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## MLA In-Text Citations: The Basics

Guidelines for referring to the works of others in your text using MLA style are covered throughout the *MLA Handbook* and in chapter 7 of the *MLA Style Manual*. Both books provide extensive examples, so it's a good idea to consult them if you want to become even more familiar with MLA guidelines or if you have a particular reference question.

### Cite your source automatically in MLA

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## BASIC IN-TEXT CITATION RULES

In MLA Style, referring to the works of others in your text is done using **parenthetical citations**. This method involves providing relevant source information in parentheses whenever a sentence uses a quotation or paraphrase. Usually, the simplest way to do this is to put all of the source information in parentheses at the end of the sentence (i.e., just before the period). However, as the examples below will illustrate, there are situations where it makes sense to put the parenthetical elsewhere in the sentence, or even to leave information out.

### General Guidelines

- The source information required in a parenthetical citation depends (1) upon the source medium (e.g. print, web, DVD) and (2) upon the source's entry on the Works Cited page.

- Any source information that you provide in-text must correspond to the source information on the Works Cited page. More specifically, whatever signal word or phrase you provide to your readers in the text must be the first thing that appears on the left-hand margin of the corresponding entry on the Works Cited page.

## IN-TEXT CITATIONS: AUTHOR-PAGE STYLE

MLA format follows the author-page method of in-text citation. This means that the author's last name and the page number(s) from which the quotation or paraphrase is taken must appear in the text, and a complete reference should appear on your Works Cited page. The author's name may appear either in the sentence itself or in parentheses following the quotation or paraphrase, but the page number(s) should always appear in the parentheses, not in the text of your sentence. For example:

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).

Both citations in the examples above, (263) and (Wordsworth 263), tell readers that the information in the sentence can be located on page 263 of a work by an author named Wordsworth. If readers want more information about this source, they can turn to the Works Cited page, where, under the name of Wordsworth, they would find the following information:

Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads*. Oxford UP, 1967.

## IN-TEXT CITATIONS FOR PRINT SOURCES WITH KNOWN AUTHOR

For print sources like books, magazines, scholarly journal articles, and newspapers, provide a signal word or phrase (usually the author's last name) and a page number. If you provide the signal word/phrase in the sentence, you do not need to include it in the parenthetical citation.

Human beings have been described by Kenneth Burke as "symbol-using animals" (3).

Human beings have been described as "symbol-using animals" (Burke 3).

These examples must correspond to an entry that begins with Burke, which will be the first thing that appears on the left-hand margin of an entry on the Works Cited page:

Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. University of California Press, 1966.

## IN-TEXT CITATIONS FOR PRINT SOURCES BY A CORPORATE AUTHOR

When a source has a corporate author, it is acceptable to use the name of the corporation followed by the page number for the in-text citation. You should also use abbreviations (e.g., nat'l for national) where appropriate, so as to avoid interrupting the flow of reading with overly long parenthetical citations.

## IN-TEXT CITATIONS FOR SOURCES WITH NON-STANDARD LABELING SYSTEMS

If a source uses a labeling or numbering system other than page numbers, such as a script or poetry, precede the citation with said label. When citing a poem, for instance, the parenthetical would begin with the word "line," and then the line number or range. For example, the examination of William Blake's poem "The Tyger" would be cited as such:

The speaker makes an ardent call for the exploration of the connection between the violence of nature and the divinity of creation. "In what distant deeps or skies. / Burnt the fire of thine eyes," they ask in reference to the tiger as they attempt to reconcile their intimidation with their relationship to creationism (lines 5-6).

Longer labels, such as chapters (ch.) and scenes (sc.), should be abbreviated.

## IN-TEXT CITATIONS FOR PRINT SOURCES WITH NO KNOWN AUTHOR

When a source has no known author, use a shortened title of the work instead of an author name, following these guidelines.

Place the title in quotation marks if it's a short work (such as an article) or italicize it if it's a longer work (e.g. plays, books, television shows, entire Web sites) and provide a page number if it is available.

