MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (MLA) FORMATTING AND DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM

The guidelines that follow provide detailed instructions for using the MLA formatting and documentation system.

❖ PART 1 contains information on formatting the line spacing and margins, page numbers, and heading and title.

❖ PART 2 contains explanation and examples of parenthetical citations.

❖ PART 3 provides explanation and examples of formats for entries in the Works Cited list. A sample Works Cited list is provided at the end of this section.

PART 1: TITLE PAGE, HEADER, LINE SPACING, AND PAGE NUMBERS

Line Spacing and Margins
Double-space the entire assignment, including the title, quotations, and Works Cited list. Leave a 2.5-cm (1") margin all around the page. Indent paragraphs 1.25 cm (½") from the left margin. Indent all lines of a long quotation (more than four typed lines) 2.5 cm (1") from the left margin.

Page Numbers
Beginning with page 1, number all pages of your paper, including the Works Cited list. The numbers go in the upper right corner of the page, 1.25 cm (½") from the top edge and 2.5 cm (1") from the right-hand edge. Use the “Align right” function of your word processor and key in your last name + one space and then the page number. Do not insert “page” or “p.” before the page number, and do not put a period after the page number.

Heading and Title
MLA-style essays do not require a separate title page. (If, however, your instructor wants you to provide a separate title page, go to the APA page on this Web site to see how to format it.) A paper formatted in MLA style includes your name and course identification on page 1. Beginning at the left margin, 2.5 cm (1") from the top of the page, type on separate lines your name, your instructor’s name, your course name and number, and the date, all double-spaced. Double-space again, and centre your title. Double-space once more, indent 1.25 cm, and begin the first line of your paper. Following is an example of the first page of an MLA-style essay.
Uncertain Future: The Potential Dangers of Genetically Modified Crops

Most of us eat genetically modified (GM) foods every day. About 60 percent of the items found in Canadian grocery stores contain genetically modified organisms (GMO). Examples include corn, canola, potatoes, tomatoes, and soybeans, as well as products made from them. Despite their widespread use, however, few of us stop to consider the potential dangers that may be associated with these foods. Unlike traditional crops, GM plants are created in a laboratory by inserting strands of DNA from the cells of one species into those of another. This method allows scientists to produce desirable traits in these plants, such as resistance to pests, increased yield, and the ability to survive drought (Humphrys 195-97).
PART 2: PARENTHETICAL REFERENCES IN MLA STYLE

Every time you include in your paper a quotation, paraphrase, summary, fact, or idea you have borrowed from another writer, you must identify the source in parentheses immediately following the borrowed material. The parenthetical reference tells your reader that what he or she has just read comes from somewhere else, and it points your reader to the complete information about the source in your Works Cited list. Parenthetical references should be as short and simple as possible while accomplishing these two purposes.

A standard MLA reference provides the surname (last name) of the author of the source material and the page number. With the author’s name and page number, your reader can find complete bibliographic information about the source in your Works Cited list at the end of your paper. Electronic sources present a challenge to this author-based citation method because they often lack an identifiable author, and they rarely include page numbers. More on this later.

You need to include a piece of source information only once; don’t repeat information unnecessarily. For example, if you’ve already mentioned the author’s name in your paragraph, you need to give only the page reference in the parentheses.

EXAMPLES OF PARENTHETICAL REFERENCES: TRADITIONAL PRINT SOURCES

1. If you name the source author in your paragraph, give just the page number in parentheses.

   Isajiw asserts that the 20th century “has produced more refugees and exiles than any other period since the fall of the Roman Empire” (66).

   For the Works Cited entry for this source, see item 5 in the sample Works Cited list.

2. If you do not name the source’s author in your paragraph, give the author’s surname and the page number.

   The effect of “status drop” on the psychological well-being of immigrants can be substantial: “Especially among those more
highly educated, this experience can cause feelings of bitterness or hostility. . ." (Isajiw 97).

3. If no author is named in a source, give the first few words of the Works Cited entry.

Legislation to reduce the amount of pollution generated by large-scale vehicles has been on the federal agenda for some time: “Canada has said it will toughen pollution-emission rules for all new vehicles, ending a loophole that allowed less stringent standards for popular sport-utility vehicles and minivans” (“Canada to Toughen” A6).

For the Works Cited entry for this source, see item 3 in the sample Works Cited list.

4. If your source was published in more than one volume, give the volume number before the page reference.

Only once in their two-volume work do Erickson and Waverman suggest conspiracy (2: 184).

See item 9 in the Works Cited list for the details of this source.

5. If you are quoting from a literary classic or the Bible, use Arabic numerals separated by periods to identify act, scene, and lines from a play or a biblical chapter and verse.

