MLA: Overview

The Modern Language Association (MLA) format is a set of conventions for documenting sources in written work. It is the standard documentation style in English Studies, but it is also used in other fields. This handout provides basic guidelines and examples; for more information, please see the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (8th ed.).

Sources Documented

In academic writing, you must cite sources for <u>all</u> borrowed information and ideas—not only quoted material but ideas you've put into your own words. Do not cite sources for common knowledge or generally known facts. If in doubt, cite your source.

MLA Documentation

Complete MLA documentation consists of two elements:

- **A parenthetical reference citation** in the body of your paper, commonly after a quotation but anytime you use a borrowed idea, giving the author's last name and page numbers (or line numbers for citations of poetry).
- **A Works Cited list** made up of references at the end of your paper, giving complete publication information for all sources cited in your paper.

Using the MLA Format

General Formatting

An MLA-formatted paper has 12-point Times New Roman font, and is double-spaced. The top right-hand corner of every page must include the author's (i.e., your) last name followed by the page number (e.g., Smith 1). The margins are set to 1". After you have formatted your paper properly, start by writing your full name, your professor's name, the class number, and the submission date. Next, centre your title in the middle of the page; the title is not bold, underlined, or italicized.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;">

Smith 1

John Smith

Dr. Zaius

Engl 231

6 Oct. 2011

Taylor's Troubles with the Natural World in Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes*

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Using Quotations

Paraphrased Material or Quoted Passages: Less than 4 Lines

If you are quoting a poem or written document of fewer than four lines, the quotation must not interrupt the flow of the sentence and follows the same format as the rest of the paragraph. A parenthetical reference citation must be placed at the end of the sentence, but before the period.

Example 1: Author's Name in Parenthetical Reference
All criticism is political (Eagleton 209).

Example 2: Author's Name in Text
According to Eagleton, "the idea that there are 'non-political' forms of criticism is simply a myth which furthers certain political uses of literature all the more effectively" (209).

Example 3: Poetry with the Author's Name in the Text
In his poem "Kubla Khan," Samuel Taylor Coleridge depicts the mad romantic prophet: "And all who heard should see him there, / And all should cry, Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!" (48-50).

If you are borrowing a term, concept, or phrase developed by another writer, you still need to cite your source: At the intersection of language and culture lies a concept that we might call "languaculture" (Agar 60).

Quoted Passages: More than 4 Lines

If you are quoting a poem or written document that is more than four lines, each line must be indented one inch from the left margin, and no quotation marks are added unless included in the original. Place a period (or other appropriate punctuation mark) before the parenthetical reference.

Example 4: Prose Quotation of More than 4 Lines
In her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre,* Alexandra F. Johnston argues that understanding the evidence of dramatic activity in the Middle Ages is fraught with difficulty because
> [n]early all medieval play-texts were ephemeral objects, scripted down for performance purposes only, and the idea of preserving plays in written form did not become common in Britain and Ireland until much later. If medieval plays did come to be written down for long-term preservation it was usually for reasons that had little to do with practical performance. (7-8)

Example 5: Poetry Quotation of More than 4 Lines
"The Waste Land" opens with an image of rebirth:
> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain. (Elliot 1-4)

Items to Include in Every Parenthetical Citation

1. **Authors' Names:** In the citation, an author's name can appear in one of two places: the parenthetical reference, as in example one, or the sentence, as in example two. <u>Do not</u> include the author's name in both the sentence <u>and</u> the parenthetical reference.
   a. This example is **incorrect**: According to Eagleton, "the idea that there are 'non-political' forms of criticism is simply a myth" (Eagleton 209).

2. **Page or Line Numbers:**
   a. For a prose source, whether an article or novel, use the page number. If the work lists neither page nor reference numbers of any kind, the work must be cited in its entirety. In the case of such citations, you still mention the author's name (either in the text, as in example two, or in the reference, as in example one) but you don't give any corresponding page numbers. <u>Do</u> <u>not</u> count unnumbered paragraphs.
   b. For poetry, cite line numbers not page numbers, as in example five.

For Quoted Information from a Source within a Source

Whenever possible, always try to locate and cite the original source instead of using a "second-hand" source. If you must quote second-hand, though, use "qtd. in" followed by the bibliographic details of the original source.

> **Example:** Gadamer argues that tradition "has a justification that is outside the arguments of reason" (qtd. in Eagleton 73).

MLA Works Cited List

Your "Works Cited" section should always start on a new page at the end of your paper, and it must include every source cited in your paper.

