The MLA Style of Documentation

What It Is and How To Use It
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The Modern Language Association (MLA) style is widely used for identifying research sources. In MLA style, you briefly credit sources with parenthetical citations in the text of your paper and give the complete description of each source in your works cited list.
What Is the Purpose?

The purpose is to

1. Give proper credit to the original writer or speaker

2. Help an interested reader of your work to look up your sources for additional information and study
Since you will need to properly cite any direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary within your paper, document (on a note card or in your paper) the exact information as to where you found a fact, statistic, opinion, idea, quotation, chart, graph, etc.

Then, you will prepare a final bibliography or works cited page at the end of your paper.
What Is a Works Cited List?

The works cited list, or bibliography, is a list of all the sources used in your paper, arranged alphabetically by author's last name, or when there is no author, by the first word of the title (except A, An or The).
Use quotation marks for these sources:

Titles of

- Essays in anthologies
- Periodical articles
- Poems
- Short stories

Use italics for these sources:

Titles of

- Books
- Databases
- Periodicals
- Plays
- Websites
Citing Sources within the Text of Your Paper

Printed Sources: Nonfiction Books
If You Do Not Name the Author in the Sentence

When citing a book in the text of your paper, place in parentheses the author’s last name and page number where the information was found.

• Example: Rupert Brooke was not merely “a young Apollo, golden-haired” (Read 53).

• Note: You do not place a comma between the author’s name and the page number. If your quote ends a sentence, the period for the end of the sentence comes after the parentheses, not inside the quotation marks.
If you do name the author in the sentence where the quotation occurs, include only the page number where the information was found in the parentheses.

• Example: Read has stated that Rupert Brooke was not merely “a young Apollo, golden-haired” (53).
What If the Author Is Unknown?

If you do not know the name of the author, use the complete title in your sentence or a word or two from the title in the parentheses.

• Example: Since the dawn of civilization, conflict and war “have been a basic condition of the human personality” (*Silence Following Great Words of Peace* 3).
What If There Are Two or Three Authors?

Include each author’s last name in either your text or the citation.

- Example: Bruccoli and Duggan express another view in Fitzgerald’s correspondence (79).
- Or: There is yet another viewpoint expressed in Fitzgerald’s correspondence (Bruccoli and Duggan 79).
What If There Are More Than Three Authors?

You can give the names of all authors or use only the last name of the first author listed and then follow the name by the Latin phrase *et al.* This is a Latin phrase meaning “and others.”

- Example: The image of death in the world for the sake of inner peace is one often found in World War I sonnets in 1914 (Clark et al. 39).
Multiple Texts by the Same Author

If you are citing two or more texts by the same author, use an abbreviated form of the title to indicate which one you are citing in your text.

- Example: Keegan believes that “Napoleon could not hope to match these numbers” (*Face of Battle* 121).

- Example: Keegan believes that by 1870 “a new era in military planning had begun” (*First World War* 24).
Citing Sources within the Text of Your Paper

Printed Sources: Literature
Citing a Novel or Short Story

Give the page number first and then any section or chapter if applicable.

• Remember: The titles of novels are italicized; the titles of short stories are placed in quotation marks

• Example: In *Three Soldiers*, John Dos Passos describes society as “organizations growing and stifling individuals” (397).
Citing a Play

For a play, list the act, scene, and line numbers, all separated by periods.

- Example: As he dies, Hamlet implores Horatio, “If thou didst ever love me in thy heart, absent thee from felicity awhile” (*Hamlet* V.2.308).
Citing Poetry

In quoting poetry, add a slash mark to indicate where each new line begins.

- Example: In “Dead IV,” Brooke ponders the death of one of his friends: “That men call age; and those who would have been, / Their sons they gave, their immortality” (lines 12-13).
Citing a Work in an Anthology

You should cite the author of the selection—not the editor of the collection.
Citing Sources within the Text of Your Paper

Printed Sources: Periodicals, Journals, Reference Books, and the Bible
Articles in Reference Books

For a one-page article, cite only the author’s name and no page number.

