MLA Style is a method of formatting and documenting sources in academic writing. MLA is commonly used for papers in the Humanities (such as English and philosophy); at Temple, MLA style is also used in First Year Writing and Intellectual Heritage courses. This guide is primarily concerned with the MLA style of documenting outside sources. For more information on MLA formatting, see The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Sixth Edition (available in the University Writing Center).

Understanding the MLA Style of Documentation

Unlike other citation styles you may have used, MLA Style focuses writers on developing a response to source texts, whether that response involves additional application, critique, elaboration, correcting misunderstandings, etc. MLA Style aims to help you achieve this critical response to texts by providing you with a framework for incorporating sources into your argument. Direct quoting and paraphrasing are equally important to MLA Style, though they create different effects for your readers.

Quoting allows you to reference someone else’s exact words, usually in order to read those words closely and critically in your paper and interpret those words to advance your argument. For instance, in the following passage, quoting from Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey allows Christopher R. Miller to apply another writer’s idea to the quote, and therefore create his own interpretation that the weather described in the scene symbolizes a particular emotion.

The effect of the clearing sky on Catherine, meanwhile, is emblematic: “A gleam of sunshine took her quite by surprise; she looked round; the clouds were parting, and she instantly returned to the window to watch over and encourage the happy appearance” (59). If, as Burke’s etymological observation reminds us, thunder is the figure of astonishment, the gleam of sunshine is the objective correlative of surprise.

Rather than letting the Austen quote stand on its own, Miller connects it to his argument as a piece of evidence, a technique that can make your arguments more persuasive and compelling.

Paraphrasing, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on your interpretation than on your source’s original words. The goal in paraphrasing is to condense as much relevant information as possible into a brief statement that summarizes the gist of the source’s argument. Paraphrasing involves synthesis: the ability to summarize and interpret at the same time.

Typically, self-administered questionnaires assume that participants will complete the survey on their own time and with no intervention from the survey researchers. Because there is no time limit and participants can read and reply to the questions in private, self-administered questionnaires can include more complex individual questions, as the participant will have time to consider the question carefully before responding (Kennedy and Vargus 486).

This passage on surveys summarizes several paragraphs worth of information into two sentences; the writer “interprets” the original text by choosing which pieces of information to include and which to overlook because they are irrelevant to her argument. For more information on using quotes and paraphrases effectively, see our Incorporating Source Materials Effectively handout (www.temple.edu/writingctr/student_resources/avoiding_plagiarism.htm).

Based on the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Sixth Edition, and MLA.org’s Style FAQ. This Writing Center Guide was last revised on 11/1/2005.
MLA Style requires that you provide both an in-text citation and an entry in your Works Cited for each outside source you refer to in your paper.

In-Text Citations

Whether you use quotations or paraphrases, MLA Style requires you to indicate exactly where the information came from by citing the author’s last name and the page number on which you found the information. In-text citations provide enough information for the reader to find the appropriate source in your Works Cited, if necessary. There are a number of variations for in-text citations:

- Both author’s name and page number must be included when the writer has not been previously identified in the sentence.

  Catherine’s pleasure at encountering sunshine after a period of rain is the “objective correlative of surprise” (Miller 250).

  One show that received an award from NOW was Felicity, a show about how a young woman follows her dream boy to a college in New York and bases her entire life on his actions (Fazzone 255).

- The page number alone will suffice if the writer has been identified earlier in the sentence (or if you are discussing a single author within one paragraph or within the entire paper).

  Through the words of Penelope, Merkel acknowledges that men become slaves to attractive women with pleasing features and nice hair: “I know how you men are…when one of you happens upon such a pretty face and soft curly flowing hair” (266).

- Internet sources are identified with author’s name (if available) and paragraph number (instead of page number.) If there is no author listed, use an abbreviated version of the title.

  Many people also thought that a diagnosis of being HIV+ was an automatic death sentence. Even Michael Jordan, who was pulled out of practice to be personally informed of Magic Johnson’s condition, reportedly asked, “Is he gonna die?” (Friend, par. 30).

  A diagnosis of HIV+ doesn’t mean that an individual has AIDS, the final stage of HIV. However, according to The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the National Institutes of Health, “virtually all AIDS patients are HIV-seropositive; that is they carry antibodies that indicate HIV infection” (“The Evidence That HIV,” par. 8).

- Paraphrases that cover multiple writers’ ideas can include all relevant authors and page numbers at the end of the sentence or paragraph. Note that the first author listed does not include a page number; this is because the entire work is being cited, not just a single page.