In Shakespeare's play, the duke's threat to give "measure still for measure" (MM 5.1.414) echoes the familiar passage in the Bible (Matt. 7.1-2).
EXAMPLES OF MLA PARENTHETICAL REFERENCES: ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Parenthetical references for print sources in MLA style usually include the author’s surname and the page number of the source. This principle cannot always be applied to electronic sources since many of them lack one or both of these elements. Give enough information to guide your reader to the source listed in your Works Cited list.

1. If the electronic source lists an author, give the surname in your parenthetical reference.

Planespotting is a popular hobby, even an obsession, for growing numbers of people who are fascinated with aviation:

“Some spotters take photographs. Others make videotapes. But the majority flock to airports around the world, equipped with scanners and notepads, with one goal in mind—recording the registration numbers painted on airplane tails” (Bourette).

This quotation comes from Shift.com, an online magazine.

2. If the electronic source does not list an author, give the document title, or a shortened version of the title, in italics or quotation marks as appropriate, instead of the author’s name.

One student developed a Web site to help others navigate their way through the works of William Shakespeare:

There are some people who don’t even attempt to learn Shakespeare because they think that Shakespeare is . . . only for English scholars. But that’s not true! Shakespeare can be FUN. That’s right—Shakespeare can actually be something you want to learn about. ("William Shakespeare").

This quotation comes from an unnumbered page on an anonymous Web site called Shakespeare: Chill with Will. The Works Cited entry for this source is item 8 in the sample Works Cited list.
3. You do not usually find page numbers or other navigation devices in an electronic source. If there are page, paragraph, or section numbers that could guide your reader to the specific material being quoted, include them. If the author’s name is included in the parenthetical reference, put a comma after it and include the section or paragraph numbers. Use the abbreviations sec. and par.

Margaret Atwood does not enjoy the editing process that she, like all authors, must endure before her books are published:

Being edited is like falling face down into a threshing machine. Every page gets fought over, back and forth, like WW1. Unless the editor and the writer both have in mind the greater glory of the work, ... blood will flow and the work will suffer. Every comma, every page break, may be a ground for slaughter. (sec. 6)

This quotation comes from an article on Atwood’s Web site.

If there are no page, paragraph, or section numbers to identify the quotation, simply give the author’s name or the title in parentheses. If your reader wants to locate the information, Web search engines can often find it through a key word search.

PART 3: THE WORKS CITED LIST

The Works Cited list appears at the end of your paper. It includes detailed bibliographical information for all the sources you have summarized, paraphrased, or quoted in your paper. The information listed in Works Cited enables your reader to assess the extent of your research and to find and check every source you used.

Begin the list on a new page and number each page, continuing the page numbers of your paper. (Remember that the page numbers appear in the upper right-hand corner, 1.25 cm from the top and lined up with the right margin.) Centre the heading, Works Cited, an inch from the top of the page. Do not underline, italicize, or add punctuation to
the heading. Double-space the entire list, including the title and the first entry.

Begin each entry at the left margin. If an entry runs more than one line (and most do), indent the subsequent line or lines five spaces or 1.25 cm. This format is called a “hanging indent” and can be found in most word-processing packages. (Hanging indents make it easy for the reader to find whatever source he or she is looking for in the alphabetical listing.)

Arrange the entries alphabetically, beginning with the first word of the entry, which is often the author’s surname. If no author is identified in your source, alphabetize by the first word in the title, ignoring A, An, and The. For example, The Canadian Oxford Dictionary would be listed under C, for Canadian. Separate the main parts of each entry with periods. Do not number your entries.

Below you will find instruction and examples for four different kinds of Works Cited entries: books, periodical articles, audiovisual sources, and electronic sources.

❖ BOOKS, ENCYCLOPEDIAS, AND GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS
Here is the basic model for a book entry in a Works Cited list.

Last name of author, First name. Title of Book. City of publication: Publisher, date of publication.

Note the spacing, capitalization, and punctuation as well as the order of the information. If several cities are listed for the publisher, use the first one. Shorten the publisher’s name. For example, McGraw-Hill, Inc. is abbreviated to McGraw-Hill. If the publisher is a well-known university press, use the abbreviation UP: e.g., Oxford UP. The year the book was published is usually found on the copyright page at the front of the book; if it is not given, use the latest copyright date.

Book by one author


Book by more than one author


**Book edited by someone other than author**


**Book with more than three authors or editors**


**Book with a subtitle**


**New edition of an older book**


**Paperback edition of a previously published book**


**Recent edition of a classic text**


**Work in several volumes**

Erickson, Edward W., and Leonard Waverman, eds. *The Energy...*
Question: An International Failure of Policy. 2 vols.

**Article, essay, story, or poem in a collection**


**Encyclopedia reference**


**Book published by a corporation (company, commission, or agency)**


**Government publication**

If the author is not named, identify the government first, then the agency, then the title, city of publication, publisher, and date.