To start, type "Works Cited" (without italicizing, bolding, or underlining it) and centre it at the top of your page. Make sure your list is double-spaced, and that each entry contains no extra lines. Alphabetize entries by the first author's last name (for example: Atwood, Margaret) or by the first keyword in the name of a corporate author (The Modern Language Association). If there is no author, move the title to the author position and alphabetize by the first significant word (Beowulf). If there is more than one author for a single entry, list each subsequent author by first name first (e.g. Scholes, Robert, Carl H. Klaus, and Michael Silverman). If there are four or more authors, list only the first author's name followed by et al. (Plag, Ingo, et al.). If you are citing multiple works by the same author, list each entry alphabetically by title, but after the first entry, use three hyphens and a period (---.) in place of the author's name**.**

Books
[Last name, First name. *Title*. Publisher, year.]

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Cat's Table*. McClelland and Stuart, 2011.

---. *In the Skin of a Lion.* Vintage, 1996.
> Note: *In the Skin of a Lion* is also written by Ondaatje, so we use "---." for the second entry.

Translations
[Same as above, but with the translator listed]

Homer. *The Odyssey.* Translated by Robert Fagles, Viking, 1996.

Anonymous Works
[Start with the title of the work, followed by any recent contributors (such as editors or translators), then format the rest as usual]

Donaldson, E. Talbot, translator. *Beowulf*, edited by Nicholas Howe. Norton, 2001.

Graphic Novels
[Include the illustrator, ink artist, colorist, and others if provided]

Moore, Alan. *The Watchmen*, illustrated by Dave Gibbons. DC Comics, 1995.

Pekar, Harvey, writer. *The Quitter*, art by Dean Haspiel. Letters by Pat Brosseau. Vertigo-
  DC Comics, 2005.

Journal Articles
[Last name, First name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, Volume #, Issue #, Year: Pages. Doi (if online source)
Baugh, Albert C. "Improvisation in Middle English Romance." *Proceedings of the American
  Philosophical Society* 130 (1959): 418-454. doi: 10.43634/mdf.1997.2353

Marshall, Mary H. "Theatre in the Middle Ages: Evidence from Dictionaries and Glosses."
  Symposium, vol. 4, no. 1, 1950: 1-39.

A Chapter or Article in an Edited Book
[Last name, First name. "Title of Chapter or Article." *Title of Book*. Editor(s) last name(s) edited. Publisher, year. Pages.]

Mills, David. "Chester's Midsummer Show: Creation and Adaptation." *Festive Drama*. Twycross &
  Johnson. D.S. Brewer, 1996. 132-144.

Encyclopedia or Dictionary Entry
["Entry name." Definition or Entry number. *Title of Encyclopedia or Dictionary*. Edition. Year.]

"Performance." Def. 2a. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed., 1989.

Newspaper or Magazine Article
[Last name, First name. "Title of Article." *Newspaper* Date, edition: Section letter or number.]

Lowey, Mark. "Facing the Techno-gap." *The Calgary Herald,* 11 June 1994: B8.

Web Pages
[Last name, First Name. "Title of Work." *Title of Website*. Publisher or Sponsor (if not available use N.p.), Date of Publication (if nothing is available, use n.d.).Website address. Date of Access.]

Russell, Tony, et al. "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *Owl Purdue Online Writing Lab.* Purdue
U, Oct. 2011. web.ics.purdue.edu/~felluga/241/241/Home.html. Accessed 20 Oct. 2011.

Whamsby, Tim. "Extra Flight Time Won't Ground These Jets." *CBC.ca*. Canadian Broadcasting
Corporation, Sep. 2011. http://www.cbc.ca/news. 6 Oct. 2011.

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Baugh, Albert C. "Improvisation in Middle English Romance." *Proceedings of the American*

Philosophical Society vol. 30, 1959: 418-454*.* http://www.middleenglishromance.org.uk/ 18

Nov. 2010.

Beowulf. Translated by E. Talbot Donaldson. Edited by Nicholas Howe. Norton, 2001.

Homer. *The Odyssey.* Translated by Robert Fagles. Viking, 1996.

Lowey, Mark. "Facing the Techno-gap." *The Calgary Herald* 11 Jun. 1994: B8.

Marshall, Mary H. "Theatre in the Middle Ages: Evidence from Dictionaries and Glosses."

Symposium, vol. 4, no. 1, 1950: 1-39.

Mills, David. "Chester's Midsummer Show: Creation and Adaptation." *Festive Drama*, edited by

Meg Twycross. D.S. Brewer, 1996. 132-144.

Moore, Alan. *The Watchmen*. Illustrated by Dave Gibbons. DC Comics, 1995.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Cat's Table.* McClelland and Stuart, 2011.

---. *In the Skin of a Lion.* Vintage, 1996.