

MLA Formatting Guidelines

The MLA (Modern Language Association) has specific formatting rules that primarily encompass three areas: page layout, parenthetical citations, and the works cited page. In April 2016, MLA published the eighth edition of its handbook. This edition sheds light on the new ways in which resources are documented and referenced in academic writing. In general, MLA is most often used in disciplines within liberal arts and humanities.

Page Layout

- Write your last name and page number in the header of *every page* (in the right-hand corner).
- Include your name, the instructor's name, the class title, and the due date of the assignment in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.
- Set the page margins to one-inch on each side (top, bottom, left, and right).
- Use 12-point, Times New Roman font and regular double-spacing throughout the essay.
- Include the title of your essay on the first page, in regular font and center aligned. Do not use bold or italicized print.

Colbert 1

Mark Colbert

Professor Sanchez

English 1B

12 May 2016

Essay Title

Indent one tab (0.5") to begin each paragraph. Continue with your body
paragraphs and double-space throughout the essay.

Parenthetical Citations

You must use a parenthetical citation when you refer to the words or ideas of others in your essay. You use these citations to give credit to the original author(s). These citations are necessary when you use a quote or offer specific paraphrased information.

Parenthetical citations for quotes of four lines or fewer include the author's last name and page number. Do not place a comma between the author's last name and page number. The period is placed after the citation.

Example

"Good writing, on the other hand, teaches the learning writer about style, graceful narration, plot development, the creation of believable characters, and truth-telling" (King 341).

Another citation option is to refer to the author's last name in-text as you introduce the quote. If you choose to provide the author's name in-text, you still must include the page number of the quote in the parenthetical citation.

Example

As King says, "Good writing, on the other hand, teaches the learning writer about style, graceful narration, plot development, the creation of believable characters, and truth-telling" (341).

Citations for quotes of more than four typed lines also include the author's last name and page number. However, there are three specific formatting rules for block quotes. Note that you **only** use these rules for quotes that exceed four typed lines.

- Indent the entire quote 1" (two tabs).
- Do not use quotation marks to enclose the quote.
- Place the period after the text of the quote and *before* the parenthetical citation.

Example

The author then addresses his desire to assimilate into the American culture:

We started school and watched Mr. Rogers on PBS in the afternoons, grew to love hamburgers and ketchup and longed to lose our accents. We older kids did lose our accents—and those who came later never had accents to begin with because they were born here. When we first came, I was the oldest of three children, all born in Vietnam. Now I have seven siblings, 22 years separating me from my youngest brother, who will start kindergarten in the fall. (Oanh Ha 69)

Parenthetical citations are also necessary when you paraphrase information from a source. To paraphrase is to convey the ideas of a writer or researcher in your own words. (NOTE: If you use three or more consecutive words from a source, you must use quotation marks because you are no longer paraphrasing.)

Example

As King explains, strong writing provides an interesting plot, sophisticated style, well-drawn characters, and examples of excellent narration (341).

If you come across a lengthy quote that you would like to use portions of in your essay, you must use ellipsis points [. . .] to indicate an omission within the quote.

Example

"In other words, to read a great book for the first time in one's maturity is an extraordinary pleasure . . . in maturity one appreciates many more details" (Calvino 736).

Works Cited Page

An alphabetized works cited page is required as the last page of your essay. Titles of books, films, journals, magazines, newspapers, and lengthier works are italicized; titles of essays, short stories, articles, poems, etc., are placed in quotation marks. The second line and beyond of each entry is indented one tab (0.5"). The below example shows how to cite different source types.

Essay in a Book/Anthology	→	Colbert 10 Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "On Monday of Last Week." <i>The Thing around Your Neck</i> , Alfred A. Knopf, 2009, pp. 74-94.
Magazine	→	Alton, George D. "Reading with a Purpose: Mindfulness and the Poetic Mind." <i>Psychology Today</i> , Feb. 2014, pp. 281-300.
Journal Article	→	Brown, Mark. "The Consequences of Printing." <i>Journal of Climate Change</i> , vol. 39, no. 3, Jan. 2009, pp. 42-9.
Website	→	James, Toby. <i>The Bill Blake Archive</i> . 1996-2014, www.blakearchive.org/blake .
Book	→	Johnson, Maggie. <i>The Joys of Talking in an Age of Amusement</i> . Oxford UP, 2015.
Television/Film	→	Kuzui, Fran Rubel, director. <i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> . Twentieth Century Fox, 1992.

Additional Works Cited Tips

Often times, online articles—scholarly materials, blogs, and social media webpages—include the author’s name while omitting the page number. In this case, only the author’s name, title of source, date accessed, and URL are included in the reference.

Example

Hollmichel, Stefanie. “The Reading Brain: Differences between Digital and Print.” *So Many Books*, 25 Apr. 2013, somanybooksblog.com/2013/04/25-reading-brain-differences-between-digital-and-print.

When citing a work that does not contain an author’s name or page number, begin the citation with the source’s title, followed by the page/journal title, date created, and finally, the URL.

Example

“Athlete’s Foot.” *WebMD*, 30 September 2004. <http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/tc/athletes-foot-topic-overview>.

Key Changes in the New Edition

As mentioned, the eighth edition presents several notable changes that make documenting references more efficient and concise. These changes may be seen largely in the works cited page of the document. Below are a few of the key differences between the eighth and seventh editions.

- The publication medium—print, web, film etc.—is now omitted from the reference.
- The city of publication is no longer indicated in the citation. However, if the book, article, film etc., is published in multiple locations, or in different languages or editions, including the location will help the reader understand the source.
- While the seventh edition includes the volume, number, and page number(s), it does not identify them specifically. The eighth edition includes the abbreviations for volume (vol.), page number (pp.), and number (no.) so to provide a clearer explanation.
- In previous editions, the inclusion of URLs was at the discretion of the instructor. However, the eighth edition highly recommends providing URLs given that many links are now easier to access.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the updated MLA handbook applies a more universal approach when documenting books, articles, digital media, and other source materials. While older editions highlight the importance of following specific guidelines for each source type, the eighth edition emphasizes the comprehensive documentation of scholarly articles. Therefore, this streamlined approach demonstrates a new way of constructing reference pages and eliminating unnecessary information, such as the city of publication, in order to create a more intuitive framework.