Citing Sources: MLA

Using the 2016 *MLA Handbook: 8th Edition*

Introduction

**Note**
All parenthetical citations in this guide of page numbers from the MLA Handbook refer to the *MLA Handbook: 8th edition*, published in 2016 and referenced here as *MLA*. Many of the explanations and examples also come directly from the mla.org website with permissions granted in the *Terms of Service* found on the website.

The Writer’s Responsibilities:
1. **Think** “about the sources [you] are documenting” (*MLA* 4).
2. **Select** “the information about the [source you] are documenting that is appropriate to the project [you] are creating” (*MLA* 4).
3. **Organize** “[the entry] logically and without complication” (*MLA* 4).

A Summary of What Has Changed in the New Edition:
- Any source in any format can be documented easily, using a template containing common elements for Works Cited entries. (See the final page of this handout for the Template.)
- Works Cited entries are based on “containers,” of which there are three kinds:
  1. **a self-contained source**: a source can stand alone (a book, a movie, etc.)
  2. **a source in a container**: a source can be “in a container” (an article in a newspaper, a song on a CD, a poem in an anthology, an entry in a specialized dictionary)
  3. **a source in a container in a container**: sometimes a source’s container is also inside another container (an article in a journal found in a database, an image in an article found in an online document, an episode in a television show series viewed on a digital service)
- Depending on the author’s purpose for using a source “… there is often more than one correct way to document a source” (*MLA* 4).
Formatting a Research Paper

This guide was collected and adapted from *The MLA Style Center* (which can be found at [style.mla.org](http://style.mla.org)) by Wor-Wic’s Arts & Humanities Faculty.

**Note**
If your instructor has specific requirements for the format of your research paper, check them before preparing your final draft. The most common formatting is presented here. When you submit your paper, be sure to keep a secure copy.

**Margins**
Except for the running head (see below), leave margins of one inch at the top and bottom and on both sides of the text.

**Text Formatting**
Always choose an easily readable typeface (e.g., Times New Roman or Ariel) in which the regular type style contrasts clearly with the italic, and set it to a standard size (e.g., 12 points). Do not justify the lines of text at the right margin: align text LEFT; turn off any automatic hyphenation feature in your writing program. Double-space the entire research paper, including quotations, notes, and the list of works cited. Indent the first line of a paragraph half an inch from the left margin. Indent set-off quotations half an inch as well (for examples, see 76–80 in the *MLA Handbook*). Leave one space after a period or other concluding punctuation mark, unless your instructor prefers two spaces.

**Heading and Title**
A research paper does not need a title page. Instead, beginning one inch from the top of the first page and flush with the left margin, type your name, your instructor’s name, the course number (and session, if required by your instructor) and the date (day, month, year) on separate lines, double-spacing the lines. On a new, double-spaced line, center the title (fig. 1). Do not italicize or underline your title, put it in quotation marks or boldface, or type it in all capital letters. Follow the rules for capitalization in the *MLA Handbook* (67–68), and italicize only the words that you would italicize in the text.

Do not use a period after your title or after any heading in the paper (e.g., Works Cited). Begin your text on a new, double-spaced line after the title, indenting the first line of the paragraph half an inch from the left margin. (Note: If your teacher requires a title page, format it according to the instructions you are given.)
Fig. 1. The top of the first page of a research paper.

Running Head with Page Numbers
Number all pages consecutively throughout the research paper in the upper right-hand corner, half an inch from the top and flush with the right margin. Type your last name, followed by a space, before the page number (fig. 2). Do not use the abbreviation p. before the page number or add a period, a hyphen, or any other mark or symbol. Your writing program will probably allow you to create a running head of this kind that appears automatically on every page. Some teachers prefer that no running head appear on the first page. Follow your teacher’s preference.

Fig. 2. The running head of a research paper.
In-text Citations
An in-text citation points clearly and explicitly to a source on the list of Works Cited. In other words, for every entry on your Works Cited page, there should be at least one related in-text citation; for every individual source cited in your essay, there should be a corresponding entry on the Works Cited page. In-text citations should be placed in such a way that they do not interrupt the flow of your sentence; most often you should put them at the ends of your sentences. When your sentence ends with a quotation, place the citation to the right of the closing quotation mark and then end your sentence with a period (see models below).

