

# Presenting Your Essay – MLA Style

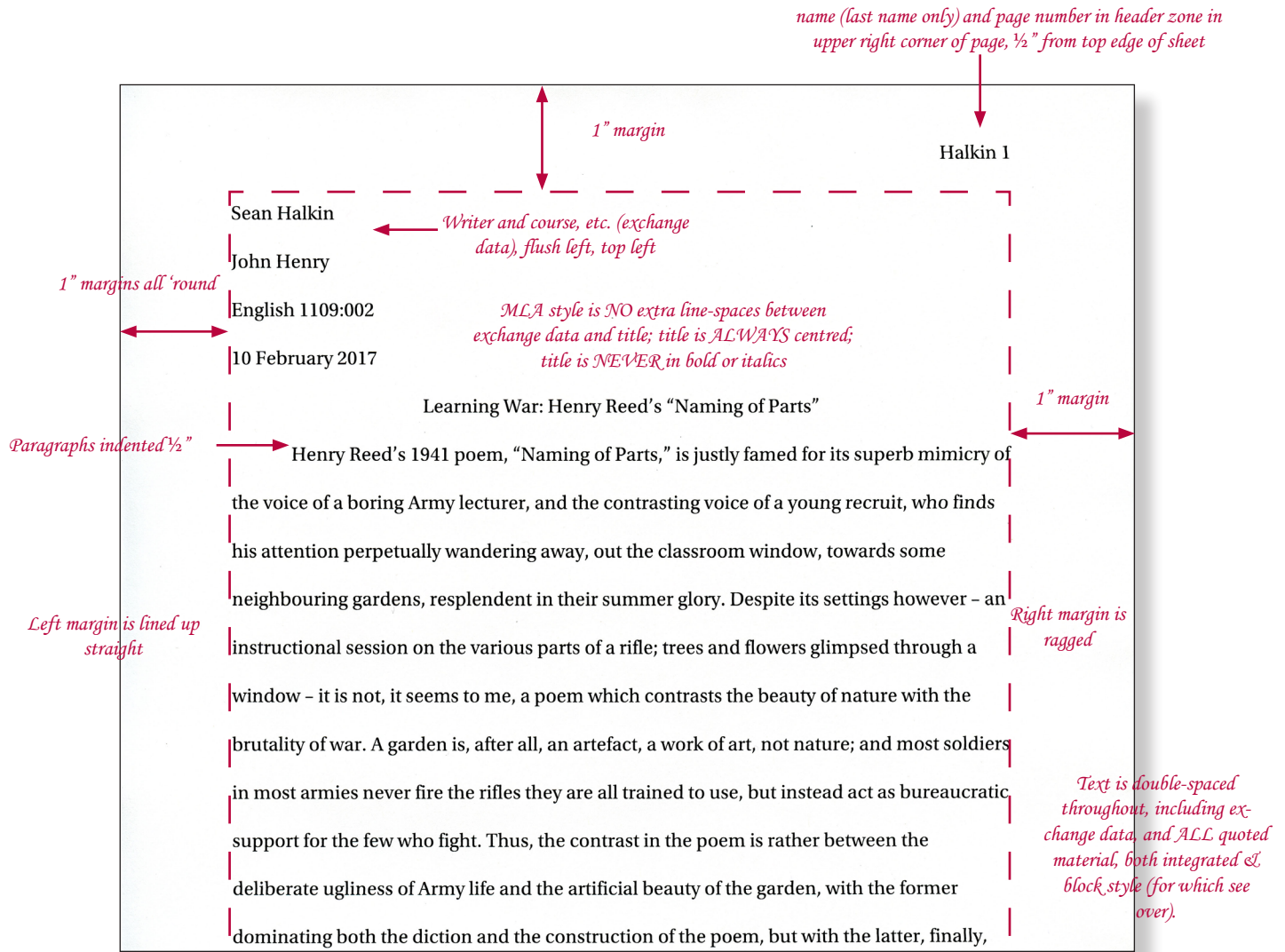


Figure 1: "Title" page

The three figures on this page and the next show how to present your essay in MLA (Modern Language Association) style. Figure 1 shows how to set out your title page; the subsequent figures show how to set out quotations, and how to account for the sources of your quotations using parenthetical references and a "Works Cited" list. The object of both references and list is to make it easy and convenient for your reader to find your sources.

