Research Paper Guide

MLA Style 8th Edition

Bergen Community College

Fall 2016

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This document is based on the MLA Handbook and MLA Style Center.
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The Research Paper Guide

Introduction for Instructors

The *MLA Handbook* eighth edition was published in April 2016. Unlike earlier editions in the last two decades, which primarily revised the electronic entries, this edition presents a new model for MLA documentation. According to Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Director of Scholarly Communication, it attempts to meet the needs of today’s “student research and writing…which take many forms other than the research paper…and may include citations appended to traditional, linear texts” as well as “weblike texts and even projects which are not texts at all” (xiii). This new style guide is intended to move away from “a prescriptive list of formats to …enabling readers to fully participate in the conversations between writers and their sources. [As long as the information is presented in] a “clear, consistent structure,” it meets MLA style guidelines (Fitzpatrick xii).

The English Faculty at Bergen Community College applaud this updated version of MLA style and agree with the changes in theory. However, because the 8th edition allows for several “optional” elements, we feel the need to develop a program standard for all students taking English-related courses at Bergen which require the use of MLA documentation. This Teacher Guide is intended to provide a level of consistency in the use of the 8th edition of the *MLA Handbook* as students move from one course to another at the college. The Teacher Guide is written in 2nd person in the event you wish to distribute all or parts of the guide to your students.
It is the collaboration of faculty from English Basic Skills, Composition and Literature, the Writing Center, and the Silverman Library.

This guide is not intended to be comprehensive but rather provide the basic information regarding the new MLA-style model and the research paper in general. As faculty familiar with the earlier version of MLA style, you will note that the major changes in the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook* are in the works cited list.

Here are the major changes:

- There is one standard citation format for every type of source called a “container.”
  - There are “single” containers (book, article in a journal, video on a website).
  - There are “double” containers (article in a journal -- in a database).
- It is now acceptable to use pseudonyms for author names.
- The abbreviations vol. and no. have been added to magazine and journal article citations.
- URLs are included in citations with a preference for DOIs.
- The city of publication is generally omitted.

Here are the changes that BCC has elected to make:

- In the basic container format, further identify sources (book, video, essay, etc.). They will appear on the “Location” element of the MLA template.
- For electronic sources, use the URL rather than DOI.
- Use “Date of access” for citing electronic media.
You can find the additional information by consulting the 8th edition of MLA Handbook available in the Silverman Library, on the Silverman Library’s Citations Guide (http://bergen.libguides.com/citationguides), at the MLA Style Center (https://style.mla.org/whats-new), and at the Purdue OWL (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/).

Work Cited


Evaluating Your Source Material

Today the Internet, with its many publications, databases, archives, and search engines, has accelerated the process of finding and retrieving sources - but at the same time it has complicated the researcher’s assessment of their reliability. The amount and variety of information available have grown exponentially, but the origins of that information are often too unclear.

The first step, therefore, in gathering sources for your academic work is to evaluate them, asking yourself questions such as these:

- WHO is the author of the source? Is the author qualified to address the subject? Does the author draw on appropriate research and make a logical argument? Do you perceive bias or the possibility of it in the author’s relation to the subject matter?
WHAT is the source? Does it have a title, and does that title tell you anything about it? If it lacks a title, how would you describe it? Is it a primary source, such as an original document, creative work, or artifact, or secondary source, which reports on or analyzes primary sources? If it is an edition, is it authoritative? Does the source document its own sources in a trustworthy manner?

HOW was the source produced? Does it have a recognized publisher or sponsoring organization? Was it subjected to a process of vetting, such as peer review, through which authorities in the field assessed its quality?

WHERE did you find the source? Was it cited in an authoritative work? Was it among the results of a search you conducted through a scholarly database (such as the MLA International Bibliography) or a library’s resources? Did you discover it through a commercial search engine that may weight results by popularity or payment?

WHEN was the source published? Could its information have been supplemented or replaced by more recent work?

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

What Is Plagiarism?

Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines plagiarism as committing “literary theft.” Plagiarism is presenting another person’s ideas, information, expressions, or entire work as one’s own. It is thus a kind of fraud: deceiving others to gain something of value. While plagiarism
sometimes has legal repercussions (e.g., when it involves copyright infringement—violating an author’s exclusive legal right to publication), it is always a serious moral and ethical offense.

What Does Plagiarism Look Like?

