

MLA Primer

Get Started Using MLA Format to Write College Papers

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The information contained in this presentation conforms to the 8th Edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Always follow the instructions provided by your professor.

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Disclaimer

What is MLA?

- MLA is a format for writing essays and papers developed by the Modern Language Association in 1985.
- While many students know MLA as a citation style, the *MLA Handbook* provides guidance on grammar, mechanics, word use, and research.
- MLA format is preferred by college professors because it balances ease of use for both the reader and the writer.

Core Components of MLA

- Header
- Text
- Parenthetical citations
- Works cited

A Word About Fonts and Spacing

- Most word processors allow a choice of font.
- MLA requires the use of a clear, readable, 12-point font. Times New Roman is always a good choice.
- Avoid irregular fonts like *Chiller*, **Comic Sans**, or ***Magneto***.
- Because MLA uses italics for titles, use a font whose regular style is easily differentiable from its *italic style*.
- All parts of an MLA paper should be double-spaced.

Header

- Each page in MLA format should contain your last name and page number.
- The first page, and only the first page, should have the following information at the top of the page: Student Name, Professor Name, Class Name, Date.

Lee 1

Lee, Harper
Professor Capote
Composition I
1 Jan 2017

Text

- Include a title beneath the header. The title should be in the same font and style as the rest of the paper. Don't boldface or italicize your title.
- The body of the paper should be double-spaced with indented paragraphs.
- Use the tab key at the beginning of each new paragraph to create the indent as opposed to hitting the space bar five times.

Lee, Harper

Professor Capote

Composition I

1 January 4, 2017

Lee 1

To Kill a Mockingbird

When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. When it healed, and Jem's fears of never being able to play football were assuaged, he was seldom self-conscious about his injury. His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right; when he stood or walked, the back of his hand was at right angles to his body, his thumb parallel to his thigh. He couldn't have cared less, so long as he could pass and punt.

Parenthetical Citations

- When you quote from a source, a parenthetical citation is required.
- A parenthetical citation is also required when you refer to a source, paraphrase material from a source, or use an argument or example from a source.
- Parenthetical citations always contain a signal word or phrase that corresponds to the entry in the “Works Cited” page.
- A page number should also be included, if possible.

Common parenthetical citations:

(Lee 1) Author name followed by page number

(“Fifty Ways”) Title of article, webpage, or song

Parenthetical Citations (continued)

- The signal word or phrase used often depends on the type of source.
- When the author is known, use the author's name as the signal word. In the case of multiple authors, use the name of the author listed first.
- When the author is a committee, agency, or corporation, use that name.
- When no author is listed or the author is not known, use a shortened form of the title that clearly signals which of the Works Cited entries you are referencing.
- For instance, if the title of the article is “Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover,” use “Fifty Ways” as your signal phrase.

Works Cited

- Every source referenced in a parenthetical citation should have an entry on the Works Cited page.
- Do not include entries for works that are not referenced in a parenthetical citation.
- The Works Cited page should be its own page, in the same font as the rest of the paper, double-spaced, and have a “hanging” paragraph style.
- The information included in the entry depends largely on the type of source.

Works Cited (continued)

- To the right is the general form for any entry.
- Fill in the information pertinent to your source, and omit the rest.
- Instead of trying to remember the form, use your knowledge of the source to look up the correct form of the citation.

1 Author.
Copeland, Edward.

2 Title of source.
"Money."

CONTAINER 1

3 Title of container,
The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen,

4 Other contributors,
edited by Copeland and Juliet McMaster,

5 Version,

6 Number,

7 Publisher,
Cambridge UP,

8 Publication date,
1997.

9 Location.
pp. 131–48.

Image courtesy of: <https://style.mla.org/works-cited-a-quick-guide/>