At the top right of each page of the essay, the writer's last name and the page number should appear; use the "header zone" of your word processing program to insert these automatically on every page. Moving to the text zone, the "title page" of your essay is created by placing what we call the *exchange data* at the top left of the first page, followed by the title, centred above the text.

An essay is an exchange between you and your instructor, and consists in two parts, the people involved in the exchange and the context in which the exchange is made. The details are inserted, one line for each, in the following order:

- ☐ the name of the writer (who *presents* the paper);
- ☐ the name of the instructor (who *receives* the paper);
- ☐ course and section number (*where* the exchange takes place);
- ☐ the date (*when* the exchange takes place).

MLA allows no extra spaces between the exchange data and the title, it specifies that the title should be in the same typeface as the main text, and that the title *must* be centred.

Use a serif font for the main text, for example, Times, or Palatino. Double-space the text throughout, *including* any quoted material. To begin a new paragraph, indent the first line by 1/2". **DO NOT** separate paragraphs by using additional spacing. Many word processors, by default, add spacing after each paragraph; you will need to go into the program preferences to eliminate this default spacing. For example, MS Word adds 10 points of space. To eliminate it, you must set the "Space After" (under "Format > Paragraph > Indents & Spacing") to zero points.

Figure 2: Source notation

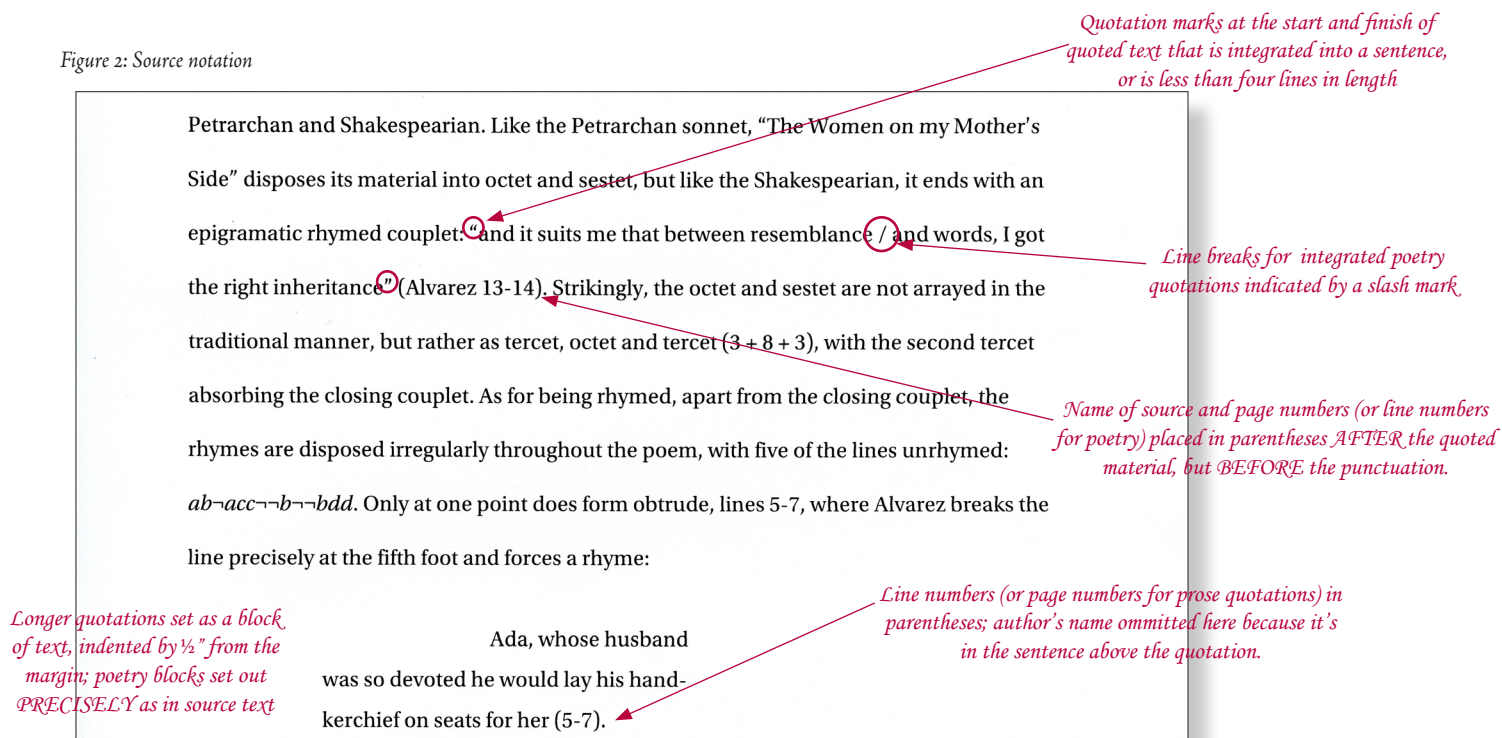
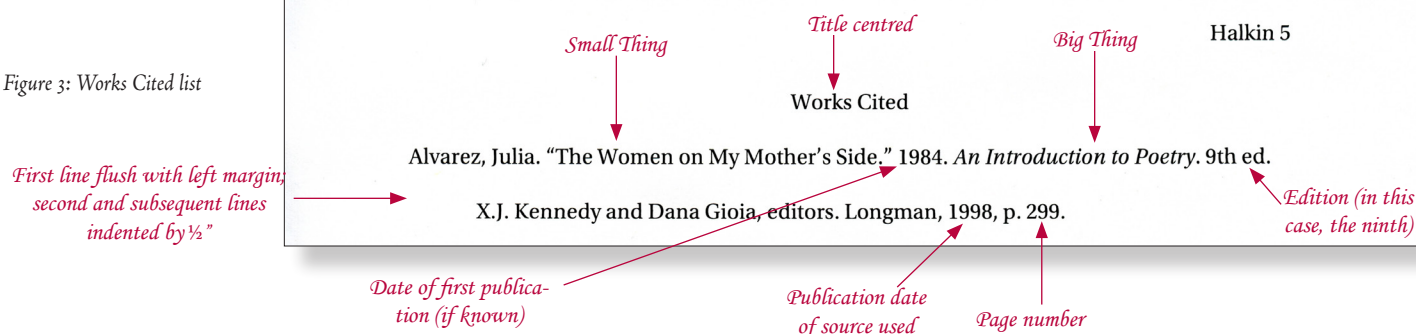