  CASM researchers thus began by identifying the cognitive processes respondents must navigate in order to answer survey questions (and, in fact, any questions): comprehension, retrieval, judgment, and response (Tourangeau et al.; McColl, Meadows, and Barofsky 217; Collins 232; Drennan 58).
Works Cited Page

A Works Cited page is a list of all the sources you quoted or referred to in your paper. Generally speaking, you would not include sources that you read, but didn’t actually use in your writing. Works Cited pages are arranged in alphabetical order according to authors’ last names. Sources without an author are alphabetized by the first letter of the title (excluding A/An or The).

MLA Style puts a high premium on intelligibility for all readers, which is why Works Cited pages include full names and minimal abbreviation. There are different formats for citing different kinds of sources. For example, if you are citing a book, you’ll present the information one way, and if you are citing a journal article you’ll present the information another way. This guide includes sample citations for 40 of the most commonly used formats in academic writing. You’ll see that most of them require most of the following information: the author’s name, the title of the work, and the date and place of publication.

What if my source doesn’t have an author (or page numbers, or a place of publication, or a date of publication, etc.)? What if my source doesn’t fit in any of these citation formats?

Every source is unique, and some sources don’t provide all of the information called for in the samples. Luckily, the authors of the MLA Style guide anticipated this, and they created acceptable formats for citing most types of sources. If don’t find what you need in this brief guide, you can consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Sixth Edition*: it offers guidelines for citing even the most unusual source. You can also look

It’s sometimes difficult to follow the variations between citations. Is there any way to make this list easier to understand?

We know how difficult it is to learn a new citation style, so we’re trying a new approach that might make it easier to comprehend. Each entry in the online version of this Citation Guide is now color-coded to make it easier for you to isolate different parts of an entry.

Authors will always be listed in red. Publication dates will always be listed in blue. Information specific to books (like the place of publication) will be assigned a color in the sample entry at the beginning of the Documenting Books section. Information specific to periodicals (like a journal title) will be assigned a color in the sample entry at the beginning of the Documenting Periodicals section. Information specific to Internet sources (like a URL) will be assigned a color in the sample entry at the beginning of the Documenting Electronic Sources section.
What Is Plagiarism? What Happens If I Plagiarize? How Do I Avoid Plagiarizing?

Q: What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you knowingly use another person’s words or ideas without giving him or her credit. Plagiarism is considered a form of theft and is a serious breach of the University Code of Conduct. Some plagiarism is clearly intentional. Copying all or part of a paper from the Internet passing it off as one's own is a case in point. Most people would agree that such an act is unmistakably plagiarism. Not all cases are as clear-cut, though, because not everyone who plagiarizes means to do so. For example, paraphrasing improperly or having a friend help write part of your paper qualifies as plagiarism. Failure to cite all of your sources (including paraphrases) using a documentation style appropriate for your discipline is also considered plagiarism.

Q: What will happen if I get caught plagiarizing?

The consequences for plagiarism vary based on the severity of the offense, the policy of the instructor, the policy of the department, and the policy of the school or college. Plagiarism is never worth the risk, but if you are curious about the policies for your course, check your syllabus or ask your instructor. The most common consequences for plagiarism include a failing grade on the plagiarized paper, a failing grade for the course, and possible suspension/expulsion from your degree program and/or the University.

Q: How can I avoid plagiarizing unintentionally?

Learn how (and why) to incorporate source materials in different ways. There are several methods of using sources into your text, and each of them achieves a different effect; some strategies remind the reader that the source information is coming from an outside expert, while other strategies demonstrate how well the writer has been able to merge her/his ideas with those of the source. You can learn more about these strategies from our Incorporating Source Materials Effectively handout (www.temple.edu/writingctr/student_resources/avoiding_plagiarism.htm).

Make sure you understand how to paraphrase correctly. Most people misunderstand what paraphrasing really means and don't know how to write an appropriate paraphrase. You can learn more about what paraphrases should involve using our Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism handout (http://www.temple.edu/writingctr/student_resources/avoiding_plagiarism.htm). You can also practice writing paraphrases (http://www.temple.edu/writingctr/student_resources/paraphrasing.htm).

If you are worried about borrowing too much from your source, don't keep your book or your notes directly in front of you while you write. Your goal while you are writing, and especially while you are paraphrasing, should be to use your own words as often as possible. Imagine yourself interpreting the author's argument for a friend or classmate: that's the kind of approach you want to take in your paper. You can always go back to the source to add a quote or correct your interpretation of that source after you've gotten the main points into the paper.

Cite all of your sources completely using an accepted documentation style, like the MLA Style presented in this Citation Guide.
DOCUMENTING BOOKS AND PARTS OF BOOKS

When you are citing a book, you need to be sure to include the author, the title, the place of publication, the publishing company and the date of publication, but always be sure to check the specific listing for your source to make sure that you use the correct punctuation and that you include any additional information required. Note that book titles and journal titles are always italicized, whereas chapter titles and article titles are enclosed in “quotation marks.”

