Documentation Conventions – The MLA System

To document means to provide information about the sources you used in your paper. A documentation system consists of two parts:

1) parenthetical references within the body of text, and

2) a list at the end of the paper that provides bibliographic information about works that were consulted and cited.

All papers using outside sources include both parts. However, the specific style of documentation can vary according to discipline, since disciplines have become specialized and therefore place emphasis on different types of knowledge. For example, in the Works Cited section, the MLA system places the date of publication as one of the later elements in the citation, since knowledge in the humanities does not become dated as quickly as it might in the natural or social sciences (a 1920 edition of a Shakespeare play, for example, might be just as valid as a 1965 edition). However, in the social sciences, which use the APA system, more recent findings might contradict older findings; therefore, in that system, the date is given toward the beginning of the citation.

Differences in documentation styles are also based on what is deemed convenient or efficient. Therefore, in its "References" list, the APA style does not use quotation marks around the title of an article, nor does it capitalize major words in the title.

Some variations, though, are due simply to the conventions of different academic disciplines, and if you are writing for a particular discipline, you must demonstrate that you are familiar with its documentation practices. The information below provides some basic information about acknowledging and documenting sources according to the MLA and APA formats. You should also keep in mind the following tips:

1) **Be scrupulous** about acknowledging secondary source material. Do not risk plagiarizing whether deliberately or inadvertently.

2) **Form is important.** Always check to see that you have the proper form for referring to outside material within the body of your text and for listing on the Works Cited or References page. Remember that proper form includes indentation and punctuation. If you are writing for a course within a specific discipline, look over journals for that discipline. Note the system of documentation within those journals. Understanding the form requires concentration, so leave sufficient time for documenting your sources correctly.

3) It is almost impossible to memorize every specific rule about documenting sources. **Keep a set of rules handy** when you polish your final draft. The rules in this guidebook will help you use the correct forms for most papers in lower division courses. For more complete information, consult the *MLA Handbook* or the *APA Publication Manual*. These can be purchased at the USC Pertusati Bookstore or checked out from the Leavey Library.

The MLA System - Parenthetical Reference and a Works Cited Page

According to the MLA system, information in your paper must be acknowledged by *parenthetical reference* within the body of the paper and through a *Works Cited* page at the end. The parenthetical reference provides your reader with enough information to locate the full reference in the Works Cited section, and the Works Cited page provides enough information for the reader to obtain exactly the source you used. Remember that any information or point of view which you obtained from an outside source must be acknowledged, whether it is a quotation, a summary or a paraphrase. It is better to be painstakingly meticulous about acknowledging your sources than to plagiarize unintentionally.
Parenthetical Documentation in the MLA System

In the MLA system, you should refer to outside sources within the body of your text by including enough information so that the reader will be able to locate a source in the Works Cited page at the end of the paper. Each reference to a source must provide the author's name (or a short title if the work is anonymous) and the exact page number. Here is an example:

Snodgrass points out that "young men these days are as concerned about their weight as young women" (237).

Note that you would not need to include Snodgrass's name in the parentheses because it already appears in the text; that is, the reader is already aware of the author's name and would be able to find the rest of the information about the source in the Works Cited section. Note also the placement of the quotation marks, the parentheses, and the period. These are conventions, which must be observed correctly.

In the example below, however, Snodgrass's name is not mentioned in the accompanying text; therefore, it would be necessary to include his name as well as the page number within parentheses:

In diagnosing the scope of this problem, what is often overlooked is that "young men these days are as concerned about their weight as young women" (Snodgrass 237).

Note that there is no comma between the name (Snodgrass) and the page number.

Now suppose that your Works Cited section included two works by Snodgrass. In this case, in order for the reader to locate the source within the Works Cited section, you would have to include the title as well as the author and page number within the parentheses. Here is an illustration:

In diagnosing the scope of this problem, what is often overlooked is that "young men these days are as concerned about their weight as young women" (Snodgrass, Men and Appearance 237).

The use of parenthetical documentation has made it much easier for writers to refer to outside materials. Not too long ago, students who were writing even relatively short papers had to use an elaborate system of footnotes when they included information from a secondary source.

Long Quotations

Use block quotations, indented one inch and double spaced, when a quotation runs more than four lines on your typewritten page. The parenthetical reference should appear two spaces after the punctuation at the end of the block. Here is an example:

The following charming description of a day in Prague refutes the common stereotype of the bleakness of Eastern Europe:

   The crowd of shoppers, strollers, and office workers was standing around together listening -- as best I could figure out -- to a comedian who must have been performing in an auditorium inside. I don't understand Czech but I guessed that it was a comedian -- and a very funny one -- because the staccato rhythm of his monologue, the starts, stops, and shifts of tone, seemed consciously designed to move the crowd into spasms of laughter that ripened into a rich roar. (Roth 106)
The MLA Works Cited Page: Books

There are three main components on a Works Cited page: the title, the author, and the publication information (city, publisher, publication date). Here is some basic information about the Works Cited page:

1) All items are arranged in alphabetical order by the last name of the author. If no author is listed, use the first significant word of the title.

2) Each citation should begin at the left margin and additional lines in each citation should be indented five spaces (or one-half inch).

3) **Double space** between each line and **double space** between each citation. The title "Works Cited" should be centered one inch down from the top of the page. Then double space between the title and the first citation.