If the article is more than one page, cite the author’s name and page number.

If there is no author, identify the article by a brief title either in your text or in parentheses following the quote.
Journal and Magazine Articles

Journal articles follow the same format as for a book: cite author’s name and page number.

Magazine articles follow the same format as for articles in reference books, i.e., if the article is one page, cite the author’s name and do not include a page number; if the article is more than one page, include the author’s name and page number.
The Bible

You should note the version (edition), book, chapter, and verse number when citing for a quotation.

- Example: “The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself” (*King James Version*, Ecclesiastes 10:12).
Citing Sources within the Text of Your Paper

Electronic Sources
Electronic Sources

For a website, indicate the author (or brief title if no author is known).

For an online article, cite the article in parentheses or in the text of your paper.
Handling Long Quotations in Your Text

If the quotation is more than four typed lines, indent the entire quotations one inch or ten spaces. The quotation should be double spaced, but do not enclose the quotation in quotation marks.

• See the example on the following slide.
Brooke, in his own words, remained unrepentant about the unpleasant poems. I don’t claim great merit for “The Channel Passage,” but the point of it was (or would have been) “serious.” There are common and sordid things—situations or details—that may suddenly bring all tragedy to you. (Keynes 328)
Using Quotation Marks

Enclose quoted material in quotation marks if what you are quoting is no more than four typed lines. If you have a quotation within a quotation, use single quotation marks to set off the quoted material within.
More about Double and Single Quotation Marks

Do not use quotation marks if what you are quoting is more than four typed lines. If you have a quotation within the larger quotation, use double quotation marks to set off the quoted material within.
The Works Cited Page

Books
Now that we have discussed how to cite various types of material within the text of a paper, we need to construct the works cited page, which will be placed at the end of your paper.
The list should be double spaced and alphabetized by author’s last name or, when there is no author, by the title.

If an entry exceeds one line, indent the following lines one-half inch or five spaces.

You should include only sources that appear in your paper.
The information may be thought of as divided into three sections—author, title, publishing information—with each section separated by a period.

- The Pattern: Author’s last name, first name. Title in full as it appears on the title page. City of publication: name of publisher, year of publication. Medium of publication (print).
Some Examples

Book with one author:


Book with two or three authors:

Multiple Works by the Same Author

Give the author’s name for the first entry; replace the author’s name in subsequent entries with three dashes and a period. Texts should be arranged in alphabetical order.

• See the following slide for an example of the inclusion of three books all by Ernest Hemingway in a works cited page.

---. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. New York: Scribner’s, 1940. Print.

When the Author Is a Corporation

Name the organization or corporation as the author, but be sure to omit any initial article.

- Example: If the article is authored by The Rand Corporation, you would cite the author as Rand Corporation.
An Edited Book

If your paper focuses on a particular work or its author, cite the author’s name first, not the editor’s.

• Example:
An Edited Book

If, however, the paper focuses on the editor or the particular edition used, cite the editor first.

• Example:
You do not need to cite the editor, publishers, or place of publication for well-known references such as *Webster’s Dictionary* or *World Book Encyclopedia*. Cite the entry, but do not include volume and page numbers.
Cite the author’s name, then the title of the article followed by the name of the journal or periodical. Provide the volume number, issue number, year of publication, and the page numbers.

Example:
Internet and Electronic Sources

Include the following in your citation:

• Name of the author (if known)
• Title of the document and site
• Name of the editor (if any)
• Publication information, including the date or latest update
• Name of the sponsoring organization (if any)
• Date on which you last accessed the source
• Medium of publication (Web)
• Source’s URL (if your instructor requires it or if the reader would be unable to locate the source without it)
“Who’s Who—and Why.” *Saturday Evening Post*  
Works Cited


The information presented in this document is based on the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.