

## 6.5: Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Style

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the major components of a research paper written using MLA style.
- Apply general Modern Language Association (MLA) style and formatting conventions in a research paper.

We have addressed American Psychological Association (APA) style, as well as the importance of giving credit where credit is due, so now let's turn our attention to the formatting and citation style of the Modern Language Association, known as MLA style.

MLA style is often used in the liberal arts and humanities. Like APA style, it provides a uniform framework for consistency across a document in several areas. MLA style provides a format for the manuscript text and parenthetical citations, or in-text citations. It also provides the framework for the works cited area for references at the end of the essay. MLA style emphasizes brevity and clarity. As a student writer, it is to your advantage to be familiar with both major styles, and this section will outline the main points of MLA as well as offer specific examples of commonly used references. Remember that your writing represents you in your absence. The correct use of a citation style demonstrates your attention to detail and ability to produce a scholarly work in an acceptable style, and it can help prevent the appearance or accusations of plagiarism.

If you are taking an English, art history, or music appreciation class, chances are that you will be asked to write an essay in MLA format. One common question goes something like "What's the difference?" referring to APA and MLA style, and it deserves our consideration. The liberal arts and humanities often reflect works of creativity that come from individual and group effort, but they may adapt, change, or build on previous creative works. The inspiration to create something new, from a song to a music video, may contain elements of previous works. Drawing on your fellow artists and authors is part of the creative process, and so is giving credit where credit is due.

A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be aware of the works that you used to create it. Readers want to examine your sources to see if you know your subject, to see if you missed anything, or if you offer anything new and interesting. Your new or up-to-date sources may offer the reader additional insight on the subject being considered. It also demonstrates that you, as the author, are up-to-date on what is happening in the field or on the subject. Giving credit where it is due enhances your credibility, and the MLA style offers a clear format to use.

Uncredited work that is incorporated into your own writing is considered plagiarism. In the professional world, plagiarism results in loss of credibility and often compensation, including future opportunities. In a classroom setting, plagiarism results in a range of sanctions, from loss of a grade to expulsion from a school or university. In both professional and academic settings, the penalties are severe. MLA offers artists and authors a systematic style of reference, again giving credit where credit is due, to protect MLA users from accusations of plagiarism.

MLA style uses a citation in the body of the essay that links to the works cited page at the end. The in-text citation is offset with parentheses, clearly calling attention to itself for the reader. The reference to the author or title is like a signal to the reader that information was incorporated from a separate source. It also provides the reader with information to then turn to the works cited section of your essay (at the end) where they can find the complete reference. If you follow the MLA style, and indicate your source both in your essay and in the works cited section, you will prevent the possibility of plagiarism. If you follow the MLA guidelines, pay attention to detail, and clearly indicate your sources, then this approach to formatting and citation offers a proven way to demonstrate your respect for other authors and artists.

### Five Reasons to Use MLA Style

1. To demonstrate your ability to present a professional, academic essay in the correct style
2. To gain credibility and authenticity for your work
3. To enhance the ability of the reader to locate information discussed in your essay
4. To give credit where credit is due and prevent plagiarism
5. To get a good grade or demonstrate excellence in your writing

Before we transition to specifics, please consider one word of caution: consistency. If you are instructed to use the MLA style and need to indicate a date, you have options. For example, you could use an international or a US style:

- **International style:** 18 May 1980 (day/month/year)
- **US style:** May 18, 1980 (month/day/year)

If you are going to the US style, be consistent in its use. You'll find you have the option on page 83 of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition. You have many options when writing in English as the language itself has several conventions, or acceptable ways of writing particular parts of speech or information. For example, on the next page our *MLA Handbook* addresses the question:

Which convention is preferred in MLA style:

twentieth century  
Twentieth Century  
20th century  
20th Century

You are welcome to look in the *MLA Handbook* and see there is one preferred style or convention (you will also find the answer at end of this section marked by an asterisk [\*]). Now you may say to yourself that you won't write that term and it may be true, but you will come to a term or word that has more than one way it can be written. In that case, what convention is acceptable in MLA style? This is where the *MLA Handbook* serves as an invaluable resource. Again, your attention to detail and the professional presentation of your work are aspects of learning to write in an academic setting.

Now let's transition from a general discussion on the advantages of MLA style to what we are required to do to write a standard academic essay. We will first examine a general "to do" list, then review a few "do not" suggestions, and finally take a tour through a sample of MLA features. Links to sample MLA papers are located at the end of this section.

