



MLA Citation Style (Quick Guide)

What is MLA?

The Modern Language Association (MLA) is an international organization that determines formatting standards for work in the humanities. If you are a student, this means that MLA will supply the required format for information like in-text citations and the works cited page for many essays you will write in your Humanities courses, including English. You may find more detailed instructions about MLA style in the MTSU *EasyWriter* or *Research Matters* handbooks.

Why does citation matter?

Whenever you refer to someone's words or ideas, whether you are paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting, you have a responsibility to your readers to cite your source. If you do not cite your sources' words or information, you are committing plagiarism (academic theft). Whether intentional or accidental, it has consequences (see [MTSU's definition of plagiarism](#)). See our resources on Writing Responsibly and Citation for more information. Understanding your citation style can go a long way toward helping you write responsibly.

What's an in-text citation?

Writers use **in-text (parenthetical) citations** when they make reference to someone else's ideas through paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting.

In-text citations in MLA format typically include:

1. The author's name.
2. The page number(s) referenced.

The name may appear either in the sentence itself or in the parentheses following the quotation or paraphrase/summary, but the page numbers always appear in parentheses. For example:

Although Watson's theories have been "long-lived," new ideas are born each day (Jones 29).

-or-

Jones asks, "Are these rules necessary?" (29).

What if the source has no author?

If the source has no author and still is reliable, use an abbreviated version of the work's title or whatever information is at the beginning of the corresponding works cited entry.

For example:

An anonymous critic once argued that Zinsser's own writing was full of clutter ("Get to the Point" 89).

What if the source has no page numbers?

If the source is **web/electronic**, it may not have page numbers. If paragraphs/sections are numbered, refer to the paragraph or section. Abbreviate *par(s)* for paragraphs, or *sec(s)* for sections:

Alston describes three types of rubrics for evaluating customer service (pars. 2-15).

Hilton and Merrill provide examples of effective hyperlinks (sec 1).

What is a “Works Cited” page... and how do I make one?

The works cited section lists every source referenced in text. If you didn't cite it in your paper, don't add the source to your works cited page.

The purpose of the works cited page to provide a roadmap to your sources so that other scholars or researchers can find them. This means that, as a writer, you need to provide as much information as you can about where and how to find a source.

Scholarly sources include a variety of media, and each type of source has its own citation style. To find the formatting guidelines for the particular type of source you are working with, consult one of the following:

McGraw-Hill Education. *Research Matters at MTSU*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013. Print.

Lunsford, Andrea A. *Middle Tennessee State University EasyWriter*. 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014. Print.

The Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. 3rd ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2008. Print.

The Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

Start citing!

Overwhelmed by the amount of the information needed for a citation? Before you begin creating your citation, collect as much information as you can about the source.

Some sources, particularly electronic ones, may not provide information like author name, publisher, or publication date. Some of this information will appear at different locations in your citation, depending on the type of source being used.

Author Name(s)	
Title of the Work	
Editor Name(s)	
Title of the Collection , Newspaper, or Journal	
Publisher	
City of publication (for books and anthologies)	
Volume number (if available)	
Issue number	
Page number(s)	
Date of publication	
Name of database	
Website name	
Website publisher	
Publication medium	
Date of access (for web sources)	

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