The citations in this section will refer to the following source (entries on a Works Cited page should be double-spaced):


The simplest in-text citation contains the author’s last name and the relevant page number of the source:

As can be seen, “The Arthurian legend enters its fifteenth century with undiminished power and authority, a remarkable achievement for a monarch, or a myth, of any age” (Goodman 115).

However, if you include the author’s name in a signal phrase in your text, only the page number appears in the citation:

As Goodman explains, “The Arthurian legend enters its fifteenth century with undiminished power and authority, a remarkable achievement for a monarch, or a myth, of any age” (115).

Remember that varying the placement of the signal phrase does not change the placement of the citation:

“The Arthurian legend enters its fifteenth century with undiminished power and authority,” Goodman explains, which is “a remarkable achievement for a monarch, or a myth, of any age” (115).

“The Arthurian legend enters its fifteenth century with undiminished power and authority, a remarkable achievement for a monarch, or a myth, of any age,” explains Goodman (115).
Source Document Formats: PDF vs HTML

Goodman’s article, housed in Gale’s Artemis Literary Sources, is formatted as a .pdf (Portable Document Format), and so a printout of that article is actually a photograph of each page. The actual page numbers appear in a printout of the article. But what do you do if your article is formatted as .html — whether you accessed that article online or in one of the databases?

A printout of an .html article may contain chapter, section, or paragraph markers, so you can use those in place of page numbers. Use the following abbreviations in your citation: chapter = ch.; section = sec.; paragraph = par. Do not, however, number the paragraphs yourself.

If no divisions are indicated within an .html article, cite it by the author’s last name only, either as an in-text citation or as a signal phrase. Here is an article from the databases formatted in .html:


The two ways of citing the article above:

In comparing T.H. White to Sir Thomas Malory, it becomes clear that “White takes far greater care in describing character and motivation, factors often slighted in epics of action” (Kellman).

OR

Martin Kellman argues that “White takes far greater care [than Sir Thomas Malory] in describing character and motivation, factors often slighted in epics of action.”

NOTE: For the purposes of a research assignment, your instructor may require you to submit printouts of the articles you have used. If your printout is in .pdf format, you will use the actual page number in your in-text citations; however, if the printout is in .html format, your instructor may ask you to use the page number from your printout for ease in locating the source of your citation. Be sure to check the specific requirements of your assignment when constructing your in-text citations.
Placement of the List of Works Cited
The list of works cited appears at the end of the paper, after any endnotes. Begin the list on a new page. The list contains the same running head as the main text. The page numbering in the running head continues uninterrupted throughout. For example, if the text of your research paper (including any endnotes) ends on page 10, the list of works cited begins on page 11. Center the title, Works Cited, an inch from the top of the page (fig. 3). (If the list contains only one entry, make the heading Work Cited.) Double-space between the title and the first entry. Begin each entry flush with the left margin; if an entry runs more than one line, indent the subsequent line or lines half an inch from the left margin. This format is sometimes called hanging indention, and you can set your writing program to create it automatically for a group of paragraphs. Hanging indention makes alphabetical lists easier to use. Double-space the entire list. Continue it on as many pages as necessary.

Fig. 3. The top of the first page of a works-cited list.
The Template (see the final page for a full-sized version)
The template is a simple guide for organizing your information for each entry in your Works Cited page.

Note the **punctuation** used after each item on the Template is in bold in Fig. 4.0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Author.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Title of source.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Title of container,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Other contributors,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Version,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Number,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Publisher,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Publication date,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Location.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Formatting Rules for Items in a Works Cited Entry:**

Place **titles** in *italics* if the source is self-contained and independent.

Place titles in **“quotation marks”** if the source is contained in a larger work. Examples: the title of an article from a magazine is in quotation marks; the title of that magazine is in italics.

The **title of the container** is normally *italicized*.

Generally, write the full **date** as it is given, ordered as **day, month, and year**, and using abbreviations for all months except May, June, and July, e.g., 13 Nov. 2016.

The **location** of an online source is generally indicated by the URL. **Omit the URL**, however, for a database source; use URLs **only** for a source from the Internet.

