and other topics important to the scholarly writer. But what is different about the eighth edition is that it recommends a universal set of guidelines that writers can apply to any source, in any field. In the past, writers would create an entry in a works cited list by looking at MLA’s instructions for how to cite a specific type of source. For example, if you needed to cite a film, you would consult the handbook to see the proper format for documenting film. In this new edition, MLA explains that this method is no longer practical, since types of sources are sometimes undefinable, or accessible in more than one way (for instance, a YouTube clip from a film is not the same as the original film itself). Therefore, the eighth edition offers a new model for entries in a works cited list, so that rather than consulting the handbook for the proper way to document a specific type of source, the writer creates entries by consulting MLA’s list of core elements and compiling them in the recommended order.

Core elements are those basic pieces of information that should be common to all sources, from books to articles, from lectures to tweets. The MLA core elements are as follows:

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

If you have included these elements and assembled them in a way that makes sense to your readers, then your works cited entries will be consistent and thorough.

Look for updates to OWLs resources and more detailed information about changes to MLA guidelines coming soon.

**Examples**

Since the eighth edition focuses on the principles of documenting sources, rather than on strict adherence to a particular format for each source, citations in this new edition vary only slightly from the old ways. When comparing works cited entries in the new eighth edition with the former seventh edition, see that differences in citation style are minimal; punctuation is streamlined, volume and issue numbers are identified as such, and there is no excess information such as city of publication or media type.

**Note the differences in citing a print book with one author:**

*Eighth edition (the new way)*:

Jacobs, Alan. *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*. Oxford UP, 2011.

In this version, only the most essential information is included (author’s name, book title, publisher, and date). Note that the city of publication is not needed, and the medium of publication is eliminated.

*Seventh edition (the old way)*:

Jacobs, Alan. *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.

This version includes the city of publication (Oxford) and the medium (print), which the new eighth edition does not require.

**The differences in citing an article from a scholarly journal:**

*Eighth edition*:

Kincaid, Jamaica. “In History.” *Callaloo*, vol. 24, no. 2, Spring 2001, pp. 620-26.

This version identifies the volume (24), the number (2), and the page numbers (620-26) of the scholarly journal, rather than leaving those numbers without clear explanation. This helps readers best make sense of your citation and allows them to locate your source without getting bogged down with extra information or references that can be difficult to decipher. Also note that punctuation is simple; only commas separate the journal title, volume, number, date, and page numbers.

*Seventh edition*:

Kinkaid, Jamaica. “In History.” *Callaloo* 24.2 (Spring 2001): 620-26. Web.

This version includes the volume and number (24.2), and page numbers (620-26) of the journal, but does not explain those references. The seventh edition emphasized following a strict punctuation formula, such as parentheses around the date and the colon, while the new eighth edition focuses on providing this information in a more streamlined manner by using only commas to separate each component.

**Takeaways**

If you are already familiar with traditional MLA citation methods, continue to use them in a more simplified form. Since the eighth edition emphasizes the writer’s freedom to create references based on the expectations of the audience, consider what your readers need to know if they want to find your source.

* Think of MLA style principles as flexible guides, rather than rules. Part of your responsibility as a writer is to evaluate your readers and decide what your particular audience needs to know about your sources.
* Your goal is to inform, persuade, and otherwise connect with your audience; error-free writing, along with trustworthy documentation, allows readers to focus on your ideas.
* In-text citations should look consistent throughout your paper. The principles behind in-text citations have changed very little from the seventh to the eighth editions.
* List of works cited/works consulted needs to include basic core information, such as author’s name, title of source, publication date, and other information, depending on the type of source. Each entry should be uniform and simple, but should give enough information so that your readers can locate your sources.
* These updated MLA guidelines are based on a simple theory: once you know the basic principles of style and citation, you can apply that knowledge widely, and generate useful documentation for any type of publication, in any field.

For a more detailed overview of how to cite sources using the eighth edition, see [How to Cite Document Sources in MLA Style: An Overview](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/).