

MLA Style Guide

The Modern Language Association (MLA) style requires you to cite your sources within the text of your paper. Cite the source of all material you paraphrase, summarize, or quote.

This guide shows the most common scenarios for MLA citing. For more examples, see *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 8th ed. (McPherson Library Reference, call number **LB2369 M53 2016**) and the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. 3rd ed. (McPherson Library Reference, call number **PN147 G526 2008**).

Many publications used as examples in this guide are fictitious and created for illustration purposes.

NOTE: Some significant changes have been made for the 8th edition of the *MLA Style Manual*: MLA 8 takes a very different approach to previous editions. Instead of offering models for all possible sources, this handbook lays out a set of principles for users to follow. As long as you are recording the necessary information that will allow readers to find your source and presenting that information in a logical way, you are following MLA style. The instructions below offer an overview of conventions and best practices, but you can use your judgment (and perhaps consult your instructor or librarian for advice) when creating works cited lists and in-text citations.

MLA style is the predominant documentation style used by scholars in English departments and by those who write about literature written in modern languages (such as French or Mandarin).

Until recently, MLA handbooks resembled other style guides in offering students models of how to format bibliographic entries for different types of sources (ranging from books to websites). Every time a new information format emerged – podcasts, television programs on streaming services like Netflix, holograms, etc. – users had to wait for a new style guide to know exactly how they should format references.

► MLA Works Cited List

To allow your readers to survey and access the sources you have used, all works from which you take ideas or language must appear in an alphabetized list appended to the end of your essay. In most cases, you will include only sources from which you quote, paraphrase, or summarize (and thus need to cite), so your list will have the title **Works Cited**. Some assignments may require you to list all sources that influenced your thinking whether or not you cite them directly – such a list should be titled **Works Consulted**.

Information about each source appears must be presented in a bibliographic entry that follows a basic set of principles that we can see in this example of an entry for a short story published in a collection accessed through a web site:

1. For any source, you need to answer the following questions:
 - Who is the author of the source? [Arthur Conan Doyle]
 - What is the title of the source? [“The Adventure of the Red-Headed League”]
 - How was the source published? [The short story was published in the second edition of the collection *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.]
 - Where did you find this source? [I found this source online in the *HathiTrust Digital Library*.]
 - When was this source published? [The short story appeared in the printed collection in 1893, and *HathiTrust Digital Library* put it up as a digital file in 2016.]
2. Next, you organize this information with the following template:
 - Basic source information:
 - Author or creator: Arthur Conan Doyle
 - Title of source: “The Adventure of the Red-Headed League”
 - Information about where and how this source was first published (container one):
 - Title of container: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*
 - Other contributors: {None}
 - Version: 2nd edition

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- Number: {None}
 - Publisher: George Newnes
 - Publication date: 1893
 - Location: pp. 29-56
 - Information about how that published version of the source was made accessible (container two):
 - Title of container: *HathiTrust Digital Library*
 - Other contributors: {None}
 - Version: {None}
 - Number: {None}
 - Publisher: {None}
 - Publication date: 2016
 - Location: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556034075739;view=1up;seq=11>
 - And so on. If you need to organize another level of information, simply repeat the “container” template, and fill in the blanks.
3. Then use this information to create an entry that offers your readers only the information they will need to find the source themselves. Note that you offer information in the order dictated by the template, usually separating each level with periods and separating items within levels with commas:
- Doyle, Arthur Conan. “The Adventure of the Red-Headed League.” *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. 2nd ed., George Newnes, 1893, pp. 29-56. *HathiTrust Digital Library*, 2016, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556034075739;view=1up;seq=11>.

