

# citing sources mla

## The Importance of Citing Sources MLA

**citing sources mla** is a fundamental practice for academic integrity and scholarly communication. It ensures that you give credit to the original authors of the ideas and information you incorporate into your work, thereby avoiding plagiarism. Proper MLA citation also allows your readers to locate and verify the sources you used, strengthening the credibility and authority of your research. This comprehensive guide will delve into the intricacies of MLA citation, covering everything from in-text citations to the Works Cited page, and will illuminate why mastering this style is crucial for any student or researcher. We will explore common source types and how to format them accurately, ensuring your academic writing adheres to the highest standards of scholarship.

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## What is MLA Style?

MLA style, developed by the Modern Language Association, is a widely adopted citation format, particularly prevalent in the humanities, arts, and literature. Its primary purpose is to provide a consistent and standardized method for acknowledging the work of others and to guide readers to the original sources. Adhering to MLA guidelines ensures that your academic work is clear, organized, and credible, demonstrating your understanding of scholarly conventions.

The MLA system is built upon two main components: in-text citations and a Works Cited page. In-text citations, typically appearing in parentheses within the body of your paper, briefly identify the source of information.

The Works Cited page, located at the end of your document, provides a complete alphabetical list of all the sources you have consulted and cited. This dual system creates a seamless flow for your readers, allowing them to easily cross-reference the information within your text with the full bibliographic details of your sources.

## **Why is Citing Sources Essential?**

The imperative to cite sources stems from a core principle of academic honesty: avoiding plagiarism. Plagiarism, the act of presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own without proper attribution, is a serious offense with significant consequences, including failing grades and damage to one's academic reputation. Proper citation is your safeguard against unintentional plagiarism, ensuring that you are always giving credit where credit is due.

Beyond academic integrity, citing sources enhances the authority and credibility of your own work. By referencing reputable and relevant sources, you demonstrate that your research is well-informed and grounded in existing scholarship. This practice also allows your readers to explore the topic further by consulting your sources, fostering a deeper engagement with the subject matter. It shows that you have engaged critically with the material and have built upon the work of others.

## **Understanding MLA In-Text Citations**

In-text citations in MLA are concise references embedded within the text of your paper. Their purpose is to inform your reader precisely where a piece of information, a quote, or an idea originated. The most common form involves a parenthetical citation, which usually includes the author's last name and the page number where the information can be found. For example, if you are quoting or paraphrasing from a book by John Smith on page 45, your in-text citation would appear as (Smith 45).

The placement of in-text citations is crucial for clarity. Generally, they should follow the quotation or paraphrased information, just before the punctuation mark that ends the sentence. However, if the author's name is already mentioned in the sentence, you only need to include the page number in parentheses. For instance, if you write, "According to John Smith, the theory is widely accepted," your citation would simply be (45).

## Basic Parenthetical Citations

The foundational element of MLA in-text citation is the parenthetical citation. When you incorporate a direct quote or paraphrase material from a source, you must include an in-text citation. The standard format is the author's last name followed by the page number from which the information was taken, enclosed in parentheses. This allows your reader to quickly identify the origin of the material.

For example, if you are referencing a point made by Jane Doe in her book on page 78, your sentence might conclude with: "The implications of this finding are far-reaching" (Doe 78).

## Citations with Block Quotes

When quoting a passage of four or more lines from a source, you should format it as a block quote. This involves indenting the entire quote one inch from the left margin, double-spacing it, and omitting quotation marks. The parenthetical citation for a block quote is placed after the final punctuation mark of the quoted passage, rather than before it.

Consider this example:

The profound impact of technological advancement on societal structures cannot be overstated. As scholars have observed:

The rapid evolution of digital communication has reshaped interpersonal relationships,  
leading to new forms of social interaction and community building.  
This transformation necessitates a re-evaluation of traditional sociological models  
to accurately capture the complexities of modern human connection.  
(Johnson 112)

## Citations for Indirect Sources

Sometimes, you may encounter information in a source that was originally published elsewhere. This is known as an indirect source or a "cited-in" source. When you cite material from an indirect source, you should acknowledge both the original author and the source in which you found their work. In the in-text citation, you typically mention the original author and then use the abbreviation "qtd. in" followed by the author and page number of the secondary source.

For instance, if you are citing a quote by Robert Green that you found in a book by Mary White on page 55, your in-text citation would look like this: (Green qtd. in White 55).

## **Citing Multiple Authors**

When citing sources with multiple authors, the MLA format varies depending on the number of authors. For works with one or two authors, list all their last names in the in-text citation. For example, if a book is co-authored by Emily Carter and David Lee, and you are referencing material from page 90, your citation would be (Carter and Lee 90).

For works with three or more authors, you list only the first author's last name, followed by the abbreviation "et al." (which means "and others"). So, if a book has authors Smith, Jones, Williams, and Brown, and you are citing from page 120, the citation would be (Smith et al. 120).

## **Constructing the MLA Works Cited Page**

The Works Cited page is a comprehensive list of all the sources you have cited within your paper. It appears at the end of your document and serves as a roadmap for your readers, enabling them to locate the full bibliographic information for each source. Each entry on the Works Cited page is meticulously formatted according to MLA guidelines to ensure consistency and clarity.

