

# MLA Style Guide

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The Modern Language Association (MLA) style guide is one of the most common and well-used standards for formatting and documentation in the world. While it is most widely used in the humanities and liberal arts, any discipline can benefit from its unique brand of documentation, which balances readability (the in-text citations are not *too* onerous, unlike APA style) with an emphasis on the cited authors (who are brought right into the text (unlike the Chicago/Turabian footnotes).

The following list of formatting tips is taken directly from Perdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL).

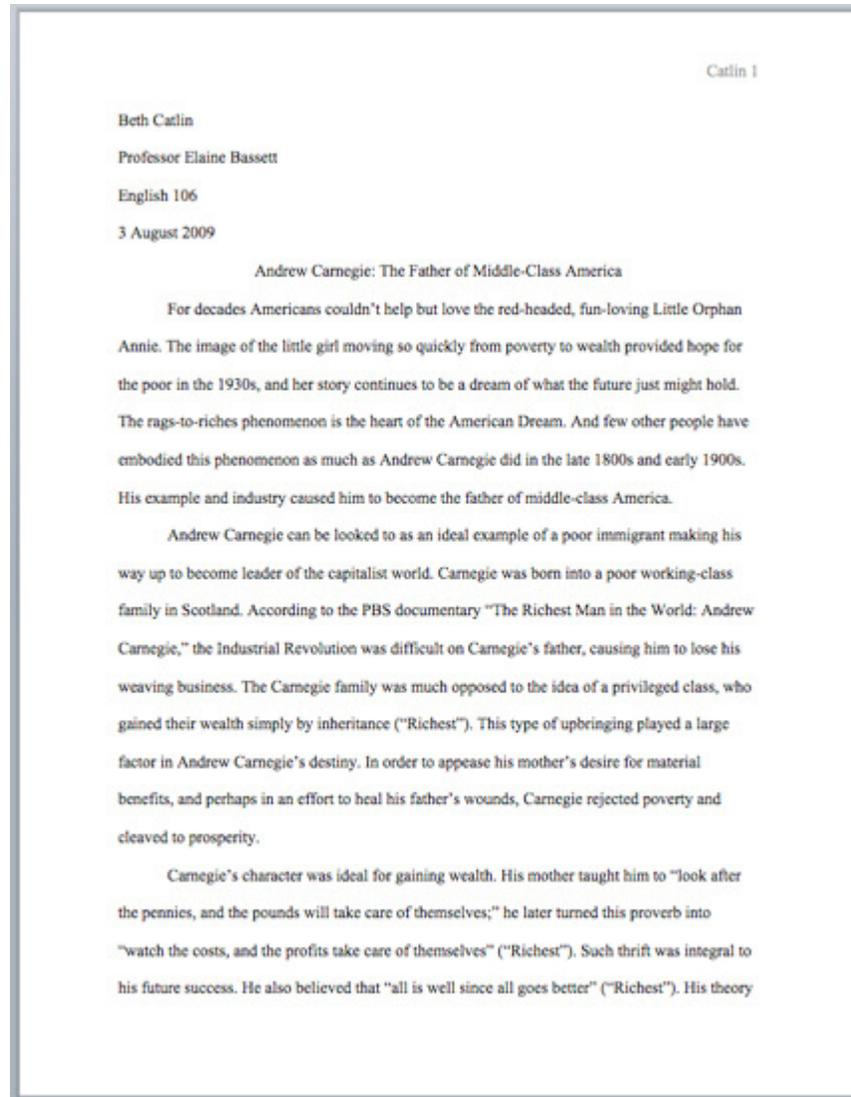
## General Formatting

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper.
- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font (e.g. Times New Roman). Whatever font you choose, MLA recommends that the regular and italics type styles contrast enough that they are recognizable one from another. The font size should be 12 pt.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks (unless otherwise instructed by your instructor).
- Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides.
- Indent the first line of paragraphs one half-inch from the left margin. MLA recommends that you use the Tab key as opposed to pushing the Space Bar five times.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor may ask that you omit the number on your first page. Always follow your instructor's guidelines.)
- Use italics throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.
- If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Works Cited page. Entitle the section Notes (centered, unformatted).

## Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

- Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.
- Double space again and center the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.
- Use quotation marks and/or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text: Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas as *Morality Play*; Human Weariness in "After Apple Picking"
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.

- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number; number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor or other readers may ask that you omit last name/page number header on your first page. Always follow instructor guidelines.)
- Here is a sample of the first page of a paper in MLA style:



(Image from Purdue OWL)

# Citing in MLA

MLA formatting, like most writing/citing formats, requires two forms of citation: 1) **in-text** citations and 2) **works cited** citations. Both must always be used whenever you use specific information that does not come from your own brain. This includes specific examples and quotes from your primary texts (like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Cry, The Beloved Country*) as well as any secondary sources you might use for research. The rules found in this document should apply to any paper you write using MLA citations.

