

In-Text Citation Using MLA Style (9th Edition)

This resource provides a brief introduction to using MLA Style for acknowledging sources as you are writing your paper.

Introduction

As you write an academic paper for a college course, you need to let your reader know where you found your information each time you use ideas or wording that you found in other sources – that is, you must document all your sources. One way to document these sources is to follow the guidelines published by the Modern Languages Association (MLA). MLA Style is most often used in English literature essays.

First, in the body of your essay, you identify the authors of your sources followed by the page(s) you got the information from. You must provide this citation whether you are quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing another’s ideas. This provides information to guide your reader to the list of “Works Cited” at the end of your paper to find the complete details of each source.

Identifying the Source

Following MLA Style, you need to include two pieces of information in a sentence when you include someone else’s words, ideas, or facts in your writing.

the author's last name
the page number

Torvald betrays his mistrust of Nora when he asks if her “sweet tooth didn’t get the better” of her while she was shopping earlier (Ibsen 151).

There are multiple ways to include documentation in your writing using MLA style:

1. If you are only using one source, you only need the page number in the parentheses.

In writing about literature, you will often focus your paper on only one literary source. When that’s the case, introduce the author in your introductory paragraph, providing her/his full name, and then using only the surname in subsequent references. Then, following each detailed reference to the text (quoted or summarized), provide only the page number in parentheses. So, once your reader knows that you are writing about a specific play by Ibsen, you should cite quotations from his play this way:

Torvald betrays his mistrust of Nora when he asks if her “sweet tooth didn’t get the better” of her while she was shopping earlier (151).

2. When you are using more than one source, you need to repeat the author’s name in the context of each quotation or paraphrase. The author’s name and page number can be presented in one of two ways:

a. You can include both the author’s last name and the page number in parentheses after the information is given.

Torvald betrays his mistrust of Nora when he asks if her “sweet tooth didn’t get the better” of her while she was shopping earlier (Ibsen 151).

- b. **You can also split up the author's name and the page number.** The author's name is included in your sentence before the quotation, and the page number is in parentheses after the quotation. In this example, Walker is the author of the work being quoted.

Walker does not share this vision of feminist separatism: "a womanist person loves men sexually and/or nonsexually" (173).

When to Document

Your essay or paper needs to have evidence, or support, or proof of the points you are making. The main evidence you use in a literature essay comes in the form of ideas or words from the text you are analyzing. Below is a list of the situations where you should acknowledge the sources of information you use.

1. **Quoting:** if you quote an author's exact words

Walker states that "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender," but does not stop at defining herself as a feminist (173).

2. **Paraphrasing:** if you use your own words, but you use another author's ideas

The aristocratic heroic and kinship values of Germanic society continued to inspire both clergy and laity during Christian times (Smith 323).

3. **Summarizing:** if you summarize one or more points in another author's writing

The Renaissance was seen as a time of upheaval of traditional art forms, paving the way for a more enlightened and broad view of the foreign world (Rahemtulla 988).

4. **Using statistics or facts:** if you use a fact or a statistic that is not common knowledge

The Dutch Crown's overseas territories were vastly increased in 1667 (Charland 301).

Using Sources Well

Quotations and paraphrases in MLA Style are used to provide supporting evidence for your analysis of a text, but should not dominate your essay. Do not rely on your quotations to make your points for you. Generally, follow this pattern:

1. Introduce the quotation by explaining the context. Anticipate what information the reader will need for the quotation or paraphrase to make sense. For example, you might need to explain who is speaking, to whom, and what is happening at this point in the story.
2. Give the quotation or paraphrased information followed by the citation, keeping in mind that the quotation or paraphrase needs to be included as part of a complete sentence.
3. Analyze or interpret the quotation. Explain how the quotation supports the point you are making. Your reader expects you to offer some insight or draw a conclusion from cited material, so do not end a paragraph with quoted material. State why the quoted material matters to your essay.

Selecting Information to Use

Quote only the words or parts of an author's sentence that you want to emphasize. In the following example, there is no benefit to quoting the whole sentence:

The young believe "his physical prowess is prominent, emphasized by how his hands are strong" (Nowlan 510).

Quote only the important words, those you wish to emphasize, as in the following example:

Perhaps naively, they believe that their strength is there and their "hands are strong" (Nowlan 510).

PUNCTUATION OF SHORT QUOTATIONS: the period at the end of each sentence comes **after** the parenthesis. Even if the phrase quoted ends with a period in the original, you must leave the period out if your sentence has not yet ended.

Grammar, Style and Mechanics of the Source

When you integrate quotations into your writing, you need to pay attention to punctuation and grammar. You need to be careful to insert quotations and paraphrases smoothly into your writing so that the grammar matches. To make a quotation match the grammar of the sentence into which you are inserting it, you can:

- a. paraphrase most of the sentence

Torvald thinks of Nora as a "scatterbrain" and "featherbrain" (148), but we know she is actually quite clever.

- b. use square brackets (to add any changes to the original)

Nora begs to be allowed to "let [herself] go just a little bit" (148) this year, but he thinks this attitude is unacceptable, and "just like a woman" (149).

- c. use ellipsis, which means three periods with a space between each period (to leave out parts of the quotation that are not needed).

Ezeudu's funeral overtakes the village: "The ancient drums of death beat, . . . and men dashed about in a frenzy" (Achebe 121).

Note: do not use ellipsis before or after a quoted passage to mark its beginning or end; ellipsis should be used only when words are left out of the middle of a quotation.

Using Long Quotations

If a quotation is longer than four (4) lines, then you need to insert and punctuate it differently. As in the following example, a long quotation is set off from your writing by **beginning a new line, indented one inch from the left margin and double-spaced**. Do not use quotation marks.

After the quoted material, you should offer some insight or analysis of the material just quoted. Begin at the left margin again to complete your paragraph.

Alice Walker tells of the loving creativity that infused her mother's domestic life:

I remember people coming to my mother's yard to be given cuttings from her flowers; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden [T]o this day people drive by our house in Georgia – perfect strangers and imperfect strangers – and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art. (240)

Clearly, creativity and art are not limited, in Walker's view, to the few forms of expression traditionally recognized, but must include more homely, humble and domestic forms of art which women create for themselves, their families and their communities.

PUNCTUATION FOR LONG QUOTATIONS: the period at the end of the sentence comes **before** the page number in parentheses.

Using Information Cited in Another Source (Indirect Sources)

What do you do if you want to use a quotation or a statistic that an author borrowed from another original source that you do not have?

Use "qtd. in" in the parentheses before the citation to show in which secondary source you found the quotation or statistic. For example, if you read an article by Kimmel, and you find information about a study by Kohen cited in Kimmel's article, then your reference to these authors should appear like this:

In a five-year study, Kohen found that one out of four middle-aged men changed jobs near retirement (qtd. in Kimmel 301).

Sources with Multiple Authors

For co-author situations, if there are two authors, include both authors' last names in the citation. If there are three or more authors, provide the first author's last name, followed by the abbreviation "*et al.*" (which is a short form for a Latin expression which means "and others." Notice that you need to put "*et al.*" in italics because it comes from another language).

For example, with a multiple-author source, rather than write:
Smith, Barnes, Kohen, and Sekon provide examples of . . .
simply write:
Smith *et al.* provide examples of . . .

Creating the Works Cited page at the end of your paper

This handout does not cover the details of creating Works Cited pages. Consult the MLA style guide or the Douglas College Library resources for more information about how to cite and the details of formatting necessary, as well as how to format the Works Cited page.