

The MLA System

In 2016, the Modern Language Association (MLA) published an 8th edition of its MLA Handbook. In keeping with its name, the MLA aims in this new edition to connect its documentation conventions with modern academic writers' needs. The 8th edition recognizes that, for 21st-century researchers, the scope of sources available in the digital age makes it impractical to maintain unique formats for each type of source included in the bibliographic information at the end of the paper. Therefore, the MLA Handbook has revised much of its documentation conventions in order to simplify and even standardize citations across different resources. In essence: instead of suggesting different rules for each source (traditional book, online book, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), the 8th edition provides a user-friendly format based on the traits shared by most works. This shift allows the writer a bit more autonomy when it comes to abiding by documentation conventions, but that also means the writer has an equally weighted responsibility to be consistent and aware of audience. With these broad concepts about the MLA revisions in mind, remember that the basics have not changed: reference your sources within the body of the paper and match those to a bibliographic list of sources at the end of the paper.

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:

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.

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

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

Here, you would not need to include Snodgrass's name in the parentheses because 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.

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 half an inch from the margin 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

The MLA Works cited page is the place, at the end of the paper, for the more thorough bibliographic information about the sources you referenced in the body of the paper.

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.

As noted above, MLA recently shifted away from suggesting specific and different formatting conventions for each type of source. Instead, the MLA 8th Edition offers a user-friendly format comprised of simple traits of “Core Elements”:

Author.

Title of Source.

Title of Container.

Other Contributors,

Version,

Number,

Publisher,

Publication Date,

Location.

Note the use of periods or commas after each Core Element. These should be part of the formatting used in your Works Cited.

Author

MLA formatting uses the term “author” loosely to denote the person or group responsible for producing the source or part of the source you have cited. Using the list above, pattern your formatting based on the Core Elements—giving attention to the periods and commas.

Title

Title should be cited in full exactly as they are identified in the source. Italicize sources that are self-contained (more on containers below) and place quotation marks around the title of a source that is part of a larger whole.

Container

The biggest change from previous MLA source documentation conventions is that MLA 8th Edition introduces **containers** as a new concept. When the source documentation is part of the larger whole, this larger whole—a periodical, website, or an edited collection for example—can be thought of as the **container**.

When the cited source is part of a larger whole, the larger whole should be considered the **container** that holds the source. For example, the container may be a collection of essays, a periodical made up of articles, a television series made up of episodes, or a Web site made up of articles, postings, or images.

A source can, however, have more than one container. It may be nested within another, larger container. A collection of poetry may be read on a digital platform such as Kindle. A journal article may be stored on a digital platform such as *JSTOR*. As more research moves online and into databases, documenting source's containers is an integral part of the research trail. A source in one container may differ from other copies, so you should represent your sources cited as accurately as possible.

Other Contributors

Other people may be credited as contributors to your sources. Editors, directors, translators, or narrators for example maybe featured in your citation. Precede each name with a description of the role:

Adapted by

Edited by

Illustrated by

Translated by

Version

If your source indicates that it is a version or edition of a work previously released in more than one form, identify the version/edition you used.

Number

Your source may be part of a numbered sequence. If you consult one volume out of a numbered set, denote the volume number with a prefix (Vol.). Journal issues typically contain volume and issue numbers that should be documented in your citation. For example, volume 34, issue 3 should be cited as vol. 34, no. 3.

Publisher

Identify the date your source was published. If there is more than one date, cite the date that is most meaningful or relevant to the way you've used the source. For example, a newspaper article published online may also cite the date the article appeared in print. If you only consulted the online version, note only that date and ignore the print date.

Location

The location of a source depends upon the type of source. In a print source, a page number (preceded by p.) or a page range (preceded by pp.) identifies your sources' location. The location of an online source is typically identified as its URL or Web address. There is no need to precede the Web address with `http://` or `www`.

URLs, however, are not stable; Web publishers can change their Web address anytime. If your source offers stable URLs, called permalinks, use them in your Works Cited. Also, some online publishers assign DOIs (digital object identifiers) to their publications. These identifiers remain stable—attached to a source even if the URL changes. When possible, citing the DOI is preferable to citing a URL.

Examples:

Article Found on ProQuest Cited with DOI

Langhamer, Claire. "Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth Century England." *Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2007, pp. 173–96. *ProQuest*, doi:10.1017/S0018246X06005966. Accessed 27 May 2009.