## General MLA List

1. Use standard white paper (8.5 × 11 inches).
2. Double space the essay and quotes.
3. Use Times New Roman 12-point font.
4. Use one-inch margins on all sides
5. Indent paragraphs (five spaces or 1.5 inches).
6. Include consecutive page numbers in the upper-right corner.
7. Use italics to indicate a title, as in *Writing for Success*.
8. On the first page, place your name, course, date, and instructor's name in the upper-left corner.
9. On the first page, place the title centered on the page, with no bold or italics and all words capitalized.
10. On all pages, place the header, student's name + one space + page number, 1.5 inches from the top, aligned on the right.

### Tip

Depending on your field of study, you may sometimes write research papers in either APA or MLA style. Recognize that each has its advantages and preferred use in fields and disciplines. Learn to write and reference in both styles with proficiency.

## Title Block Format

You never get a second chance to make a first impression, and your title block (not a separate title page; just a section at the top of the first page) makes an impression on the reader. If correctly formatted with each element of information in its proper place, form, and format, it says to the reader that you mean business, that you are a professional, and that you take your work seriously, so it should, in turn, be seriously considered. Your title block in MLA style contributes to your credibility. Remember that your writing represents you in your absence, and the title block is the tailored suit or outfit that represents you best. That said, sometimes a separate title page is necessary, but it is best both to know how to properly format a title block or page in MLA style and to ask your instructor if it is included as part of the assignment.

Your name  
Instructor  
Course number  
Date  
Title of Paper

## Paragraphs and Indentation

Make sure you indent five spaces (from the left margin). You'll see that the indent offsets the beginning of a new paragraph. We use paragraphs to express single ideas or topics that reinforce our central purpose or thesis statement. Paragraphs include topic sentences, supporting sentences, and conclusion or transitional sentences that link paragraphs together to support the main focus of the essay.

## Tables and Illustrations

Place tables and illustrations as close as possible to the text they reinforce or complement. Here's an example of a table in MLA.

Table 13.2

Sales Figures by Year	Sales Amount (\$)
2007	100,000
2008	125,000
2009	185,000
2010	215,000

As we can see in Table 13.2, we have experienced significant growth since 2008.

This example demonstrates that the words that you write and the tables, figures, illustrations, or images that you include should be next to each other in your paper.

## Parenthetical Citations

You must cite your sources as you use them. In the same way that a table or figure should be located right next to the sentence that discusses it (see the previous example), parenthetical citations, or citations enclosed in parenthesis that appear in the text, are required. You need to cite all your information. If someone else wrote it, said it, drew it, demonstrated it, or otherwise expressed it, you need to cite it. The exception to this statement is common, widespread knowledge. For example, if you search online for MLA resources, and specifically MLA sample papers, you will find many similar discussions on MLA style. MLA is a style and cannot be copyrighted because it is a style, but the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook* can be copyright protected. If you reference a specific page in that handbook, you need to indicate it. If you write about a general MLA style issue that is commonly covered or addressed in multiple sources, you do not. When in doubt, reference the specific resource you used to write your essay.

Your in-text, or parenthetical, citations should do the following:

- Clearly indicate the specific sources also referenced in the works cited
- Specifically identify the location of the information that you used
- Keep the citation clear and concise, always confirming its accuracy

## Works Cited Page

After the body of your paper comes the works cited page. It features the reference sources used in your essay. List the sources alphabetically by last name, or list them by title if the author is not known as is often the case of web-based articles. You will find links to examples of the works cited page in several of the sample MLA essays at the end of this section.

As a point of reference and comparison to our APA examples, let's examine the following three citations and the order of the information needed.

Citation Type	MLA Style	APA Style
Website	Author's Last Name, First Name. Title of the website. Publication Date. Name of Organization (if applicable). Date you accessed the website. <URL>.	Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Date of publication). Title of document. Retrieved from URL
Note: The items listed include proper punctuation and capitalization according to the style's guidelines.		

Citation Type	MLA Style	APA Style
Online article	Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." Title of the website. Date of publication. Organization that provides the website. Date you accessed the website.	Author's Last name, First Initial. (Date of publication). Title of article. <i>Title of Journal</i> , Volume(Issue). Retrieved from URL
Book	Author's Last Name, First Name. <i>Title of the Book</i> . Place of Publication: Publishing Company, Date of publication.	Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Date of publication). <i>Title of the book</i> . Place of Publication: Publishing Company.

Note: The items listed include proper punctuation and capitalization according to the style's guidelines.

### ? Exercise 6.5.1

In [Section 13.1](#), you created a sample essay in APA style. After reviewing this section and exploring the resources linked at the end of the section (including California State University–Sacramento's clear example of a paper in MLA format), please convert your paper to MLA style using the formatting and citation guidelines. You may find it helpful to use online applications that quickly, easily, and at no cost convert your citations to MLA format.