Figure 3: Works Cited list



MLA style is a two-part system. Part A is the notation of sources within the essay text. Part B is a list of those sources (called "Works Cited"). The list is placed on a separate page following the main body of the essay (Figure 3).

Quotations (Part A) are indicated in one of two ways, either by the use of quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quotation – called an integrated quotation – or by setting the text in a separate block, the entire block being indented 1/2" from the left margin; these are called block quotations. Quotations are integrated when they are brief (four lines of text or less), and set out as blocks when they exceed that length. The source of the quotation is indicated in parentheses, author's name first, followed by page number(s), with any necessary punctuation following the parentheses (Figure 2).

Each item in the sources list (Part B) is divided into three parts:

- ❑ **who** wrote it (last name first);
- ❑ **what** it's called;
- ❑ and **where** it originates (i.e., where you found it).

Note that each part of the source listing is followed by a period. Origin can sometimes be further subdivided, because Small Things (essays, articles,

poems, etc.) are usually found inside Big Things (journals, books, etc.), and we must account for the origin of both sorts of Things.

Authors are listed last name first, and first name last, the two separated by a comma. If it is a Small Thing, the title is enclosed in quotation marks; if it is a Big Thing, the title is set in italics. "Title casing" is used for the title, that is, every important word is capitalized, but small words (a/the/in, etc.) are not. Publication data consists in two parts: **who** (publisher); and **when** (date). Publisher, date, and page notations are separated by commas, and publisher's names are conventionally abbreviated (a list of abbreviations can be found in the *MLA Handbook*) by omitting any business references (& Co., for example, or Ltd.).

In the above example, Alvarez's poem was first published in 1984, but was found in a 1998 anthology. The first date is placed directly after the title, the second is part of the publication data, and goes after the publisher's name. The names of the editors of the anthology are not reversed because MLA specifies that second and subsequent names in an entry *not* be reversed. The edition number of the anthology (the ninth) is placed after the title, but before the names of the editors and the publication data. Finally, the page of the anthology on which Alvarez's poem was found is noted.

For further information, for example, how to cite a database source, consult the Library's free guide to MLA style.