Online Article Cited with URL:

Lundman, Susan. "How to Make Vegetarian Chili," *eHow*,
www.ehow.com/how_10727_make-vegetarian-chili.html. Accessed 6 July 2015.

In general, here is the format citations should follow:

Author. Title. Title of container, Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication Date, Location.

Here are some examples of these Core Elements in practice, as well as explanations for how these models conform to the MLA 8th Edition.

Citing Books

Book with One Author

Snodgrass, Stanley. *Men and Appearance*. Vanity P, 1985.

Note that the capital "P" after "Vanity" is for "Press," which when part of a longer publication name such as "Vanity Press" or "Washington Square Press" does not need to be written out or hold its own punctuation.

A Book with Two Authors

When the source has two authors, write them in the same order the source presents them. Use the "Last, First" convention for the first author and the "First Last" convention for the second author.

Johnson, Zachary, and Sandra Stone. *Living With Lunatics*. Bayberry Scott, 1975.

A Book with Three or More Authors

When a source has more than two authors, cite the first author's name using the "Last, First" convention and complete the author section with *et al.* ("and others").

Fieldstone, Jerome, et al. *Conservatism on the Rise*. Hillman, 1987.

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:

Snodgrass, Stanley. *Men and Appearance*. Vanity P, 1985.

---. *Women and Appearance*. Vanity P, 1986.

A Book with a Translator or Editor

Lagercrantz, Olof. *From Hell to Paradise: The Comedy of Dante*. Translated by Alan Blair. Washington Square P, 1966.

A Chapter That Is Part of an Anthology or Collection

Updike, John. "A&P." *Fiction 100*, edited by James E. Pickering, 4th ed., Macmillan, 1982, 1086–1089.

An Introduction, Preface, Foreword, or Afterward

Flintstone, Fred. Introduction. *Life in Bedrock*, by Wilma Flintstone, Stone Age P, 1982. i–ix.

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

Citing Periodicals

When listing references to periodicals on the Works Cited page, you should include the same Core Elements noted above. Periodicals, because they are contained in larger works, will use the container Core Element.

Journals

For journal entries, include the title in italics, the volume number, the issue number when available, the year and inclusive page numbers:

Thomas, Jason. "How Can We Reduce the Federal Deficit?" *Journal of Economics*, vol. 12, 1992, pp. 22–24.

Magazine

Barker, James R. "Living with a Pit Bull and Loving It." *The Canine Courier*, Apr. 1989, pp. 26–29.

If the magazine comes out more frequently, add the day of the month:

von Hoffman, Nicholas. "The White House News Hole." *The New Republic*, 6 Sept. 1982, pp. 19–23.

Note that if the magazine does not indicate the name of the author, simply begin with the title of the article:

"Chaos in Television." *Time*, 12 Mar. 1979, pp. 60–61.

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:

James, Noah. "The Comedian Everyone Loves to Hate." *The New York Times*, 22 Jan. 1984, p. 23.

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.

Song on a Digital Music Platform

Beastie Boys. "No Sleep Till Brooklyn." *Licensed to Ill*. Def Jam/RAL, 15 Nov. 1986. *Spotify*, open.spotify.com/album/5izHWByImEjk1yTVPAYJWj.

Song via Online Album

Beyoncé. "Sandcastles." *Lemonade*, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, <http://www.beyonce.com/album/lemonade-visual-album/>.

Song CD

Armstrong, Louis. "What a Wonderful World." *All Time Greatest Hits*. MCA, 1994.

Note: 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:

Gershwin, George. "Foggy Day." With Wynton Marsalis, Trumpet. *Marsalis Standard Time Vol. 1*. Columbia, CK 40461, 1987.

Marsalis, Wynton, Trumpet. "Foggy Day." By George Gershwin. *Marsalis Standard Time Vol. 1*. Columbia, CK 40461, 1987.

A Published or Broadcast Interview

Shaw, Robert. *Interviews with Robert Shaw*. Interview by John Schaffer, Brentwood P, 1989.

Schwarzkopf, Norman. Interview. *Morning Edition*. National Public Radio. KCRW, 4 Jan. 1991.

Personal Interview

Smith, James. Personal Interview. 6 Nov. 1988.

The MLA Works Cited Page: The Internet

Because content published on the World Wide Web varies so widely in nature, the MLA 8th Edition citation format still suggests following the Core Elements, with special attention to the URL and (where possible) DOI information.