## 1. In-Text Citations

The first kind of citation you will use is found in the actual body of the text. Whenever you refer to specific information from a work, you should immediately provide an in-text citation. There are two things we need to consider with in-text citations: **placement** and **formatting**.

### Placement:

First, in order to determine where in a paragraph to place your in-text citation, you need to consider how often you are referring to that source in your paragraph.

- If you are referring to the same source and page number throughout the paragraph, just place the citation at the end of the paragraph like so:

Paton's consistent efforts to portray South Africa as a living, vibrant character are found throughout the book. At one point, Paton invites the country to weep for the children that will be borne to it, who will be the bearers of its fears, hatreds and grief. He suggests that the country will be loved deeply by these children, but that the country will inevitably break their hearts as they witness its demise (Paton 111).

Note that the citation always comes **before** the period in the last sentence.

- If, within a single paragraph, you refer to different pages of the same work, it is not necessary to keep including the author's name each time. It is assumed that the author remains the same throughout the paragraph unless you state differently. **You do, however, need to provide separate citations each time you change pages.** For example:

Paton's consistent efforts to portray South Africa as a living, vibrant character are found throughout the book. At one point, Paton invites the country to weep for the children that will be borne to it, who will be the bearers of its fears, hatreds and grief. He suggests that the country will be loved deeply by these children, but that the country will inevitably break their hearts as they witness its demise (Paton 111). Elsewhere, he refers to South Africa's "magical" qualities (256) and reaffirms the fact that Africa is a "beloved" country that needs God's protection (259).

Note that once you change paragraphs, you should re-state the author's name. Also note that in-text citations always occur **within** sentences, before the period. (The one exception to this is in the case of block quotes, in which you place the citation outside of the final punctuation mark.)

- Finally, if you use more than one source in a paragraph, you need to provide a citation for each source. For example:  
Some scholars have suggested that one strength of Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* is his ability to convey the complexity of characters, portraying them not as all good or all bad, but always a mixture of both ("Cry, The Beloved Country – Literary Themes for Students"). Others have suggested that the real strength of the book lies in its hopeful, redemptive message (Tay).

Let's say that two sources provide the same information and you wish to credit both of them (this makes you look smart and adds to your credibility). Simply place both citations together, separated by a semi-colon:

Many scholars have suggested that one strength of Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* is his ability to convey the complexity of characters, portraying them not as all good or all bad, but always a mixture of both ("Cry, The Beloved Country – Literary Themes for Students"; Tay).

- Finally, it is important to know what whenever you use a quotation, you must immediately cite it, regardless of what else is happening in your paragraph. For example:

Paton's consistent efforts to portray South Africa as a living, vibrant character are found throughout the book. As he writes in chapter 12, "Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply" (111). Here he describes how the country itself should weep for the children that will be borne to it, who will be the bearers of its fears, hatreds and grief. He proceeds to suggest that the country will be loved deeply by these children, but that the country will inevitably break their hearts as they witness its demise (111).

Note that the citation is placed after the closing quotation marks, but before the period. Note as well that Paton's name was not included in this citation, as it was understood from the sentence that it was Paton who wrote this (if you are clear in your intro sentences, you can do this).

## Formatting:

The second thing you need to know about in-text citations is how to format them, which really depends on what kind of source it is and what kind of information you have about the source. The preferable format is (Author #), where # represents the page number. Unlike Chicago formatting, there is no comma between the author and the page number.

Note the previous example:

Paton's consistent efforts to portray South Africa as a living, vibrant character are found throughout the book. At one point, Paton invites the country to weep for the children that will be borne to it, who will be the bearers of its fears, hatreds and grief. He suggests that the country will be loved deeply by these children, but that the country will inevitably break their hearts as they witness its demise (**Paton 111**).

- Let's say, however, that you are using a web article and no author is listed. If there is no author, then the next best thing is to list the title of the source **in quotation marks**. For example:  
Some scholars have suggested that one strength of Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* is his ability to convey the complexity of characters, portraying them not as all good or all bad, but always a mixture of both ("**Cry, The Beloved Country – Literary Themes for Students**").
- In these sources, it is also likely that no page number will be provided. This is ok – just omit it. Of course, having a page number is preferable when possible.
- Occasionally, you may have more than one source by the same author, or more than one source with the same name. In this case, you need to use a comma and provide slightly more information to distinguish between sources. For example,  
If you have two sources by Alan Paton, provide different titles: (**Paton, *Cry, The Beloved Country* 111**) and (**Paton, *South Africa in Transition* 42**). If two web sources both have no authors and have the same name, provide website titles: ("**Cry, The Beloved Country**", **Wikipedia**) and ("**Cry, The Beloved Country**", **Mostly Fiction Book Reviews**).
- Occasionally, you may need to cite a source that has more than one author. If there are three or less authors, simply list their last names in the citation in the order presented in the work, with an "and" before the last name. For example,  
In their influential work on mathematics and society, three high-school teachers have suggested that solving math equations is among the most enjoyable of human experiences (**Naftel, Hamilton, and Armishaw 24**). Other scholars have challenged this assertion (**Visser and Lendore 78**).