The Works Cited page should be titled "Works Cited" and centered at the top of a new page. The entries are listed in alphabetical order by the author's last name (or by the title if no author is listed). Each entry is double-spaced, both within and between entries, and uses a hanging indent, meaning the first line of each entry is flush with the left margin, and subsequent lines are indented by half an inch.

## **Core Elements of a MLA Entry**

The MLA Handbook outlines nine core elements that should be included in most bibliographic entries. While not every source will have all of these elements, understanding them provides a strong foundation for creating accurate citations. These elements are presented in a specific order and with particular punctuation.

The nine core elements are:

- Author.
- Title of Source.
- Title of Container,
- Other Contributors,
- Version,
- Number,
- Publisher,
- Publication Date,
- Location.

## Formatting Common Source Types

Different types of sources require specific formatting for their Works Cited entries. Mastering the nuances of citing various media is essential for thorough and accurate MLA citation. This section will outline the formats for some of the most frequently encountered source types.

### Books

Citing a book in MLA format requires information about the author, the title of the book, and the publisher, along with the publication year. For a single-authored book, the format is as follows:

Author's Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, Year of Publication.

For example:

Smith, John. *The History of Modern Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

### Journal Articles

Journal articles are typically cited using the author's name, the title of the article, the title of the journal, volume and issue numbers, publication date, and page numbers. If the article is found online through a database, you will also include the database name and a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) or URL.

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, vol. ,

no. , Publication Date, pp. Page Range. *Database Name*, DOI or URL.

For example:

Doe, Jane. "The Impact of Social Media on Political Discourse." *Journal of Communication Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2021, pp. 45-62. *JSTOR*, doi:10.1080/12345678.2021.1234567.

## Websites

Citing websites requires careful attention to detail. You will typically include the author (if available), the title of the specific page or article, the name of the website, the publisher (if different from the website name), the date of publication or last update, and the URL. It's also recommended to include an access date.

Author's Last Name, First Name (if known). "Title of Page/Article." *Name of Website*, Publisher (if different), Date of Publication/Update, URL. Accessed Day Month Year.

For example:

Miller, Sarah. "Understanding MLA Formatting." *Academic Writing Hub*, 15 Oct. 2023, [www.academicwritinghub.com/mla-formatting](http://www.academicwritinghub.com/mla-formatting). Accessed 10 Jan. 2024.

## Other Common Sources

MLA style provides specific formats for a wide array of source types beyond books and articles. This includes citing newspapers, magazines, interviews, films, television episodes, musical compositions, and artworks. The key is to identify the essential elements for each medium and arrange them according to MLA guidelines.

For instance, a newspaper article citation might look like this:

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Name of Newspaper*, Day Month Year, pp. Page Numbers.

And a film citation:

Title of Film. Directed by Director's First Name Last Name, Performance by Actor's First Name Last Name, Studio, Year of Release.

## FAQ

### **Q: What is the most common mistake students make when citing sources in MLA?**

A: The most common mistake is an inconsistency in formatting. Students often forget to apply the hanging indent to the Works Cited page, or they might mix

up the punctuation between elements. Another frequent error is the omission of crucial information like publication dates or DOIs for online sources.

### **Q: When should I use an author-page citation versus just a page number in MLA in-text citations?**

A: You should use the author-page citation (e.g., Smith 45) when the author's name is not mentioned in the sentence itself. If you have already named the author in your sentence (e.g., "Smith argues that..."), then you only need to include the page number in parentheses (45) after the referenced information.

### **Q: How do I cite a source with no author in MLA?**

A: If a source has no author, you begin the Works Cited entry with the title of the source. The title should be italicized if it is a standalone work (like a book or website) or placed in quotation marks if it is part of a larger work (like an article or chapter). The entry is then alphabetized by this title.

### **Q: What is a DOI and why is it important for citing online journal articles in MLA?**

A: A DOI (Digital Object Identifier) is a unique alphanumeric string assigned to a digital object, such as a journal article, that is used to identify it. It is the most stable and preferred way to cite online journal articles because it will remain constant even if the URL of the article changes. Including the DOI in your Works Cited entry ensures readers can reliably locate the source.

### **Q: How do I cite a source that has been translated into another language?**

A: When citing a translated work, you typically list the original author first, followed by the title of the translated work. Then, you include the name of the translator(s) after the word "translated by." The publisher and publication date follow.

Example: Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quixote*. Translated by Edith Grossman, Vintage Books, 2003.

### **Q: Can I cite personal interviews in MLA format? If**

## **so, how?**

A: Yes, personal interviews can be cited. The Works Cited entry usually includes the name of the interviewee, the description of the interview (e.g., "Personal interview," "Telephone interview"), the date of the interview, and the location of the interview (city and state if in person, or indicate if conducted via phone or email).

Example: Johnson, David. Personal interview. 15 Nov. 2023.

## **Q: What is the difference between "et al." and listing all authors in MLA citations?**

A: In MLA style, you list all authors' last names in the in-text citation if there are one or two authors. For works with three or more authors, you list only the first author's last name followed by "et al." in the in-text citation. However, on the Works Cited page, you should list all authors up to ten. For works with more than ten authors, list the first ten authors followed by "et al."

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