

Writing a Paper Using MLA Documentation Style

The MLA offers guidelines for paper research and documentation used in the Cuesta College English Division. Follow the MLA guidelines below:

- Double-space all lines without extra spacing between paragraphs.
- Direct quotes—any term, phrase, phrases, sentence, and/or sentences repeated directly from outside source material—must be surrounded with quotation marks and cited.
- Paraphrases of any idea or ideas taken from outside source material and explained in one's own words without using any words from the outside source—must be cited.
- Surrounded by parentheses, citations should be placed at the end of each sentence that contains a direct quote or paraphrase and should include only the last name of the author, one space, and then the page number of the document upon which the information originally appears—i.e. (Aaron 223). If the article does not have an author, use either the editor's last name or the first word of the article in quotation marks—i.e. ("Shakespeare" 32). Begin a parenthetical reference as it is listed in the works cited.
- Citations should be synthesized into one's own paragraphs of writing using the following three steps:
 1. Introduce the quote or paraphrase with one or more of the following: the author's or speaker's name and his/her authority on the subject, the topic and/or general idea of the quote, and/or the periodical or article title from which you are quoting. If the source is from the Internet, introduce the quote with the Web site title from which you are quoting.
 2. Quote, paraphrase, or write a sentence with quoted words and paraphrased ideas from the outside source. If the quote is more than four lines long once typed, create a block quote by indenting one inch from the left margin only, still double-spaced but not surrounded with quote marks. Line breaks in a poem or a play must be indicated with a backslash (\). Finish the quote or paraphrase with a parenthetical citation (as discussed above).
 3. Interpret and explain the quote or paraphrase by interpreting individual words, word combinations, and/or the ideas implied by the source and by explaining how this piece of evidence supports the topic sentence claim of the paragraph in which you are quoting or paraphrasing the outside source. Never end a paragraph with a quote that has not been interpreted and explained because quotes are never self-explanatory in academic essays.
- Finally, on a separate Works Cited page, you must offer source information for each citation used in your paper, but only those sources actually cited in your paper can be included on this page. The first line of information for each Works Cited page entry must begin at the left margin, and all subsequent lines of each entry must be indented five spaces. Each entry should begin either with the author's or speaker's last name or, if there is no apparent author, the article title. All Works Cited entries must be double-spaced and ordered alphabetically by the first words of each entry.

IN-TEXT CITATION: HANDLING QUOTATIONS IN THE BODY OF YOUR PAPER

With MLA style of documentation, quotations and paraphrases should be followed by the author's last name and page number in parentheses (i.e. parenthetical citation). This means that the author's last name and the page number(s) from which the quotation is taken must appear in the text, and a complete reference should appear in your Works Cited list (see Sample Works Cited Page, p. 86). The author's name may appear either in the sentence itself or in parentheses following the quotation, but the page number(s) should always appear in the parentheses, not in the text of your sentence.

THREE EXAMPLES:

Wordsworth stated that Romantic poetry was marked by a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (263).

Romantic poetry is characterized by the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 263).

Wordsworth extensively explored the role of emotion in the creative process (263).

For non-print (film, TV, etc.) or electronic sources, try to include the name that begins the entry in the Works Cited page. Sometimes you may have to use an indirect quotation, that is, a quotation that you found in another source that was quoting from the original. For such indirect quotations, use "qtd. in" to indicate the source:

Ravitch argues that high schools are pressured to act as "social service centers, and they don't do that well" (qtd. in Weisman 259).

Sometimes more information is necessary to identify the source from which a quotation is taken. For instance, if two or more authors have the same last name, provide both authors' first initials (or even her or his full name if different authors share initials) in your citation. If you cite more than one work by a particular author, include a shortened title for the particular work from which you are quoting to distinguish it from the other works by that same person.

TWO EXAMPLES:

Two authors with the same last name:

Although some medical ethicists claim that cloning will lead to designer children (R. Miller 12), others note that the advantages for medical research outweigh this consideration (A. Miller 46).

Two works by the same author:

Lightenor has argued that computers are not useful tools for small children ("Too Soon"

38), though he has acknowledged that early exposure to computer games does lead to better small motor skill development in a child's second and third year ("Hand-Eye Development" 17).

Short Quotations

To indicate short quotations (fewer than four typed lines of prose or three lines of verse) in your text, enclose the quotation within quotation marks and incorporate it into your text. Provide the author and specific page citation (in the case of verse, provide line numbers) in the text, and include a complete reference in the Works Cited list. Punctuation marks such as periods, commas, and semicolons should appear after the parenthetical citation. Question marks and exclamation points should appear within the quotation marks if they are a part of the quoted passage but after the parenthetical citation if they are a part of your text.

FIVE EXAMPLES OF SHORT QUOTATIONS:

According to some, dreams express "profound aspects of personality" (Foulkes 184), though others disagree.

According to Foulkes's study, dreams may express "profound aspects of personality" (184).

Is it possible that dreams may express what some call "profound aspects of personality" (Foulkes 184)?

Dreams are an uncertain method of analyzing the conscious life, though they may express "profound aspects of personality" (Foulkes 184).

Cullen concludes that "Of all the things that happened there / That's all I remember" (11-12).