If there are *more* than three others, the correct form is to list the first author and replace the subsequent names with "et al." (meaning "and others"). For example,

According to one World Issues text, the world's population growth should slow dramatically by the year 2100 (**Brazeau et al. 203**).

- **IF CITING POETRY**, things work slightly differently. Continue to use the format (Author #), but while # usually represents the page number, when citing a poem # represents the **line number**. Therefore, (Eliot 24-26) means that you are citing lines twenty-four to twenty-six of the poem that T. S. Eliot wrote.
- **IF CITING THE BIBLE**, list first the specific translation in italics, followed by the book, chapter, and verse(s). Use a **period** to separate the chapter and verses. Eg. (*New International Version*, Ezekiel 1.5-10).
- **IF CITING A PLAY**, the common usage is to avoid placing the author in your citation at all. Instead make it clear who wrote the play in your main text, and then in your citation include the first word of the play, followed by **act, scene, and line number** – each separated by a period. For example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* contains some of his most haunting explorations of the meaning of life, especially as his young hero struggles over whether living is worthwhile at all (***Hamlet* 2.2.30-47**).

Note: If the play title is long, feel free to abbreviate it in the citation, or simply use the first word.

## 2. Works Cited Citations

The "Works Cited" page is simply a list of all the sources you used in your paper, arranged in alphabetical order according to the first letter in each entry. For example:

Harris, Muriel. "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers." *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*. Ed. Ben Rafoth. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. 24-34. Print.

"MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2009. Web. 7 December, 2010.

Paton, Alan. *Cry, The Beloved Country*. New York: Scribner, 1948. Print.

Poniewozik, James. "TV Makes a Too-Close Call." *Time* 20 Nov. 2000: 70-71. Print.

These entries should correspond to your in-text citations, but should be more comprehensive. The rules for Works Cited citations vary according to the type of source you are using.

### Books

- The classic works cited reference for books is as follows:

**Lastname, Firstname. *Title of Book in Italics*. Cityofpublisher: Publishername, year. Medium of Publication.**

Paton, Alan. *Cry, The Beloved Country*. New York: Scribner, 1948. Print.

- If there is more than one author, just the first author is listed in reverse order:

Paton, Alan, and Judy Paton. *Cry, The Beloved Country*. New York: Scribner, 1948. Print.

Paton, Alan, Jack Johnson, Ben Affleck, and Britney Spears. *Cry, The Beloved Country*. New York: Scribner, 1948. Print.

- When citing the **Bible**, the works cited reference is as follows:

***Name of Specific Edition*. Ed. Editorfirstname Editorlastname. Cityofpublisher: Publishername, year. Medium of Publication.**

*New International Version*. Ed. Susan Jones. New York: Doubleday, 1985. Print.

### Articles Within Larger Works (Like poems, short stories, encyclopedia articles, etc.)

- Articles within larger works generally follow this format:

**Lastname, Firstname. "Title of Article." *Title of Encyclopedia or Other Larger Work*. Ed. Editor's Name(s). Place of Publication: Publisher, Year. Page range of entry. Medium of Publication.**

Harris, Muriel. "Talk to Me: Engaging Reluctant Writers." *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One*. Ed. Ben Rafoth. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. 24-34. Print.

### Periodicals (like magazines, etc.)

- Magazine articles or scholarly periodicals are cited as follows:

**Author(s). "Title of Article." *Title of Periodical* Day Month Year: pages. Medium of publication.**

Poniewozik, James. "TV Makes a Too-Close Call." *Time* 20 Nov. 2000: 70-71. Print.

## Movies and Videos

- Movies and videos are cited as follows:

**Movie Name. Director name. Notable actors and actresses. Distributor, Year released. Type of Medium.**

*Saving Private Ryan*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Tom Hanks, Edward Burns, Matt Damon, Tom Sizemore. Dreamworks Home Entertainment, 1998. DVD.

## Web Sources

- Thank goodness! No longer do students have to include long, drawn-out URLs in your citations. Now you simply include as much information as possible, and it is assumed that the reader will be able to find your source by doing a Google search.
- Generally, websites are cited according to the following format:

**Editor, author, or compiler name (if available). "Name of Specific Page or Article on Site." Name of Site. Version number (if available). Name of institution/organization affiliated with the site (sponsor or publisher), date of resource creation (if available). Medium of publication. Date of access.**

"MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2009. Web. 7 December, 2010.

- One important note is that if no publisher/major institution is listed, you should write "n.p." to indicate that no publisher information is available. If there is no date provided for the website, the write "n.d." in the appropriate spot. For example:

"How to Make Vegetarian Chili." *eHow.com*. eHow, n.d. Web. 24 Feb. 2009.

That's it! If you need more information, Google-search the Owl MLA Writing Lab. Have fun and happy citing!

All information in this document is based on insights (and direct examples from):

"MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2009. Web. 7 December, 2010.