MLA Documentation Style – 7th edition

College students encounter various documentation styles in classes. Always check with the professor for the preferred style for a class. A wise approach to using a documentation style is to consult style guides rather than trying to remember every individual rule. Researchers in the fields of English and other modern languages most often use rules from the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition. This handout utilizes examples in MLA style. Guidelines for the list of sources are presented, followed by rules for documenting sources within the body of the paper.

The purpose of documentation is three-fold: to give credit to one’s sources, to establish the credibility of one’s sources and, consequently, of the writer, and to provide a path to each individual source. In fact, the writer’s job is to offer enough information on the works cited page and in the text so that readers can find the sources themselves. There are two basic elements of documentation: the works cited page (list of sources used) and the in-text citations (parenthetical documentation). Each source that is used in the body of the paper should be listed on the works cited page, and, conversely, each source on the works cited page should be referenced in the body of the paper.

Guidelines for the Works Cited Page

- Center the title Works Cited (with no quotation marks around the word, and no bold or italics) at the top of the page.
- Arrange the sources in alphabetical order—by the last name of the first author listed on the source or if no author is given by the first important word of the title (not a, an, or the).
- Double space everything on the works cited page, including individual entries themselves.
- Use hanging indent. The first line of each entry starts at the left margin, while all subsequent lines of each entry are indented ½ inch. Most computer programs can provide this formatting automatically. (Format: Paragraph: Special: Hanging.)
- Create the works cited page as a separate page, following the last page of the body of the document and paginated with the rest of the paper. That is, if the paper ends on page 5, the works cited page would be identified as page 6.

In general, each entry in the works cited contains several parts: author, title, publication information, medium of publication, and—for electronic sources only—date of access. Specific examples are shown below. Pay particular attention to formatting and punctuation.

Print Sources – General Guidelines

For each book or article:

- **First**, type the author’s last name, first name, and if available, middle initial. Do not list degrees, such as MD or PhD. If multiple authors are given, list them all but keep normal word order after the first name.
- **Next**, type the title of the article or book, followed by a period. If it is a book, use italics to indicate it is a book title. If it is an article (or portion of a book, e.g. a chapter), place the title in quotation marks. Capitalize all words, except articles, prepositions, coordinating conjunctions
and the to of infinitives. Any first word of the title and subtitle (even if a, an, from, the, or to) should also be capitalized.

- Then, give the details of publication:
  - For a book, these details are the city of publication (list the state also if the city could be in various states, such as Columbus or Springfield) followed by a colon, then the publisher (in the shortest possible wording), followed by a comma, and then the year of publication. Finally, designate the medium of publication (print). If no publisher is given, indicate this by n.p. For no date, use n.d.
  - For an article, these details are title of the journal, magazine, or newspaper in italics, followed by information that enables someone reading the list to find the right publication date and pages. For scholarly journals, the volume and issue numbers are included, with the date in parentheses, followed by a colon and the inclusive page numbers. For magazines, simply give the date (day, month, and year if it is a weekly like Time), then a colon and the page numbers. Finally, designate the medium of publication (print).

Print Sources - Examples

Book with one author

Last name, First name. Title of the Book. City where published, and if necessary for clarity, the state abbreviation: publisher’s name, publication date. Medium of publication.


Book with two or three authors

Last name, First name, and First name Last name. Title of Book. City where published: publisher’s name, publication date. Medium of publication.


Book with more than three authors


OR


Book with a corporate author


Book with no author named


Book with an editor


Two or more books by the same person


[Note: use three hyphens and a period for subsequent items by the same author; alphabetize by author then title and use a new line for each entry].
Essay in a collection of essays

Last name, First name. “Title of Article.” Title of Book. Ed. followed by editor’s name. City where published and, if necessary for clarity, the state abbreviation: publisher’s name, publication date. Pages of essay. Medium of publication.


Article in an academic journal


[Note: this is from volume 92, issue 6, year 1983, pages 30-37.]

Article in a magazine (weekly)


Article in a magazine (monthly)


Article in a newspaper


Anonymous article


Article in a reference book


Brochure, pamphlet, or press release

Last name, First name. Title of Brochure. City where published, and if necessary for clarity, the state abbreviation: publisher’s name, publication date. Medium of publication.


