

QUICK GUIDE

Getting Started with MLA Style

What Is MLA Style?

MLA style is a comprehensive set of guidelines for academic writing, created by the Modern Language Association. It covers source citation, quoting and paraphrasing, document formatting, punctuation and capitalization, and grammar.

Need to use MLA style but don't know where to start? Learn the basics here, or do a deep dive on *MLA Handbook Plus*, available through subscribing institutions.

What Can MLA Style Help You Do?

Create a works-cited list.

As you read and take notes about your research topic, be sure to record the sources of information, which you will use to create a works-cited list, a list of all the sources you cite in your paper.

- Use the [MLA template of core elements](#) to create works-cited-list entries for your sources: for each entry, you'll list facts about the source, such as author, title, and publication date.
- The *MLA Handbook* walks you through each of the core elements so that you can understand what they are, where to find them in your source, and how to style them in your entry.
- Once you understand the basics, use the [searchable appendix](#) to find additional examples of entries for books, journal articles, films, songs, legal works, web pages, and more.

Compose in-text citations.

As you write your paper, you'll need to include citations when you borrow an idea or quote from a source.

- [In-text citations](#) are brief references, usually placed in parentheses, that direct your readers to sources in your works-cited list.
- For example, if you include a quotation from page 134 of a novel by Octavia E. Butler, your in-text citation might look like this: (Butler 134). This reference, along with the works-cited-list entry for the novel, identifies the source and location of the quotation.
- More complex citations—such as citations of multiple works by the same author, works with more than one author, and works listed by their title—are explained in the *MLA Handbook*.

Quote and paraphrase sources with confidence.

Knowing how to [quote and paraphrase sources](#) in MLA style is the key not only to [avoiding plagiarism](#) but also to distinguishing your own ideas from the ideas you borrow from others.

- Shorter quotations can be integrated in your prose, while longer ones should be formatted as block quotations set apart from your prose.
- In the *MLA Handbook*, learn about where to place an in-text citation relative to a quotation and about punctuation and capitalization with quotations.

Format the titles of cited works.

You'll need to determine how to format the titles of works you discuss and cite.

- Generally, long-form works such as books and movies are italicized, while short-form works such as articles and poems are placed in quotation marks.
- Need to know how to [capitalize the title of a work](#)? MLA style has you covered.

Format your paper.

MLA style shows you how to format everything from [fonts and margins](#) to the [title of your paper](#) to [headings, tables and illustrations, lists](#), and more.

- [Sample papers in MLA style](#) show examples of works-cited lists, in-text citations, quotations, and more.
- Always read your assignment carefully: your instructor may ask you to follow different formatting guidelines.

Get answers to your grammar questions.

Need a refresher on [using commas](#) in your writing? Need to brush up on conjunctions, modifiers, and prepositions? *MLA Handbook Plus* explains grammar terms and offers plenty of examples.