Below are sample citations for different kinds of sources found on the Web:

Article in an Online Academic or Professional Journal

Petitti, Diana B. "Some Surprises, Some Answers, and More Questions About Hormone Therapy." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 294:2, 13 July 2005, pp. 245–246, doi: doi:10.1001/jama.294.2.245. Accessed 22 Mar. 2017.

Scholarly Paper

Wallace, Heather E. "Woman's Education According to Rousseau and Wollstonecraft." *Feminism and Women's Studies*, 20 Jan. 2005.

Report

Hickson, Allister. "Analytical Review: Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Motorcycle Risk Study." University of Manitoba Transport Institute. June 2005. https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/management/ti/media/docs/Analytical_review_final_all_edits1.pdf. Accessed 7 July 2005.

Article in an Online Encyclopedia, Dictionary, or Other Reference

"Baaba Maal." *African Music Encyclopedia*. 1998, <http://africanmusic.org/artists/maal.html>. Accessed 7 March 2005.

Article in an Online Magazine

Epstein, Jay. "Romancing the Hedge Funds: Hollywood's New Golden Goose." *Slate*, 11 July 2005, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_hollywood_economist/2005/07/romancing_the_hedge_funds.html. Accessed 22 August 2005.

Article in an Online Newspaper

Guan, Xiaofeng. "Panda Leaves Wild for Wander in City Centre." *China Daily* 18 July 2005, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-07/18/content_461005.htm. Accessed 1 August 2005.

Professional Site

"Treating Type 2 Diabetes with Dietary Supplements. What the Science Says." National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Nov. 2013. <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/providers/digest/diabetes-science.htm>.

Sample MLA Works Cited Page

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.

The diagram shows a rectangular box representing a page. At the top center, the text "Works Cited" is centered. Below it, several lines of text are listed, each representing a citation. The first line is "Barker, James R. 'Living With a Pit Bull and Loving It.' *The Canine Courier* Apr. 1989, pp. 26–29." The second line is "Belanoff, Pat, and Peter Elbow. 'Using Portfolios to Increase Collaboration and Community in a Writing Program.' *WPA Journal of Writing Program Administration*, 9.3, 1986, pp. 27–40." The third line is "Bishop, Wendy. *Released into Language: Options for Teaching Creative Writing*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1990." The fourth line is "---. *Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change*. Southern Illinois UP, 1990." The fifth line is "'Chaos in Television.'" *Time*. 12 Mar. 1979, pp. 60–61." The sixth line is "Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Basic, 1983." The seventh line is "Itzkoff, Dave. 'Steve Martin Teaching You (and Himself) How to Be a Comedian.'" *The New York Times*. 18 Apr. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/arts/steve-martin-comedy-dave-chapelle.html>. Accessed 26 May 2017." The eighth line is "Kirschenbaum, Howard, Simon Sidney, and Rodney Napier. *Wad-Ja-Get? The Grading Game in American Education*. Hart Publishing, 1971." The ninth line is "Seaforth, Patricia. 'The role of television in presidential elections.'" *Journal of American Politics* 6.4, 1983, pp. 19–23." On the right side of the box, there are two arrows pointing inward: one at the top labeled "1" margins" and one in the middle labeled "double-spaced". On the left side, there is an arrow pointing to the first line of text labeled "½" indent".

Works Cited

Barker, James R. "Living With a Pit Bull and Loving It." *The Canine Courier* Apr. 1989, pp. 26–29.

Belanoff, Pat, and Peter Elbow. "Using Portfolios to Increase Collaboration and Community in a Writing Program." *WPA Journal of Writing Program Administration*, 9.3, 1986, pp. 27–40.

Bishop, Wendy. *Released into Language: Options for Teaching Creative Writing*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1990.

---. *Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change*. Southern Illinois UP, 1990.

"Chaos in Television." *Time*. 12 Mar. 1979, pp. 60–61.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Basic, 1983.

Itzkoff, Dave. "Steve Martin Teaching You (and Himself) How to Be a Comedian." *The New York Times*. 18 Apr. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/arts/steve-martin-comedy-dave-chapelle.html>. Accessed 26 May 2017.

Kirschenbaum, Howard, Simon Sidney, and Rodney Napier. *Wad-Ja-Get? The Grading Game in American Education*. Hart Publishing, 1971.

Seaforth, Patricia. "The role of television in presidential elections." *Journal of American Politics* 6.4, 1983, pp. 19–23.