Titles longer than a standard noun phrase should be shortened into a noun phrase by excluding articles. For example, *To the Lighthouse* would be shortened to *Lighthouse*.

If the title cannot be easily shortened into a noun phrase, the title should be cut after the first clause, phrase, or punctuation:

We see so many global warming hotspots in North America likely because this region has "more readily accessible climatic data and more comprehensive programs to monitor and study environmental change . . ." ("Impact of Global Warming").

In this example, since the reader does not know the author of the article, an abbreviated title appears in the parenthetical citation, and the full title of the article appears first at the left-hand margin of its respective entry on the Works Cited page. Thus, the writer includes the title in quotation marks as the signal phrase in the parenthetical citation in order to lead the reader directly to the source on the Works Cited page. The Works Cited entry appears as follows:

"The Impact of Global Warming in North America." *Global Warming: Early Signs*. 1999.  
www.climatehotmap.org/. Accessed 23 Mar. 2009.

If the title of the work begins with a quotation mark, such as a title that refers to another work, that quote or quoted title can be used as the shortened title. The single quotation marks must be included in the parenthetical, rather than the double quotation.

Parenthetical citations and Works Cited pages, used in conjunction, allow readers to know which sources you consulted in writing your essay, so that they can either verify your interpretation of the sources or use them in their own scholarly work.

## AUTHOR-PAGE CITATION FOR CLASSIC AND LITERARY WORKS WITH MULTIPLE EDITIONS

Page numbers are always required, but additional citation information can help literary scholars, who may have a different edition of a classic work, like Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*. In such cases, give the page number of your edition (making sure the edition is listed in your Works Cited page, of course) followed by a semicolon, and then the appropriate abbreviations for volume (vol.), book (bk.), part (pt.), chapter (ch.), section (sec.), or paragraph (par.). For example:

Marx and Engels described human history as marked by class struggles (79; ch. 1).

## AUTHOR-PAGE CITATION FOR WORKS IN AN ANTHOLOGY, PERIODICAL, OR COLLECTION

When you cite a work that appears inside a larger source (for instance, an article in a periodical or an essay in a collection), cite the author of the *internal* source (i.e., the article or essay). For example, to cite Albert Einstein's article "A Brief Outline of the Theory of Relativity," which was published in *Nature* in 1921, you might write something like this:

Relativity's theoretical foundations can be traced to earlier work by Faraday and Maxwell (Einstein 782).

See also [our page on documenting periodicals in the Works Cited \(mla works cited periodicals.html\)](#).

## CITING AUTHORS WITH SAME LAST NAMES

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 the authors' full name if different authors share initials) in your citation. For example:

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).

## CITING A WORK BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS

For a source with two authors, list the authors' last names in the text or in the parenthetical citation:

Best and Marcus argue that one should read a text for what it says on its surface, rather than looking for some hidden meaning (9).

The authors claim that surface reading looks at what is "evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts" (Best and Marcus 9).

Corresponding Works Cited entry:

Best, David, and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *Representations*, vol. 108, no. 1, Fall 2009, pp. 1-21. JSTOR, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1

For a source with three or more authors, list only the first author's last name, and replace the additional names with et al.

According to Franck et al., "Current agricultural policies in the U.S. are contributing to the poor health of Americans" (327).

The authors claim that one cause of obesity in the United States is government-funded farm subsidies (Franck et al. 327).

Corresponding Works Cited entry:

Franck, Caroline, et al. "Agricultural Subsidies and the American Obesity Epidemic." *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, vol. 45, no. 3, Sept. 2013, pp. 327-333.

## CITING MULTIPLE WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

If you cite more than one work by an author, include a shortened title for the particular work from which you are quoting to distinguish it from the others. Put short titles of books in italics and short titles of articles in quotation marks.

*Citing two articles by the same author:*

Lightenor has argued that computers are not useful tools for small children ("Too Soon" 38), though he has acknowledged elsewhere 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).