Citations for books usually follow this general pattern:

Author’s lastname, Author’s firstname (if any); Title of book; Place of publication (usually just the city, but include the state or country if the place of publication is not a major city); Publishing company; Date of publication.

Any additional information (edition number, editor, chapter title, page numbers, etc.) remain in black type.

Book by One Author


Book by Two or More Authors


Edited Book


Revised Edition of a Book


Reprinted Book


Introduction, Preface, Foreword, or Afterword in a Book


Book by a Corporation, Organization, Association, or Foundation


Based on the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Sixth Edition. This Writing Center Guide was last revised on 10/20/2005.
Based on the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Sixth Edition, and MLA.org’s Style FAQ. This Writing Center Guide was last revised on 11/1/2005.
DOCUMENTING PERIODICALS

The term “periodicals” refers to magazines, newspapers, and scholarly journals. The citations for these three types of sources are very different, so be sure to check the specific listing for your source to make sure that you have arranged the information in the correct order, that you have used the correct punctuation, and that you have included all relevant information.

Usually periodical citations include the following information:

Author’s lastname, Author’s firstname (if any); Article title; Periodical title; Date of publication; Volume number (except for newspapers); Issue number (if any); Page number.

Any additional information will remain in black type.

NOTE: The citations in this section refer ONLY to print periodicals; if you got your periodical source from an online database (like Lexis Nexis or Proquest) or another electronic medium, use the citations in the DOCUMENTING ELECTRONIC SOURCES section.

Article in a Scholarly Journal Paginated by Volume


Article in a Scholarly Journal Paginated by Issue


Article, Story, or Poem in a Monthly or Bimonthly Magazine


Article, Story, or Poem in a Weekly Magazine


Article in a Daily Newspaper


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**Editorial**


**Letter to the Editor and Reply**


**Theater Review**


**Movie Review**


**Book Review**


**DOCUMENTING ELECTRONIC SOURCES**

Citing electronic sources can be complicated. Sometimes you will not be able to find all the information listed in an ideal works cited for electronic sources. **In this situation, include as much information as you are able to find; ALWAYS include the web address (also called a URL) and the date on which you retrieved the information.** If you are having trouble figuring out a publication date, search the page for a copyright or a “last updated” tag. If you can’t find any reference to a date, use n.d. (which stands for “no date”) in place of the publication date.

**Citations for electronic sources usually follow this general pattern:**

Author’s name (if any); Article title (if any); Website name or publication name; Date of publication or last update (if listed); Date of retrieval; URL.

Volume and issue information will follow the color coding established in the Periodicals section. All other information will remain in **black** type. Be sure to check the specific listing for your source, however, to make sure that you use the correct punctuation and that you include any additional information required.

Note that some citations ask you to provide the total number of paragraphs for the cited article. We recognize that it is sometimes difficult to determine the number of paragraphs (Does a list with
three points count as one paragraph or three paragraphs? Do you count tables?). Make a good faith effort to provide an accurate count, and ask your professor to make a ruling on questions like the ones above. For additional information on citing electronic sources, you can check out the MLA’s Frequently Asked Questions page at http://www.mla.org/publications/style/style_faq/style_faq4.

**Article from an Online Database**


**Newspaper or Magazine Article Posted Online**


**Article in an Electronic Journal**

An electronic journal is a peer-reviewed periodical published online with no print version available.


**Website**


**E-Mail**

Kent, Clark. “Superhuman Powers.” E-mail to the author. 2 Jan. 2002.
LISTSERV OR BLACKBOARD POSTING


DOCUMENTING MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES

Miscellaneous sources can take a number of forms. Generally, more information is better than less. Most audiovisual and performance-type sources include major people who contributed to the production, including directors, composers, writers, and/or performers. Use your judgment to determine who to include for a given citation. For instance, if you were focusing on the screenplay of a television program, you might include the writers (whose work you will be directly analyzing) and omit the performers (who don’t factor heavily into your particular argument).

There is no consistent pattern for miscellaneous sources, but the following color coding will be used in the citations:

- People involved in production; Title of production or series; Title of episode or excerpt;
- Distributor or place of performance; Date of production, composition, or release.

Motion Picture, Videocassette, or DVD


Television or Radio Program


Sound Recording


Performance


Work of Art

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This Writing Center Guide was last revised on 11/1/2005.


**Published Interview**

Published interviews use citations that reflect the format of the publication. That is, interviews published in books will look similar to book citations, while interviews published in periodicals or online will use an adapted version of those citations.


**Personal Interview**