[Note: the author will often be a corporate author.]

Government publication

Name of government. Name of agency. Title of Publication. City where published, and if necessary for clarity, the state abbreviation: publisher’s name, publication date. Medium of publication.


[Note: all U.S. government publications come from the Government Printing Office; abbreviate as GPO.]
Electronic Sources – General Guidelines

Whenever possible, follow the guidelines for print sources (author, title, publication information), followed by specific information about the electronic path. That additional specific information must include the date on which you accessed the site since electronic sources may change addresses and/or disappear. MLA 7th edition does not require a URL as this designation is often unwieldy and difficult to enter, and the other information provided should lead the reader to the source. For more information on this, consult the handbook, section 5.6.

For each source:

- **First**, type the author’s last name, first name, and if available, middle initial. Do not list degrees, such as MD or PhD. If multiple authors are given, list them after the first but keep normal word order.
- **Next**, type the title of the work (be it e-book, online article, or web page) followed by a period. If it is a website or book, use italics for the title. If it is an article, type the title in quotation marks. Capitalize all words, except articles, prepositions, coordinating conjunctions and the to of infinitives. However, any first word of the title and subtitle (even a, an, from, the, or to) should also be capitalized.
- **Third**, include publication information similar to that of a print listing: version or edition, sponsor of the site, date of publication, medium of publication (web).
- **Finally**, list the date the source was accessed. Give day of the month, month, and year.

**Work cited only on the web**

Last name, First name. “Title of the Work.” *Title of Overall Website.* Version or edition used. Publisher or sponsor of the site; if not available, use N.p. Date of publication (day month year); if no date is available, use n.d. Medium of publication (Web). Date of access (day month year).


**Article in a scholarly journal**

Last name, First name. “Title of Article.” *Title of Magazine* Volume.Issue (Date published): pages in original version. Medium. Date of access.


**Work from an online service**

Entire internet site

Name of editor if given. “Title of Work.” Title of Overall Website, if different from title of work. Publisher or sponsor of the site; if not available, use N.p. Date of publication (day month year); if no date is available, use n.d. Medium of publication (Web). Date of access (day month year).


Other Sources – Examples (e.g. films, interviews, lectures)

Radio or television program


[Note: the citation may be written to emphasize a performer, the director, or anyone else associated with a show’s production by having that person’s name appear first. The standard form is to begin with the title of the episode.]

Film

It’s a Wonderful Life. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell. RKO, 1946. DVD.

[Note: the citation may be written to emphasize a performer, the director, or anyone else associated with a film’s production by having that person’s name appear first. The standard form is to begin with the title of the film. In this example, RKO is the name of the movie studio.]

Interview conducted by the writer of the paper

Silber, John R. Personal interview. 5 June 1993.

[Note: in this entry, the subject interviewed is John R. Silber. Substitute E-mail interview if that is the case. No additional medium is indicated.]

Lecture, speech, or address


[Note: give the speaker, title of speech, meeting and sponsoring organization, location, date, and medium.]

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Guidelines for In-Text Citations (Parenthetical Documentation)

Give the author credit in the text in the following ways:

- Use the author’s last name, either in the sentence introducing the borrowed material or within parentheses at the end of the quotation or paraphrase (see examples below).
- *Always* use quotation marks before and after the author’s words in a short quotation (less than four lines or 40 words).
- Use page numbers, within parentheses, telling the original location of the quotation or paraphrase.
- If the quotation extends into four lines in the new text, it becomes a block quotation. Indent the whole quotation one inch from the left margin and omit the quotation marks. Double space such indented quotes. Unlike with other citations, place the period before the parentheses containing the in-text citation.
- Confirm that the in-text citation directs the reader to the right item on the Works Cited page and to the right page in the original book or periodical article. It’s especially helpful to use the author’s name in the introduction to the borrowed material and give the page number in the parentheses that follow. This way, the two parts of the in-text citation serve as markers, clearly indicating exactly where the borrowed material begins and ends. This introduction to the source material is called a *signal phrase*, a *lead-in*, or an *attributive tag*.