➤ **ARTICLES IN JOURNALS, MAGAZINES, AND NEWSPAPERS**

As with a book, information for an article begins with the author’s name (if available),
includes the title of the article, and ends with the details of publication, including the date and the complete page numbers of the article. For a periodical that is published weekly or every two weeks, provide the day, month, and year, in that order. Abbreviate all months except for May, June, and July (Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.). If the periodical is published monthly, provide the month and year. Works Cited entries for newspapers include the name as it appears on the masthead (top of the front page of the paper) but omit The (e.g., Globe and Mail). If the name of the city is not included in a locally published paper, add the city in square brackets—not underlined—after the name so that readers will know where it was published; for instance: Comox Valley Record [Campbell River].

Give the complete page span for each article in your Works Cited list. For example, if an article begins on page 148 and concludes on page 164, put a colon and the page numbers after the date: 5 June 2002: 148–64. If the article begins on page 36, then skips to page 40, and concludes on page 41, give only the first page number and a plus sign: 36+. In a newspaper, each of the sections is usually identified by a letter, so include the letter as well as the page number: National Post 16 Aug. 2002: S1+.

Note the order, punctuation, and capitalization of the information in the model below.

Author’s last name, First name. “Title of Article.” Title of Periodical. Volume no. [if any] Issue no. [if any] Date: pages.

Article in a scholarly journal

Lemire, Judith A. “Preparing Nurse Leaders: A Leadership Model.”


Some scholarly journals publish a number of issues each year; together, these issues make up an annual volume. Give the volume number (in this example, 6) after the periodical title, add a period, and then give the issue number (here, 3) immediately before the date.

Article in a monthly magazine


Article in a newspaper, signed

Vallis, Mary. “Non-traditional Roles Linked to Early Death.”


Newspaper article, unsigned


A review


➤ **AUDIOVISUAL SOURCES**

Television show


Radio show


Recording


Film, videocassette, laser disc, or DVD


If you wish to give credit to the contribution of a particular individual, begin with that person’s name.

➢ Electronic Sources

Documentation guidelines for electronic publications are still being developed, so check with your Resource Centre to see if handouts have been developed to help you cite these sources. Works Cited entries should identify the source and provide enough information to enable a reader to locate it—author, title, publication information, and date. Providing all this information is not always possible for materials found on the Web. Include as much information as you can, and remember that the key element in citing an electronic source is its electronic address or URL (uniform resource locator), which is enclosed in angle brackets (< >). Give the protocol first (e.g., http (hypertext transfer protocol), ftp (file transfer protocol), telnet, gopher, and so on), then the URL.

Do not use a hyphen to divide an URL over two lines. If you do, you will make it invalid. Record the URL on a single line, or break it after a slash (/) or before a period. Because the symbols, letters, and numbers that make up an URL are complex and must be recorded accurately, some recent style guides omit the angle brackets. Be sure to use whichever format your instructor prefers.

Another essential piece of information in Works Cited entries for e-sources is the date. Provide both the date of publication (if available) and the date that you, as the researcher, accessed the information. The access date is important because online documents can be altered at any time. Put your access date before the URL, which appears at the end of the entry. (For the month, use the abbreviations provided in the guidelines for periodicals above; e.g., Mar. for March.)

It’s a good idea to download and print any online sources you use so that you can verify them if, at a later date, the sites are revised, unavailable, or inaccessible.

Follow this basic model for online source entries in a Works Cited list:

Author’s Last Name, First Name [if known]. “Title of Document or File.” Title of Complete Work or Site. Date of document or last revision. Protocol. Date of access <URL>.

Article from an Online Database

Article in an Online Periodical


Government Publication


Online Encyclopedia


Online News Service


Personal or Professional Web Site


Personal e-mail communication

Follow this format:

Author’s surname, First name [or alias]. “Title of Message” [from
subject line]. E-mail to First Name and Last Name of recipient. Date.

Never give the writer’s e-mail address!

Zacharatos, Phil. "The Forest or the Trees?" E-mail to Caroline Bouffard. 1 Apr. 2002.

Online Posting, Listserv, or Discussion Group


CD-ROMs

Follow this basic model, including as many elements as are given in the source:

Author’s Surname, First Name. “Title of Article, or song, or poem,” [if relevant] Title of the Publication. CD-ROM. Edition, release, or version [if relevant]. Place of publication: Name of publisher, date.

Examples:


Following is a sample Works Cited list to show you what the final page of your paper should look like. Note that the entries are arranged alphabetically according to the first word of the entry. Entries in a Works Cited list are not numbered. (The numbers listed to the left of the sample page have been included to help you find the format for the
The following sources are included in this list of references:

1. Web site (author named)
2. Article in an online periodical
3. Article (unsigned) in a daily newspaper
4. Essay in an anthology
5. Book with one author
6. Article in online encyclopedia
7. Online government document
8. Web site with no author named
9. Source published in more than one volume, with two editors.
Works Cited


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