James D. Lester (*Writing Research Papers: A Guide*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1990) suggests the following scheme for including information on a Works Cited page. Many works do not require all ten items of information. However, items 1, 3, and 8 are required.

1. **Author**
2. Chapter or part of a book
3. **Title of the book**
4. Editor, translator, or compiler
5. Edition
6. Number of volumes
7. Name of series
8. **Place, publisher, and date**
9. Volume number of book
10. Page numbers

Here are some examples you can use as models:

**A Book with One Author**


**Two or More Books by the Same Author**

If you are citing two or more books by the same author, do not repeat the author's name with each entry. Instead, insert a three-hyphen line flush with the left margin. Then type a period. Below is an example:


**A Book with Two Authors**


**A Book with Three Authors**


**A Book with Four or More Authors**

A Book with a Translator or Editor


A Chapter that is Part of an Anthology or Collection


An Introduction, Preface, Foreword, or Afterward


Note here the use of the word "by" to distinguish the author from the writer of the introduction.

**The MLA Works Cited Page: Periodicals**

When listing references to periodicals on the Works Cited page, you should include the following elements:

1. Author,
2. Title of the article,
3. Name of periodical,
4. Series, volume and issue number (if relevant/available),
5. Publication date,
6. Page number,
7. Medium of the publication you consulted (e.g., Print or Web).

Here is an example:


Use the following guidelines when entering such references:

1) Enter the **author's last name at the margin**, followed by a comma, then the author's first name, followed by a period.

2) The **title of the article** should be enclosed in quotation marks followed by a period placed inside the closing quotation marks.

3) The name of the periodical is then italicized with no following punctuation.

4) References to volume, dates, issue and page number depend on the type of periodical you are citing.

In general, magazines begin with page one in each issue, whereas journals tend to have continuous pagination for an entire year, and this distinction between separate and continuous pagination determines the sort of information you should include. A volume number, year, and page numbers are sufficient for journal entries, since they are paginated continuously. However, for magazines, omit the volume number and provide a month or even specific day in the case of weekly publications. Here are some examples:
Magazine (Monthly)

Magazine (Weekly)

Note that there is no mark of punctuation between the name of the magazine and the date. Also note that if the magazine does not indicate the name of the author, simply begin with the title of the article:


Journals
For journal entries, you should include the volume number, the year within parentheses, followed by a colon, and inclusive page numbers:


If the journal begins each issue with page number one, add an issue number following the volume number. Separate the volume number from the issue number with a period:


Note that arabic (not roman) numerals are used.

Newspapers
For newspaper entries, provide the author's name, the title of the article, the name of the newspaper as it appears on the front page (Daily News, not The Daily News) and the complete date (day, month, and year). Page numbers should be listed according to how they actually appear on the page. If the article does not continue on the next page, that is, if it is not printed consecutively, write only the first page number and add a + sign. Thus, if the article begins on page 15 and continues on page 36, you should write 15+.

Here is an example of a newspaper citation:


The MLA Works Cited Page: Other Types of Sources
Some sources are neither books nor periodicals. Here are some other possibilities:

Song Titles, Films, Television or Radio Programs, Lectures, Computer Software, etc.
When referring to titles of songs, films, television or radio programs, or lectures within the text of your paper, use quotation marks for the titles of songs, lectures, or individual episodes of a television program. Italicize the titles of films and television or radio programs. In a Works Cited entry for a song or recording that is commercially available, the person cited first (e.g., the composer or performer) will depend on the desired emphasis. Compare the two versions below:


Consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (now in its seventh edition) for instructions on the correct citation format for other sources such as computer software, material from a computer or information service, television and radio programs, lectures, films, television or radio programs, performances, etc.

**An Interview**

If the interview is published, treat it as a work in a collection:


Print.

If you are citing a personal interview, identify it by date:


**A Broadcast Interview**


Radio.

**Electronic databases**

The University subscribes to many online databases (such as Lexis-Nexis, Expanded Academic, JSTOR, and ProQuest) with electronic access to the contents of printed publications. Cite these sources the same way you would a printed source, but also include the name of the database and the date you retrieved (or downloaded) the material. Here are some examples:


In the examples above, the date at the end of the citation is the date when the online version was retrieved.

**The MLA Works Cited Page: The Internet**

Because content published on the World Wide Web varies so widely in nature, the MLA citation format for various Internet sources continues to evolve. When you cite an online source, MLA guidelines recommend including as much of the following identifying information as possible:

- Author’s name or authors’ names
Below are sample citations for different kinds of sources found on the World Wide Web:

**Article in an online academic or professional journal**


**Scholarly paper**


**Report**


**Article in an online encyclopedia, dictionary or other reference**


**Article in an online magazine**


**Article in an online newspaper**


**Professional site**

Sample "Works Cited" Page in MLA Style

Here is an example of a Works Cited page. The left, right, top, and bottom margins should all be 1 inch in the MLA format, with indented text ½ inch from the left margin. All text is double-spaced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Works Cited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Barker, James R.  "Living With a Pit Bull and Loving It."  
| James, Noah.  "The Comedian Everyone Loves to Hate."  
| Thomas, Jason.  "How Can We Reduce the Federal Deficit?"  