Format of the Research Paper

- Margins should be one inch at the top and bottom and on both sides of the text.
- The first word of a paragraph is indented one-half inch (5 spaces) from the left margin.
- Double-space all text, including quotations, notes, and the works cited (MLA 116).
- There is no need for a title page. Your name, your instructor’s name, the course number and date (each on separate lines) belong one inch from the top of the first page, flush with the left margin and double-spaced.
- Double-space again and center the title. DO NOT UNDERLINE YOUR TITLE OR PUT IT IN QUOTATION MARKS OR BOLDFACE OR TYPE IT IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. Underline only the words you would usually underline in the text. No period after the title or after any heading in the paper (MLA 116-117).
- All pages (including the first) are numbered consecutively throughout the paper. The number is placed in the upper, right-hand corner. Type your last name before the page number. Do not use the abbreviation p. for page or add a period, a hyphen, or any other symbol (MLA 117-118).

See example below of the first page of a research paper:

Nelson 1

Barbara Nelson
Professor Little
Music 120
8 May 2004

Ellington’s Adventures in Music and Geography

In studying the influence of Latin American, African, and Asian music on modern
In-Text Citations (*MLA* 214-230)

Citing a source in the text enables the reader to identify the source of information through the alphabetically arranged *Works Cited* page at the end of your paper. Within the text of the paper, the last name of the author and the page number where the quote or paraphrased information can be found are inserted in the text at the appropriate point. This brief citation should match a full citation on the *Works Cited* page.

A quotation of more than four typed lines should be started on a new line. All lines of the quote should be indented. The type is double space. There are no quotation marks and a colon introduces the quote. If there is a paragraph break in the quote, indent the paragraph in your paper. The page number or pages referenced should follow the quote (*MLA* 94).

**Example of in-text citation:**

He stated, "The `placebo effect',... disappeared when behaviors were studied in this manner" (Smith 276), but he did not clarify which behaviors were studied.

**One Work by a Single Author (*MLA* 216-222)**

In a recent study of reaction times (Smith 198)... or, Smith, in a study of reaction times (198)...

**No Author (*MLA* 223-224)**

Include the first word of the title in quotation marks for an article or in italics for a book

In a recent study of reaction time ("Study" 198) -- *this is an article.*

In a recent study of reaction time (*Report* 198) -- *this is a book.*

**No page numbers (*MLA* 219-220)**

When a source has no page numbers or any other kind of reference numbers, no number can be given in the parenthetical reference. The work must be cited in its entirety.

In citing an entire source (print source, non-print source such as film, TV program, electronic publication) that has no pagination or other reference markers, it is preferable to include in the text the name of the person that begins the corresponding entry in the *works-cited* list.

**Book**: Fukuyama’s *Our Posthuman Future* includes many examples of this trend.

**Articles in Periodicals**: But Katie Thompson has offered another view.
Works Cited

This page should continue the page numbering of the text and there should be a double space from the title of the section to the first entry. The words “Works Cited” should be centered one inch down from the top of the page (MLA 130-131). Each entry should be flush with the left margin; double space and indent any entries that are more than two lines. Note the medium of the source (e.g. print, web, etc.) (MLA 128).

Book - Single Author (MLA 148-153)


Book – Two or More Authors (MLA154-156)


Edited Book (MLA 153-154)


Encyclopedia or Dictionary (MLA 160-161)


Book, no author or editor (MLA 162)


Journal Article - One Author (MLA 137)


Newspaper (MLA 141-142)


Television (MLA 193-195)

A Film or Video Recording (MLA 197-198)


Sound Recording (MLA 195-197)


Painting, sculpture, or photograph (MLA 200-201)


Legal Source (MLA 205-206)


Electronic Resources (MLA 181-193)

A citation for an electronic source should include the following information whenever possible.

- Author’s name
- Title of document
- Information about publication (website, journal, book)
- Information about electronic format (database, website)
- Access information (date and location)
- URL (if required by instructor, or if needed to find source)

Online book (MLA 187-189)


Journal or Magazine in an Online Database (MLA 192-193)

Web-only Work - Entire (MLA 182-185)


Document or Page on Website (MLA 184-187)


Online Encyclopedia (MLA 186)


Online Journal or Magazine (MLA 190-192)


Citing Indirect Sources (MLA 226)

In the Works Cited list, cite the secondary source only (the book or article you are reading). In the text, name the original work and give a citation for the secondary source, including the abbreviation qtd. for quoted.

(qtd. in Boswell 2: 450)

In your Works Cited, the full citation would be for Boswell, the secondary source, not for the original source.

Personal Communication (MLA 201-202, 204-205)

Give the name of the person interviewed, or the author of a letter or email. State the type of communication and give the date it was conducted or written.


Updated 2 Sep. 2009
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. Creating a Works Cited list using the eighth edition. MLA is a style of documentation that may be applied to many different types of writing. Since texts have become increasingly digital, and the same document may often be found in several different sources, following a set of rigid rules no longer suffices. Thus, the current system is based on a few guiding principles, rather than an extensive list of specific rules. Complete guide to MLA 8 (Modern Language Association, 8th edition) citation. Covers in-text and reference list citations and makes citing any source easy. This easy-to-use, comprehensive guide makes citing any source easy. Check out our other citation guides on APA and Harvard referencing. Back to top.

1. Core Components. Notes: If adding something that isn’t in the original source, add it within square brackets. If the date is approximate, add “circa.” before it. If you are unsure about the components in the source, follow it with a “?”.