Here are some sample bibliographic entries for an MLA Works Cited list:

Type of citation	Example
Book by one author	Sword, Helen. <i>Stylish Academic Writing</i> . Harvard UP, 2012.
Book by more than one author	May, Steven W. and Arthur F. Marotti. <i>Ink, Stink Bait, Revenge, and Queen Elizabeth: A Yorkshire Yeoman's Household Books</i> . Cornell UP, 2014.
Book with an editor	Wolfe, Heather, editor. <i>The Literary Career and Legacy of Elizabeth Cary, 1613-1680</i> . Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
Poem or short story in an edited collection	Herrick, Robert. “To Daffodils.” <i>The Broadview Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Verse & Prose</i> , edited by Alan Rudrum et al, Broadview Press, 2000, p. 317.
Review in a journal	De Grazia, Margreta. Review of <i>Hamlet in Purgatory</i> , by Stephen Greenblatt. <i>MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly</i> , vol. 63, no. 4, 2002, pp. 539-42.
Article from a print journal	Kiser, Lisa J. “The Animals in Chester’s <i>Noah’s Flood</i> .” <i>Early Theatre</i> , vol. 14, no. 1, 2011, pp. 15-44.
Article from an online journal	Eastwood, Adrienne L. “In the Shadow of the Queen: The Early English Epithalamium and the Female Monarch.” <i>Early Modern Literary Studies</i> , vol. 16, no. 3, 2013, https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/69 .
Article from a journal accessed through a database with a DOI	Lecker, Robert. “‘A Quest for the Peaceable Kingdom’: The Narrative in Northrop Frye’s Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada.” <i>PMLA</i> , vol. 108, no. 2, 283–293. <i>JSTOR</i> , doi:10.2307/462598.

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Article from a journal accessed through a database with a URL	Wang, Xiaoping. "Articulating the (Dis)Enchantment of Colonial Modernity: Mei Niang's Representation of the Predicament of Chinese New Women." <i>Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature</i> , vol. 34, no. 2, 2015, pp. 333-53. <i>Project Muse</i> , http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/article/606170 .
Online encyclopedia or dictionary entry	"chaste, adj." <i>OED Online</i> . Oxford UP, Mar. 2016. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/Entry/30895?rskey=nbplpO&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid .
Website	Raymond Siemens, et al., editors. <i>A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript (BL Add 17,492)</i> . 2 Feb. 2015. https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Devonshire_Manuscript .
Film or video	<i>Bright Star</i> . Directed by Jane Campion, performance by Ben Wishaw, Pathé Renn Productions, 2009.
Lecture or oral presentation	Ladin, Joy. "Diving into the Wreck: Feminism and Trans Feminism." Trans Poetics and Feminism Panel. MLA Annual Convention, 8 Jan. 2016, Austin Convention Center, Austin TX. Paper presentation.

When you prepare a Works Cited list, apply these general rules:

- List each work alphabetically based on whatever appears first in its entry (usually the author's last name).
- Use a 1.25 cm hanging indentation for any entries that take up more than one line.
- Put quotation marks around titles of sources that appear within containers – such as individual poems, short stories, and articles.
- Put titles of containers or stand-alone texts in italics – for example novels, full-length plays, journals, anthologies, and short story collections.
- Capitalize all major words in titles.
- Most importantly, decide what information needs to be included by thinking about your readers – what details will they need to find your source?

Please consult the 8th edition of the MLA handbook (published in 2016) for additional examples and guidance.

► MLA Citations

MLA documents the simple use of a source (through quotation, paraphrasing, or summarizing) with a parenthetical citation. The first part of the citation directs readers to a specific item in the Works Cited list, and the second part tells readers where in that source to find the material that has been utilized.

SIMPLE CITATIONS

Since the author's last name is usually the first thing listed in a bibliographic entry, you usually begin your citation with that information so that readers can find the correct item in your works cited list. Most texts you cite will include page numbers, so you indicate the page or pages on which the material you have quote, paraphrased, or summarized appears.

(Smith 215)

(Jones 15-17)

If you think your readers will know which item in your works cited list is being referenced because you just mentioned the author, you can omit that information from your citation.

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Pamuk's novel introduces its unusual use of different characters' first person narration by opening with the illogical shocking phrase, "I am nothing but a corpse now" (3).

If you are referencing the same source more than once in the same sentence or within a paragraph, you can leave out the author's name after the first citation.