*Citing two books by the same author:*

Murray states that writing is "a process" that "varies with our thinking style" (*Write to Learn* 6). Additionally, Murray argues that the purpose of writing is to "carry ideas and information from the mind of one person into the mind of another" (*A Writer Teaches Writing* 3).

Additionally, if the author's name is not mentioned in the sentence, format your citation with the author's name followed by a comma, followed by a shortened title of the work, and, when appropriate, the page number(s):

Visual studies, because it is such a new discipline, may be "too easy" (Elkins, "Visual Studies" 63).

## CITING MULTIVOLUME WORKS

If you cite from different volumes of a multivolume work, always include the volume number followed by a colon. Put a space after the colon, then provide the page number(s). (If you only cite from one volume, provide only the page number in parentheses.)

. . . as Quintilian wrote in *Institutio Oratoria* (1: 14-17).

## CITING THE BIBLE

In your first parenthetical citation, you want to make clear which Bible you're using (and underline or italicize the title), as each version varies in its translation, followed by book (do not italicize or underline), chapter, and verse. For example:

Ezekiel saw "what seemed to be four living creatures," each with faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Ezek. 1.5-10).

If future references employ the same edition of the Bible you're using, list only the book, chapter, and verse in the parenthetical citation:

John of Patmos echoes this passage when describing his vision (Rev. 4.6-8).

## CITING INDIRECT SOURCES

Sometimes you may have to use an indirect source. An indirect source is a source cited within another source. For such indirect quotations, use "qtd. in" to indicate the source you actually consulted. For example:

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

Note that, in most cases, a responsible researcher will attempt to find the original source, rather than citing an indirect source.

## CITING TRANSCRIPTS, PLAYS, OR SCREENPLAYS

Sources that take the form of a dialogue involving two or more participants have special guidelines for their quotation and citation. Each line of dialogue should begin with the speaker's name written in all capitals and indented half an inch. A period follows the name (e.g., JAMES.). After the period, write the dialogue. Each successive line after the first should receive an additional indentation. When another person begins speaking, start a new line with that person's name indented only half an inch. Repeat this pattern each time the speaker changes. You can include stage directions in the quote if they appear in the original source.

Conclude with a parenthetical that explains where to find the excerpt in the source. Usually, the author and title of the source can be given in a signal phrase before quoting the excerpt, so the concluding parenthetical will often just contain location information like page numbers or act/scene indicators.

Here is an example from O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*.

Alcohol makes an early appearance in O'Neill's play. In the very first scene, O'Neill's characters treat alcohol as a panacea for their ills:

WILLIE. (Pleadingly) Give me a drink, Rocky. Harry said it was all right. God, I need a drink.

ROCKY. Den grab it. It's right under your nose.

WILLIE. (Avidly) Thanks. (He takes the bottle with both twitching hands and tilts it to his lips and gulps down the whiskey in big swallows.) (1.1)

## CITING NON-PRINT OR SOURCES FROM THE INTERNET

With more and more scholarly work published on the Internet, you may have to cite sources you found in digital environments. While many sources on the Internet should not be used for scholarly work (reference the OWL's **Evaluating Sources of Information** ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/conducting\\_research/evaluating\\_sources\\_of\\_information](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/evaluating_sources_of_information)) some Web sources are perfectly acceptable for research. When creating in-text citations for electronic, film, or Internet sources, remember that your citation must reference the source on your Works Cited page.

Sometimes writers are confused with how to craft parenthetical citations for electronic sources because of the absence of page numbers. However, these sorts of entries often do not require a page number in the parenthetical citation. For electronic and Internet sources, follow the following guidelines:

- Include in the text the first item that appears in the Work Cited entry that corresponds to the citation (e.g. author name, article name, website name, film name).
- Do not provide paragraph numbers or page numbers based on your Web browser's print preview function.
- Unless you must list the Web site name in the signal phrase in order to get the reader to the appropriate entry, do not include URLs in-text. Only provide partial URLs such as when the name of the site includes, for example, a domain name, like *CNN.com* or *Forbes.com*, as opposed to writing out <http://www.cnn.com> or <http://www.forbes.com>.