**Fig. 4.** The “Template.”
Examples of Works Cited Entries

You will find examples of Works Cited entries on the following pages, arranged by type of container. You will find a copy of the template on the final page of this document. The parenthetical superscript numbers are not part of the entries—they are included in order to show the related template number.

Type 1: A Self-Contained Source

Some examples of “single container” sources: novels, entire books, movies, entire record albums, an entire web site, an entire TV series, and an entire textbook.

A Movie
Chaplin, Charlie. (1) *Modern Times*. (2 & 3) 1936. (8)

A Book

An Anthology

A Website
Maryland, Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services. (1) *Division of Parole and Probation*. (2 & 3) www2.dpscs.state.md.us/parole_and_probation. (9) Accessed 17 May 2016.
Type 2: A Source in a Container

Physical Sources in a Container
Sources that are found inside a single container are those that exist in the physical world — those you can actually hold in your hands. Such sources include articles from newspapers, magazines, or journals; songs from albums; and plays, short stories, or poems that appear in a print collection.

An Article in a Journal

A Short Story in an Anthology

A Poem in an Anthology

A Play in an Anthology

A Song on an Album
Springsteen, Bruce, lyricist. (1) “You’re Missing,” (2) performance by Bruce Springsteen.


**Digital Sources in a Container**
Another type of source found inside a single container is a source located inside an electronic or “virtual” source. Examples of this type of source could include articles posted on blogs; articles in online newspapers, online magazines, or other websites; status updates on Facebook; Tweets on Twitter or entries from other social media; articles in online encyclopedias or dictionaries; and stand-alone documents found in online databases. Since websites can change, you should add the date you accessed them for these entries.

**An Article in an Online Journal**

**A Video on a Website**

An Article in an Online Encyclopedia


Posts, Comments, Tweets, etc. on Social Media
Cy realist. (1) “Hello 1950’s? You left your oppressive gender roles in our century. Can you come pick them up?” (2) *Pinterest*, (3) 13 May 2016, (8)

@DinaLRelles. (1) “just called a friend on the phone for no reason other than to talk and I can't remember the last time I did such a thing.” (2) *Twitter*, (3) 17 May 2016, 7:17 pm, (8) twitter.com/DinaLRelles/status/732665798410571776. (9) Accessed 22 May 2016.


Single-Container Sources Found in an Online Database:


A File from an Online Media Distribution Service:
Swindell, Cole and Ashley Gorley, lyricists. (1) “You Should Be Here,” (2) performance by Cole Swindell. (4) Distributed by *iTunes*, (7) April 2016. (8)
Video Embedded in an Online Encyclopedia


Audio Podcast from a Website

Article in an Online Encyclopedia

Definition in an Online Dictionary

Text of Historical Document from Website
U.S. Constitution.(2) Amend. II, Sec. 3. www.archives.gov

Song on an Album Found on iTunes
Springsteen, Bruce, lyricist.(1) “You’re Missing,”(2) performance by Bruce Springsteen.(4) The Rising,(3) Columbia / iTunes,(7) 2002,(8) track 12.(9)
Type 3: An Item in a Container in a Container

Sometimes the source you are working with is in a “container” that itself is housed inside another “container.” Some common examples of this are articles that are published in journals, magazines, or newspapers that are housed in one or more online databases. (Hint: an online database is like a virtual library. Instead of physical shelves loaded with paper documents, everything exists in digital form.) Others may be items from a sub-section of a large website that has many divisions. Below are some examples of sources that may be housed in 2 or more “containers.”

Here are some examples of sources you might find in one of the online databases available through Wor-Wic’s library services.

Charts, Articles, Speeches, Government Reports, and Videos in Databases


Song Lyrics from an Album, Found on a Website

www_azlyrics_com_lyrics_brucespringsteen_youremissing_html

Type 4, Sources in a container in a container in a container!
On rare occasion, a source may have more than two containers. Here is an example of a source that is found housed inside multiple “containers”:

Article from an Edited Anthology Collected in a Larger Source Found in a Viewpoints Database
# MLA Practice Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Author.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Title of source.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**CONTAINER 1**

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<td>8</td>
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**CONTAINER 2**

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</table>
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