Inexperienced writers often slip into unintentional plagiarism by failing to distinguish clearly between quotation and paraphrase. Here’s a technique that may be helpful:

Read the passage in the source you are using. Then cover the source and write the idea in your own words. When you have finished, return to the source and compare the original with your version word by word. If there are sequences of words that are identical, make a conscious decision either to change the words so that you have not copied phrases, or use a word-for-word quotation and include quotation marks. *In either case*, give credit to the author for the ideas.

**Examples of In-Text Citations**

**Single author**

Koko acquired language more slowly than a normal speaking child (Smith 25).

OR

Linguist Jefferson Smith admits that the gorilla Koko acquired language more slowly than a normal speaking child (25).

OR

Jefferson Smith, a linguist from State University, states, “Koko learned language at an amazing rate, albeit slower than an average 4-year-old child” (25).

*[Note: include the author’s name either in your text or in parentheses.]*

**Multiple authors for one source**

Despite the short-term devastation nuclear war would cause, many scientists fear that “the disruption of the global ecosystem” would ravage human life for centuries (Turco et al. 83).

OR

Despite the short-term devastation nuclear war would cause, many scientists fear that the Earth’s biological balance would be affected in such a way that it would ravage human life for centuries (Turco, Linden, and Smith 83).

OR

Turco, Linden, and Smith claim that despite the short-term devastation nuclear war would cause, many scientists fear that the Earth’s biological balance would be affected in such a way that it would ravage human life for centuries (83).
Two or more separate sources in a single parenthetical reference

Both Durant and Johnson believe creative men and women are important in history (Durant 406; Johnson 23).

Source with a corporate or anonymous author

In 1992 it was apparent that the American health care system, though impressive in many ways, needed “to be fixed and perhaps radically modified” (Public Agenda Foundation 4).

According to a study sponsored by the National Research Council, the population of China around 1990 was increasing by more than fifteen million annually (15).

[Note: cite by the full corporate name; when possible include that name in your own text as introductory material. In that case, only a page number is needed in parentheses. When giving the name of a corporate author in parentheses, shorten terms that are commonly abbreviated, e.g. Natl. for National.]

Quote of a quote found in your source (in other words, not a primary source)

Sir Bernard Lovell notes that overly narrow and regimented computerized research in astronomy is damaging to “the free exercise of that happy faculty known as serendipity” (qtd. in Roszak 115).

[Note: include “qtd. in” (“quoted in”) before the name of your source.]

Play

In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Polonius advises Laertes to “give thy thoughts no tongue” (1.3.59).

[Note: cite a play with act, scene, and line number.]

Poem

In “Song of Myself,” Whitman identifies himself with the “procreant urge of the world” (line 45).

[Note: cite a poem by the line (and section) numbers, or for poems without numbered lines, by the title. Do not cite poetry by the page number.]

Media sources

Cinematographer Nestor Almendros does some of his finest work in capturing the rural Texas landscapes in Places in the Heart.

[Note: cite either the title or the name of the person chiefly responsible for that work (or both), depending upon your own emphasis.]

Interview information

According to psychologist George Adams, post-traumatic stress disorder afflicts a large number of war veterans. However, many experts question this opinion.

[Note: use an appropriate signal phrase, e.g., “According to,” to incorporate information gathered in an interview. If the person you interviewed is not widely known, explain his or her credentials in your paper. Following the paraphrased or quoted material, use a transitional phrase to indicate you are no longer referring to the interview information.]
Electronic sources

Give enough information to direct readers to the works cited page. The author or organization of the text should always be referred to clearly in text, but since most electronic documents do not have "fixed" page numbers, no page numbers are generally used. However, please note the following examples.

Electronic sources without page, paragraph, or screen numbers:

  Writing is a social act (Smith).
  OR
  Joe Smith has shown that writing is a social act.

Electronic source that uses fixed page numbers:

  Joe Smith suggests that writing is a social act (12).

Electronic source that uses paragraph numbers:

  Smith argues that writing is a social act (par. 5).

Electronic source that uses screen numbers:

  Smith contends that writing is a social act (screen 2).

Electronic source with a corporate author:

  According to the World Wildlife Fund, “Tigers have lost 93% of their historic range” (“Species/Tiger”).