## MISCELLANEOUS NON-PRINT SOURCES

Two types of non-print sources you may encounter are films and lectures/presentations:

Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* stars Herzog's long-time film partner, Klaus Kinski. During the shooting of *Fitzcarraldo*, Herzog and Kinski were often at odds, but their explosive relationship fostered a memorable and influential film.

During the presentation, Jane Yates stated that invention and pre-writing are areas of rhetoric that need more attention.

In the two examples above "Herzog" (a film's director) and "Yates" (a presenter) lead the reader to the first item in each citation's respective entry on the Works Cited page:

Herzog, Werner, dir. *Fitzcarraldo*. Perf. Klaus Kinski. Filmverlag der Autoren, 1982.

Yates, Jane. "Invention in Rhetoric and Composition." *Gaps Addressed: Future Work in Rhetoric and Composition*, CCCC, Palmer House Hilton, 2002. Address.

## ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Electronic sources may include web pages and online news or magazine articles:

One online film critic stated that *Fitzcarraldo* "has become notorious for its near-failure and many obstacles" (Taylor, "Fitzcarraldo").

The *Purdue OWL* is accessed by millions of users every year. Its "MLA Formatting and Style Guide" is one of the most popular resources.

In the first example (an online magazine article), the writer has chosen not to include the author name in-text; however, two entries from the same author appear in the Works Cited. Thus, the writer includes both the author's last name and the article title in the parenthetical citation in order to lead the reader to the appropriate entry on the Works Cited page (see below).

In the second example (a web page), a parenthetical citation is not necessary because the page does not list an author, and the title of the article, "MLA Formatting and Style Guide," is used as a signal phrase within the sentence. If the title of the article was not named in the sentence, an abbreviated version would appear in a parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence. Both corresponding Works Cited entries are as follows:

Taylor, Rumsey. "Fitzcarraldo." *Slant*, 13 Jun. 2003, [www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/fitzcarraldo/](http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/fitzcarraldo/). Accessed 29 Sep. 2009.

"MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *The Purdue OWL*, 2 Aug. 2016, [owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/). Accessed 2 April 2018.

## MULTIPLE CITATIONS

To cite multiple sources in the same parenthetical reference, separate the citations by a semi-colon:

. . . as has been discussed elsewhere (Burke 3; Dewey 21).

## TIME-BASED MEDIA SOURCES

When creating in-text citations for media that has a runtime, such as a movie or podcast, include the range of hours, minutes and seconds you plan to reference. For example: (00:02:15-00:02:35).

## WHEN A CITATION IS NOT NEEDED

Common sense and ethics should determine your need for documenting sources. You do not need to give sources for familiar proverbs, well-known quotations, or common knowledge (For example, it is expected that U.S. citizens know that George Washington was the first President.). Remember that citing sources is a rhetorical task, and, as such, can vary based on your audience. If you're writing for an expert audience of a scholarly journal, for example, you may need to deal with expectations of what constitutes "common knowledge" that differ from common norms.

## Other Sources

The *MLA Handbook* describes how to cite many different kinds of authors and content creators. However, you may occasionally encounter a source or author category that the handbook does not describe, making the best way to proceed can be unclear.

In these cases, it's typically acceptable to apply the general principles of MLA citation to the new kind of source in a way that's consistent and sensible. A good way to do this is to simply use the standard MLA directions for a type of source that resembles the source you want to cite.

You may also want to investigate whether a third-party organization has provided directions for how to cite this kind of source. For example, Norquest College provides **guidelines for citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers** (<https://libguides.norquest.ca/IndigenousEducation/cite#s-lib-ctab-10510622-5>)—an author category that does not appear in the *MLA Handbook*. In cases like this, however, it's a good idea to ask your instructor or supervisor whether using third-party citation guidelines might present problems.