Plagiarism can take a number of forms, including buying papers from a service on the Internet, reusing work done by another student, and copying text from published sources without giving credit to those who produced the sources. All forms of plagiarism have in common the misrepresentation of work not done by the writer as the writer’s own.

Even borrowing just a few words from an author without clearly indicating that you did so constitutes plagiarism. Moreover, you can plagiarize unintentionally; in hastily taken notes, it is easy to mistake a phrase copied from a source as your original thought and then to use it without crediting the source.

Imagine, for example, that you read the following passage in the course of your research (from Michael Agar’s book Language Shock):

Everyone uses the word language and everybody these days talks about culture. . . .

“Languaculture” is a reminder, I hope, of the necessary connection between its two parts.

If you wrote the following sentence, it would constitute plagiarism:

At the intersection of language and culture lies a concept that we might call “languaculture.”

This sentence borrows a word from Agar’s work without giving credit for it. Placing the term in quotation marks is insufficient. If you use the term, you must give credit to its source:
At the intersection of language and culture lies a concept that Michael Agar has called “languaculture” (60).

In this version, a reference to the original author and a parenthetical citation indicate the source of the term; a corresponding entry in your list of works cited will give your reader full information about the source.

Plagiarizing yourself:

If you reuse ideas or phrases that you used in prior work and do not cite the prior work, you have plagiarized. Many academic honesty policies prohibit the reuse of one’s prior work, even with a citation. If you want to reuse your work, consult with your instructor.

Plagiarizing others:

It’s important to note that you need not copy an author’s words to be guilty of plagiarism; if you paraphrase someone’s ideas or arguments without giving credit for their origin, you have committed plagiarism. Imagine that you read the following passage (from Walter A. McDougall’s Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776):

American exceptionalism as our founders conceived it was defined by what America was, at home. Foreign policy existed to defend, not define, what America was.

If you write the following sentence, you have plagiarized, even though you changed some of the wording:
For the founding fathers America’s exceptionalism was based on the country’s domestic identity, which foreign policy did not shape but merely guarded.

In this sentence, you have borrowed an author’s ideas without acknowledgment. You may use the ideas, however, if you properly give credit to your source:

As Walter A. McDougall argues, for the founding fathers America’s exceptionalism was based on the country’s domestic identity, which foreign policy did not shape but merely guarded (37).

In this revised sentence, which includes an in-text citation and clearly gives credit to McDougall as the source of the idea, there is no plagiarism.

In-text Citations

A major component of MLA documentation style is the insertion in your text of a brief reference that indicates the source you consulted. The in-text citation (or parenthetical reference) should direct the reader to the entry in your works-cited list for the source while creating the least possible interruption in your text.

An in-text citation is composed of two elements. The element that comes first in the entry in your Works Cited (usually the author’s last name) and the location of the direct quote or paraphrase (usually a page number.) However, when using the author’s last name in a sentence, you only need to place the page number in parenthesis. Note that when a source has three or more authors, only the first one name shown in the source is normally given. It is followed by et al.
Direct Quote

According to Naomi Baron, reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.

Or

Reading is “just half of literacy. The other half is writing” (Baron 194). One might even suggest that reading is never complete without writing.

Work Cited


Summary and Paraphrase

Identifying the source in your text is essential for nearly every kind of borrowing—not only quotations but also facts and summarized or paraphrased ideas. (Common knowledge is the only exception.) The parenthetical citations for a fact or paraphrased idea should be placed as close as possible after the borrowed material, at a natural pause in your sentence, so that the flow of your argument is not disrupted.

While reading may be the core of literacy, Naomi Baron argues that literacy can be complete only when reading is accompanied by writing (194).

Or

While reading may be the core of literacy, literacy can be complete only when
reading is accompanied by writing (Baron 194).

Work Cited


No Author

If your source has no author either because it is published by an organization or the author is anonymous, your in-text citation begins with the title, or the title may appear shortened if used in the parenthetical reference.

*Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* notes that despite an apparent decline in reading during the same period, “the number of people doing creative writing--of any genre, not exclusively literary works--increased substantially between 1982 and 2002” (3).

*Or*

Despite an apparent decline in reading during the same period, “the number of people doing creative writing--of any genre, not exclusively literary works--increased substantially between 1982 and 2002” (Reading 3).

Work Cited

Time-based Media

For works, such as audio and video recordings, cite the relevant time or range of times. Give the number of the hours, minutes, and seconds as displayed in your media player, separating the numbers and colons.