### ? Exercise 6.5.2

Please convert the APA-style citations to MLA style. You may find that online applications can quickly, easily, and at no cost convert your citations to MLA format. There are several websites and applications available free (or as a free trial) that will allow you to input the information and will produce a correct citation in the style of your choice. Consider these two sites:

- <http://www.noodletools.com>
- <http://citationmachine.net>

Hint: You may need access to the Internet to find any missing information required to correctly cite in MLA style. This demonstrates an important difference between APA and MLA style—the information provided to the reader.

Sample Student Reference List in APA Style	
1	Brent, D. A., Poling, K. D., & Goldstein, T. R. (2010). <i>Treating depressed and suicidal adolescents: A clinician's guide</i> . New York, NY: Guilford Press.
MLA	
2	Dewan, S. (2007, September 17). Using crayons to exorcise Katrina. <i>The New York Times</i> . Retrieved from <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/ar...gn/17ther.html">www.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/ar...gn/17ther.html</a>
MLA	
3	Freud, S. (1955). Beyond the pleasure principle. In <i>The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud</i> . (Vol. XVII, pp. 3–66). London, England: Hogarth.
MLA	
4	Henley, D. (2007). Naming the enemy: An art therapy intervention for children with bipolar and comorbid disorders. <i>Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association</i> , 24(3), 104–110.
MLA	

## Sample Student Reference List in APA Style

5

Hutson, M. (2008). Art therapy: The healing arts. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from [www.psychologytoday.com/artic...e-healing-arts](http://www.psychologytoday.com/artic...e-healing-arts)

MLA

6

Isis, P. D., Bus, J., Siegel, C. A., & Ventura, Y. (2010). Empowering students through creativity: Art therapy in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 27(2), 56–61.

MLA

7

Johnson, D. (1987). The role of the creative arts therapies in the diagnosis and treatment of psychological trauma. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 14, 7–13.

MLA

8

Malchiodi, C. (2006). *Art therapy sourcebook*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

MLA

9

Markel, R. (Producer). (2010). *I'm an artist* [Motion picture]. United States: Red Pepper Films.

MLA

10

Kelley, S. J. (1984). The use of art therapy with sexually abused children. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health*, 22(12), 12–28.

MLA

11

Pifalo, T. (2008). Why art therapy? *Darkness to light: Confronting child abuse with courage*. Retrieved from [www.darkness2light.org/KnowAb...rt\\_therapy.asp](http://www.darkness2light.org/KnowAb...rt_therapy.asp)

MLA

12

Rubin, J. A. (2005). *Child art therapy* (25th ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.

MLA

13

Schimek, J. (1975). A critical re-examination of Freud's concept of unconscious mental representation. *International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 2, 171–187.

MLA

14

Strauss, M. B. (1999). *No talk therapy for children and adolescents*. New York, NY: Norton.

MLA

15

Thompson, T. (2008). *Freedom from meltdowns: Dr. Thompson's solutions for children with autism*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

MLA

## Useful Sources of Examples of MLA Style

- Arizona State University Libraries offers an excellent resource with clear examples.
  - <http://libguides.asu.edu/content.php...97&sid=1132964>
- Purdue Online Writing Lab includes sample pages and works cited.
  - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01>
- California State University–Sacramento’s Online Writing Lab has an excellent visual description and example of an MLA paper.
  - [www.csus.edu/owl/index/mla/mla\\_format.htm](http://www.csus.edu/owl/index/mla/mla_format.htm)
- SUNY offers an excellent, brief, side-by-side comparison of MLA and APA citations.
  - [www.sunywcc.edu/LIBRARY/resea...A\\_08.03.10.pdf](http://www.sunywcc.edu/LIBRARY/resea...A_08.03.10.pdf)
- Cornell University Library provides comprehensive MLA information on its Citation Management website.
  - <http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/mla>
- The University of Kansas Writing Center is an excellent resource.
  - [www.writing.ku.edu/guides](http://www.writing.ku.edu/guides)

\* (a) is the correct answer to the question at the beginning of this section. The *MLA Handbook* prefers “twentieth century.”

## Key Takeaways

- MLA style is often used in the liberal arts and humanities.
- MLA style emphasizes brevity and clarity.
- A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be informed of the works you used to create it.
- MLA style uses a citation in the body of the essay that refers to the works cited section at the end.
- If you follow MLA style, and indicate your source both in your essay and in the works cited section, you will prevent the possibility of plagiarism.

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