Long Quotations—Block Quotes

Use block quotes when the quotations are longer than four typed lines in a free-standing block of typewritten lines, but be sure to omit quotation marks unless the source text uses quotation marks. Start the block quote on a new line, indented one inch from the left margin; justify this for each line of the quote, and maintain double-spacing. Your parenthetical citation should come after the closing punctuation mark. When quoting poetry or plays, maintain original line breaks. You also need to maintain double-spacing throughout your essay, including block quotes, and be sure to avoid indenting for a new paragraph after the block quote. Why? Well, you need to demonstrate your understanding of the quote with explanation, interpretation, and application of the quote to your original paragraph ideas.

TWO EXAMPLES:

1. Nelly Dean dehumanizes Heathcliff throughout her narration, particularly when she refers to him with the impersonal pronoun “it”:

They entirely refused to have *it* in bed with them, or even in their room, and I had no more sense, so, I put *it* on the landing of the stairs, hoping *it* would be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, *it* crept to Mr. Earnshaw’s door, and there he found *it* on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how *it* got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house. (Bronte 78, italics mine)

The narrator demonstrates her particular distaste for Heathcliff, depicting him with the pronoun “it” as if he is an annoying pet dog or other animal that needs to be removed.

2. In her poem “Sources,” Adrienne Rich explores the roles of women in shaping their world with the use of child imagery:

The faithful drudging child
the child at the oak desk whose penmanship,
hard work, style will win her prizes
becomes the woman with a mission, not to win prizes
but to change the laws of history. (19-23)

According to the speaker of the poem, influential women in our culture begin their lives as hard-working students and writers well before they begin the long journey to changing “the laws of history,” the status quo of women’s roles in our culture.

Adding or Omitting Words In Quotations

If you add a word or words in a quotation, you should put brackets around the words to indicate that they are not part of the original text.

EXAMPLE:

Jan Harold Brunvand, in an essay on urban legends, states: “some individuals [who retell urban legends] make a point of learning every rumor or tale” (78).

If you omit a word or words from a quotation, you should indicate the substituted word or words in brackets or by using ellipsis marks without substituted words. Ellipsis marks are spaced periods (see below).

EXAMPLE:

In an essay on urban legends, Jan Harold Brunvand notes that “some individuals [who retell urban legends] make a point of learning every recent rumor or tale . . . and in a short time a lively exchange of details occurs” (78).

Note: If there are ellipsis marks in the quoted author’s work, do not put brackets around them; only use brackets around ellipsis marks to distinguish them from ellipsis marks in the quoted author’s work. You may also omit a sentence or part of a sentence and continue the quote from a different sentence on the same page. To do this, indicate the deleted sentence by using a period as well as an ellipsis mark.

EXAMPLE:

In an essay on urban legends, Jan Harold Brunvand notes that many interested in sharing such stories “make a point of learning every recent rumor or tale and in a short time a lively exchange of details occurs. . . . After repeated storytelling, [these details] are transformed to coincide with the current socio-political status of the culture in which the tale is told” (78).

Your Works Cited Page

Your Works Cited listing should begin on a separate page from the text of the essay under the label Works Cited (with no quotation marks, underlining, etc.), centered at the top of the page. Double space all entries, with no skipped spaces between entries.

This list, alphabetized by the first word in each entry (usually the author’s last name), should appear at the end of your essay. It provides the information necessary for a reader to locate and be able to read any sources you cite in the essay. Each source you cite in the essay must appear in your Works Cited list; likewise, each entry in the Works Cited list must be cited in your text.

BASIC RULES

- Authors’ names are inverted (last name first). If a work has more than one author, invert

only the first author's name, follow it with a comma, then continue listing the rest of the authors. If you have cited more than one work by a particular author, order them alphabetically by title, and use three hyphens in place of the author's name for every entry after the first. When an author appears both as the sole author of a text and as the first author of a group, list solo-author entries first.

- If no author is given for a particular work, alphabetize by the title of the work and use a shortened version of the title for parenthetical citations.
- The first line of each entry in your list should be flush left. Subsequent lines should be indented one-half inch. This is known as a hanging indent.
- All references should be double-spaced.
- Capitalize each word in the titles of articles, books, etc. This rule does not apply to articles, short prepositions, or conjunctions unless one is the first word of the title or subtitle.
- Italicize titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, websites, and films.
- Use quotation marks around the titles of articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers. Also use quotation marks for the titles of short stories, book chapters, poems, and songs.
- List page numbers efficiently, when needed. If you refer to a journal article that appeared on pages 225 through 250, list the page numbers on your Works Cited page as 225-50.
- Single-space after periods in your Works Cited page.
- To remove hyperlinks from your Works Cited page, right click on the mouse to get the Hyperlinks options. You can edit or delete the hyperlink from there. For more information, go to http://www.mla.org/publications/style/style_faq/style_faq6.

Basic Forms for Sources in Print and Online

The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition, provides extensive examples of potential sources. If your particular case is not covered here, use the basic forms to determine the correct format. If you need assistance, please consult the link from the Library channel or library home page, or contact your instructor or a Cuesta College Librarian.