Buffy’s promise that “there’s not going to be any incidents like at my old school” is obviously not one on which she can follow through (“Buffy” 00:03:16-17).

Work Cited

Works Cited

The eighth edition of the MLA Handbook introduces a new model for entries in the works-cited list, one that reflects recent changes in how works are published and consulted. Previously, a writer created an entry by following the MLA’s instructions for the source’s publication format (book, DVD, Web page, etc.). That approach has become impractical today since publication formats are often combined (a song listened to online, for example, could have been taken from a record album released decades ago) or are undefinable.

In the new model, the work’s publication format is not considered. Instead of asking, “How do I cite a book [or DVD or Web page]?” the writer creates an entry by consulting the MLA’s list of core elements—facts common to most works—which are assembled in a specific order. So, see how the following citation from a Works Cited was created using the MLA core elements.

In this new model, then, the writer asks, “Who is the author? What is the title?” and so forth—regardless of the nature of the source. Note that at Bergen, we are adding the optional descriptive term (e.g., “Article”) to further identify the work. We are also adding the date of access for all electronic media.

Because of this fundamental change, the works cited list entries produced by the new approach are different than those in the earlier models.

Other changes that affect works cited list entries are common terms in the works cited list like editor, edited by, translator, and review of are no longer abbreviated, and when a source has three or more authors, only the first one shown in the source is normally given. It is followed by et al.
Common Types of Sources:

**A Book**


**An Essay in a Book Collection**


**A Video on a Web Site**


**A Journal Article Retrieved from a Database**

Article found in electronic version of journal (two containers):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MLA Core Element</th>
<th>Works Cited Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author.</td>
<td>Baron, Naomi S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of Source.</td>
<td>“Redefining Reading: The Impact of Digital Communication Media.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of container,</td>
<td><em>PMLA</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other contributors,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version,</td>
<td>Vol, 128,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number,</td>
<td>No. 1,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication date,</td>
<td>Jan. 2013,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of container 2,</td>
<td>Database name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location.</td>
<td>URL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptor.</td>
<td>Article</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Formatting a Research Paper**

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. If you plan to submit a printout on paper larger than 8½ by 11 inches, do not print the text in an area greater than 6½ by 9 inches.

Text Formatting

Always choose an easily readable typeface (e.g., Times New Roman) 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; 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 (or block quotations) half an inch as well. 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 unless your instructor prefers one. 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 the date 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.
Local Television Coverage of International News Events

The Attitude toward Violence in *A Clockwork Orange*

The Use of the Words *Fair* and *Foul* in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

Romanticism in England and the *Scapigliatura* in Italy

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.

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

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 works-cited list 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 indentation, and you can set your writing program to create it automatically for a group of paragraphs. Hanging indentation 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

Appendix
# MLA Practice Template

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

**Container 1**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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. Descriptor. Date of Access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Container 2**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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. Descriptor. Date of Access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

using the MLA source citation pattern: WHAT SOURCES NEED WHICH PATTERN ELEMENTS?

Below is the MLA pattern for creating source citations for the Works Cited page that goes at the end of every research paper:

1. AUTHOR.
2. SOURCE TITLE.
3. CONTAINER TITLE.
4. OTHER CONTRIBUTORS.
5. VERSION.
6. NUMBER.
7. PUBLISHER.
8. PUBLICATION DATE.
9. LOCATION.

Very few sources will use all the pattern's nine elements, as shown below. (Remember that a source inside a container inside another container will also need all the second container's elements.)

- You might find this element for this kind of source; most citations for this kind of source will include this element.
- You might find this element for this kind of source, or you can include information here if it fits your purposes.

| ARTICLE IN JOURNAL, MAGAZINE, OR NEWSPAPER | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BLOG, ENTIRE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BLOG, SINGLE ENTRY | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BOOK | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| COMIC OR GRAPHIC NOVEL, PUBLISHED AS PART OF SERIES | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| COMIC OR GRAPHIC NOVEL, PUBLISHED AS STAND-ALONE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ESSAY OR OTHER PART IN BOOK | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MOVIE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PODCAST | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SOCIAL MEDIA POST | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SONG | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TELEVISION EPISODE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TELEVISION SERIES | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| VIDEO ONLINE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| WEBPAGE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| WEBSITE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

FOR EXAMPLE
