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English 101

14 August 2024

Sample MLA Paper 9th ed.

For many students, college is the first time they are introduced to what is known as “MLA format.” This writing style was developed by the *Modern Language Association* in 1883 as a credible standard of formatting for academic writing and research. MLA format is typically used across the humanities disciplines, such as languages and literatures, cultural studies, and more. In contrast, other disciplines might follow an alternative formatting style, such as American Psychological Association (APA) or Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). However, many general education and college-level courses will require MLA format as a universal standard. It is important to check the expectations set by the professor, to ensure that you are following the correct formatting style for all assignments. Through the examples of in-text citations and the accompanying Works Cited page included in this sample paper, students will be able to correctly replicate characteristics of MLA format in their writing assignments.

First, from the style of the font to the size of the margins, it is important to notice the way this paper is formatted. MLA format uses Times New Roman style font in size twelve, with double-spaced lines, and one-inch margins. On the top, left-hand side of the first page, students include a four-lined heading and a title in the center. Additionally, each page will have its own header along the top, right-hand side, which includes the student’s last name and page number. For each line of text, the spacebar should only be pressed once; there is no additional spacing between headings or body paragraphs in MLA format. For further resources on MLA

specifications, please visit the “Writing Resources” webpage on the *Allan Hancock College Writing Center* website or the *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. While MLA format might seem difficult at first, students will find that the process becomes easier with practice. In addition to how the paper looks, another important aspect of MLA format is how research is cited through in-text citations and the accompanying Works Cited page.

In-text citations in the form of a direct quote is one common example for how research is cited within an MLA formatted paper. Authors must correctly document information that has been borrowed from another source; otherwise, one might be accused of plagiarism. According to the *MLA Handbook*, “plagiarism” is defined as, “...presenting another person’s ideas, words, or entire work as your own,” which is viewed by most academic institutions as an unethical and punishable offense (96). Therefore, the most efficient way to avoid plagiarism and maintain academic integrity is to correctly document sources in your writing.

This paper may be used as a model for how to correctly format in-text citations according to MLA standards. Notice how the source in the paragraph above is accompanied by a “tag,” or introductory phrase, such as, “According to...” Also, take note of how the title of the source is in *italics* style font. Titles are formatted differently depending on the body of the source. For instance, the song title “Uptown Funk” is in quotes, but the song’s album *Uptown Special* is in italics (Mars, et al.); the textbook chapter “Formatting Your Research Project” is also in quotes, but the textbook’s title, *MLA Handbook*, is in italics. If a student is citing a work written by a particular author, the in-text citation will usually use the author’s last name, as well as the location (usually the page number) in parenthesis. The parenthetical is located at the end of the sentence or at the end of the cited information, as shown above.

Perhaps a student is writing an essay about the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. The student may cite the following direct quote like so: Victor finally realizes his creation's struggles when he tells the reader, "I was moved" (Shelley 145). A direct quote will usually be included within the context of the sentence. Other times, when a direct quote is lengthier, like a passage (three lines or more), MLA requires it to be cited as a separately indented section, known as a "block quote." For example:

I was moved. I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent; but I felt there was some justice in his argument... did I not as his maker owe him all the portion of happiness that it was my power to bestow? (Shelley 145)

It is important to understand that the same information can be cited in multiple ways, but a correct citation will always give credit to the source. For instance, the above representations of an in-text citation for the same direct quote are both correct. In fact, the above quote can even be cited another way, by naming the author within the sentence, like so: Shelley depicts Victor's eye-opening realization by telling the reader, "I was moved" (145). Some, but not all professors, might also ask for students to cite the exact paragraph. In this case, the paragraph numbers will be cited within the same parenthesis, like so: (Shelley 145, par. 3) or (Shelley 145, pars. 3-5). Students who are unsure of a particular citation can check with AHC Writing Center staff or a peer tutor to ensure that sources are correctly documented. Additional MLA resources can be found on the Writing Center's website or the *Purdue Online Writing Lab*.

Finally, while a direct quote is the most frequented method for citing a source in-text, other common ways to cite can be through paraphrasing or summarizing information. Similar to a direct quote, any borrowed information that has been paraphrased or summarized will still need to be credited to the appropriate source. The *MLA Handbook* asserts that paraphrasing or

summarizing is an alternative way to document sourced information, but unlike a direct quote, the ideas have been summarized or rewritten into the author's own words (97-99). The previous sentence, for instance, could have included a direct quotation from the *MLA Handbook*; instead, the sourced information was paraphrased to match the flow and tone of the paragraph. Note that this documentation style still includes an in-text citation by providing the title of the source, as well as the page number in parenthesis. In this particular example, the source is a handbook with no author, so only the known or provided information has been included in the in-text citation.

In conclusion, MLA format is a style that students often use to write college-level research essays and assignments. This sample paper models how to correctly format and cite sources within an MLA style essay. This sample paper also includes what MLA refers to as a "Works Cited" (see next page), which must accompany the end of any MLA style essay that references sourced information. The works cited page has additional formatting requirements, according to the source type. In general, sources on the works cited page are listed in alphabetical order and separated by what is known as a "hanging indent." Resources for assisting with MLA format and source documentation can be found on the "Writing Resources" webpage on the *Allan Hancock College Writing Center* website or through the *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Remember, all AHC students are eligible to receive free writing support through the Academic Resource Center. Please ask the Writing Center or Tutorial Center staff if you need help getting started.

Works Cited

- “About the MLA.” *Modern Language Association*, 2023, <https://www.mla.org/About-Us/About-the-MLA>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2024.
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- “Writing Resources.” *Allan Hancock College Writing Center*, 2022, <https://www.hancockcollege.edu/writing/writing.php>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2024.