MLA Formatting and Style Guide

Summary:

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 for Writers of Research Papers* (7th ed.) and the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (3rd ed.), offers examples for the general format of MLA research papers, in-text citations, endnotes/footnotes, and the Works Cited page.

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**Last Edited:** 2012-05-09 07:17:57

Please use the example at the bottom of this page to cite the Purdue OWL in MLA.

To see a side-by-side comparison of the three most widely used citation styles, including a chart of all MLA citation guidelines, see the [Citation Style Chart](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/).

You can also watch our [MLA vidcast series](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYjZzP8Fgk8WVnTsDmkFh1z9bXoPn0eI9) on the Purdue OWL YouTube Channel.

**General Format**

MLA style specifies guidelines for formatting manuscripts and using the English language in writing. MLA style also provides writers with a system for referencing their sources through parenthetical citation in their essays and Works Cited pages.

Writers who properly use MLA also build their credibility by demonstrating accountability to their source material. Most importantly, the use of MLA style can protect writers from accusations of plagiarism, which is the purposeful or accidental uncredited use of source material by other writers.

If you are asked to use MLA format, be sure to consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition). Publishing scholars and graduate students should also consult the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (3rd edition). The *MLA Handbook* is available in most writing centers and reference libraries; it is also widely available in bookstores, libraries, and at the MLA web site. See the Additional Resources section of this handout for a list of helpful books and sites about using MLA style.

**Paper Format**

The preparation of papers and manuscripts in MLA style is covered in chapter four of the MLA Handbook, and chapter four of the *MLA Style Manual*. Below are some basic guidelines for formatting a paper in **MLA style**.

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1 [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
General Guidelines

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper.
- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font (e.g. Times New Roman). Whatever font you choose, MLA recommends that the regular and italics type styles contrast enough that they are recognizable one from another. The font size should be 12 pt.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks (unless otherwise instructed by your instructor).
- Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides.
- Indent the first line of paragraphs one half-inch from the left margin. MLA recommends that you use the Tab key as opposed to pushing the Space Bar five times.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor may ask that you omit the number on your first page. Always follow your instructor's guidelines.)
- Use italics throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.
- If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Works Cited page. Entitle the section Notes (centered, unformatted).

Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

- Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.
- Double space again and center the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.
- Use quotation marks and/or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text: Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas as Morality Play; Human Weariness in "After Apple Picking"
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.
- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number; number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor or other readers may ask that you omit last name/page number header on your first page. Always follow instructor guidelines.)
Headings, Page Numbers, and Titles

- Research papers in MLA do not include a title page, unless otherwise specified by your instructor. One inch from the top, include the following information:
  1. Your name
  2. Your instructor’s name
  3. The course you are writing for
  4. The date
  5. Double space once and then include your title

NOTE: Use only regular, 12 point font in titles and center them. Do not use bold-faced type or other special settings.

- Header should be set to 0.5" from the top. The header is where you will place your page numbers. Do not put your page numbers inside the 1" margin.

### In Microsoft Word

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Header and Footer</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Go to the View menu > Header and Footer  
  - Type your last name and make sure it is set to “align right.” | Go to the Insert menu > Page Numbers  
  - The numbering should be set to "Top of page" and "Alignment right." |

### In Word Perfect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Header and Footer</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Go to Insert > Header and Footer > Click Create  
  - Select "right alignment".  
  - Type your last name. Close header box. | Go to Format > Page > Numbering > Click the position box  
  - Click on Top Right  
  - Click on the “1” in the Page numbering format. |
General guidelines for works cited in MLA style

In an MLA works cited entry, the first author's name is inverted (the last name comes first, followed by a comma and the first name), and all other names are in normal order. In titles of works, all words are capitalized except articles (a, an, the), prepositions (to, from, between, and so on), coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet), and the to in infinitives — unless they are the first or last word of the title or subtitle. Titles of periodical articles and other short works, such as brief documents from Web sites, are put in quotation marks; titles of books and other long works, such as entire Web sites, are italicized.

The city of publication is given without a state name. Publishers' names are shortened, usually to the first principal word (“Wiley” for “John Wiley and Sons,” for instance), and “University” and “Press” are abbreviated “U” and “P” in the names of university publishers: UP of Florida. The date of publication is the date on the title page or the most recent date on the copyright page.

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4 http://www.csus.edu/owl/index/mla/mla_format.htm
5 http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/res5e_ch08_s1-0011.html
All works cited entries must include the medium in which a work was published, produced, or delivered. The medium usually appears at the end of the entry, capitalized but neither italicized nor in quotation marks. Typical designations for the medium are “Print,” “Web,” “Radio,” “Television,” “CD,” “Audiocassette,” “Film,” “Videocassette,” “DVD,” “Photograph,” “Performance,” “Lecture,” “MP3 file,” and “PDF file.” (See specific items throughout this section.)

Listing authors (print and online)

Alphabetize entries in the list of works cited by authors’ last names (or by title if a work has no author). The author’s name is important because citations in the text of the paper refer to it and readers will be looking for it at the beginning of an entry in the alphabetized list.