The delightfully named John Thomas Looney may have championed the Earl of Oxford as the true author of Shakespeare's plays because of his "profound distaste for modernity" (Shapiro 170) although he explicitly argued that his doubts arose from the sense that no one who wrote for commercial gains could have created such great plays (171).

That said, it is better to cite and make clear to your readers the source you are referencing than to make them puzzle it out – when in doubt, include full information.

COMPLEX CASES

There are situations in which formulating a citation might be a bit more complicated. For example, what if the source you want to reference has no author (perhaps because there is an editor listed first, because there is a corporate author, or because the work is anonymous)? Remember that you are trying to guide readers to an item in your works cited list, and it will seem logical to pick the first word or words in the bibliographic entry – whether they are an editor's last name, an organization's name, or part of a title.

(Thomas 15) (Canadian Council 29) (*Beowulf* 25)

And what if there are no page numbers? If it is easy to offer readers some other guide to help them find the place in the text you are referencing, please use that information instead. Otherwise, simply list nothing – you are not expected to count pages, paragraphs, or lines if doing so will be burdensome.

(Smith par. 15) (Jones ch. 2) (Thomas)

If there is more than one text by the same author in your works cited list, you will need to give your readers a bit more information than the author's last name to help them find the source being cited. Follow the author's last name with the first word of the title:

(McKitterick, *Old* 25-26) (McKitterick, *Print* 200)

Similarly, if there is more than one author with the same last name in your works cited list, just the author's last name won't be sufficient in a parenthetical citation. You will need to provide a first initial to distinguish between authors – and, in the case where authors share the same first initial, first names.

(A. Patterson 15) (L. Patterson 20-27)
(Patricia Lake 11) (Peter Lake 2)

If you have taken an idea from more than one source, you can reference multiple items in the same parenthetical citation by separating your references with semicolons. (If your citations get unwieldy, however, you can turn them into bibliographical endnotes.)

(Lake 15; Patterson 25) (Enders 24-26; White 95; Wickham 1-5)

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You can even acknowledge a source you haven't used yourself (and thus not included in your Works Cited list) by making explicit where you found it.

(Donne qtd. in Kuchar 52)

(Booth ctd. in Connors 15)

SPECIAL TEXTS: POETRY, PLAYS, THE BIBLE, ETC.

When the text you are using offers ways to find a specific part of the text other than (or in addition to) page numbers, you help your readers by citing those guides. For example, editions of poetry often include line numbers, so you should cite lines of a particular poem rather than the page on which it appears.

(Donne 10-14)

Editions of the Bible and other religious texts usually have standard chapter names and book and verse numbers. Offer that information in your citations as follows:

(Isaiah 29:3-15)

Verse plays (like those written by Shakespeare) include act, scene, and line numbers you can cite like this:

(Shakespeare 1.3.12-13)

For plays without line numbers, you can still reference act and scene numbers along with page numbers:

(Miller 12; act 1)

► Notes in MLA

While MLA uses in-text, parenthetical citations for simple references to sources, more complex references can be handled in endnotes. You can use endnotes to offer a summary of existing scholarship on a subject, to comment on another scholar's argument, or to explain a point – that is, endnotes are where you put any use of sources that can't or shouldn't be handled in the text of your essay. MLA endnotes use short references to sources like those that appear in parenthetical citations:

Sample bibliographic note:

2 For a sense of how long scholars have struggled to develop more accurate terminology see Dobson 25; Collier 15; Malone 94; Greg 16; Chambers 24-26; Wickham 45; Happe 25; Bevington 46; and Walker 74.

Sample note for a source that can't be handled in a parenthetical citation:

5 This information about the difficulty of creating perfectly round vessels derives from my experience of spending a day observing the work of master potter Andrea Mason in her Lennox, Massachusetts studio.

Sample explanatory note:

3. Although there is disagreement among editors about how to render this character's name, I follow the Oxford and Norton editions in calling her Innogen. This spelling makes sense since it is identical to the name of a woman from Britain's mythical past, the wife of the supposed Trojan founder of the nation Brutus.

Adapted from the UVic Department of English MLA Guide, 2016.