MLA Format FAQ’s

Q: Why are there so many different documentation styles?

A: The different styles of documentation were developed within specific academic fields to meet the needs of those particular fields. APA style, used in the social sciences, prioritizes the date of the publication; it also leaves out first names because so many scientific studies have multiple authors. MLA style, used in the humanities, leaves the date near the end and includes the author’s first name. The Chicago/Turabian style is used for history and other fields in the humanities, and offers more emphasis on extensive footnotes and endnotes.

Q: What is an in-text citation?

A: The term “in-text citation” simply refers to an author’s name and a page number contained within parentheses at the end of one of your sentences. You should have one of these citations for every quotation, summary, or paraphrase in your paper. These citations tell the reader to look for that name in your Works Cited list at the end of your paper (your Bibliography) to find more information about where to find that source. The page number in the in-text citation tells the reader where to look in that book or article to find the quotation or information.

Q: Do I use a comma between the author’s name and the page number in my in-text citation?

A: No. Simply write the author’s last name and a number. Do not use a comma or put a “p.” or a “pg.” before the number.

Q: Can I call my Works Cited page a “Bibliography”?

A: No. Leave a one-inch margin at the top of the page and put the words “Works Cited” in the middle of the page at the top. Do not underline these words, put them in quotation marks, or put them in italics. Double-space under these words and then begin your entries.
Q: Do I include the middle initials of authors in the Works Cited entries?

A: Yes.

Q: Can I include works in my Works Cited list that are not cited in my paper?

A: No. Works Cited means they are actually cited (summarized, quoted, or paraphrased) in your paper. If you would like, you can include another page called “Works Consulted” which lists works that you used in your research but did not cite in your paper.

Q: Can I use endnotes in MLA format?

A: Yes. Put your endnotes on a sheet of paper at the end of your paper with the title “Notes” centered at the top of the page. P/H states, “For each note, indent five spaces, raise the number above the line, leave one space, and begin the note. Double space, and if the note continues on the next line, begin that line at the left-hand margin.” It’s also good to know that Microsoft Word will automate endnotes for you, so that you can simply adjust margins, etc., to fit MLA guidelines.

Q: How do I know when I need to indent a long quotation?

A: In MLA format, any quotation that is longer than four typed lines (in your paper) must be set off by indenting the quotation one inch or ten spaces from the left margin. These longer quotations are usually set off with a colon. Do not indent the right margin, and do not single-space these indented quotations. At the end of the indented quotation, you will put a period, then the parenthetical citation outside of the punctuation.

Q: Isn’t that backwards from the usual way of punctuating citations?

A: Yes. In-text citations place the parenthetical citation within the final punctuation mark in the sentence, while indented quotations put the citation outside of the punctuation.

Q: Do I put the URL in my in-text citation for a web source?
A: No. You will put either the last name of an author or a brief title of the web article or website. This brief word should be listed in your Works Cited, where the entry will provide full documentation information, such as date accessed and the URL.

Q: Do I list all authors in the in-text citation if there are multiple authors?

A: If there are two or three authors, list all of their names in the in-text citation. However, if there are more than three authors, you may list them all or use the term *et al.*, which means “and others,” after the first name.

Q: What do I do if I have several sources written by the same author?

A: In your in-text citation, list the author’s last name, a comma, and then a brief title of the work you are citing. In the Works Cited page, list each work by the author separately, alphabetized by the titles.

Q: What is a “dropped quotation”?

A: Any quotation that is not introduced and integrated into your own sentence with a signal phrase is “dropped.” For instance, if you just begin a sentence with the quotation itself and do not include a phrase like “Smith persuasively argues” to introduce the quotation, you have “dropped” the quotation. This is considered a mistake. Always incorporate quotations into your own sentences by introducing, identifying, and evaluating their authors.

Q: How do I handle a source that is quoted within another source?

A: It’s always best to find and use the original source. If you cannot do this for some reason, name the original author, and then indicate that this author is quoted in another source by writing “qtd. in” in the in-text citation. For example, you would write: (Newman, qtd. in Mazor 33). On your Works Cited page, we would see only the Mazor entry, not the Newman entry.