

A Brief Guide to
Writing a Research Paper
for Students

at

Medford High School

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MLA Research Style

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Medford High School
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Introduction

- If you are allowed to select your own research topic, select a topic that interests you, and then phrase it as a question to (1) help you to narrow the topic; and (2) to constantly remind you that you are looking for an answer - not proving a point. For example,

General Topic: Television

Specific Topic: Violence on Television

Question: (1) Are Saturday morning cartoons too violent for children?

(2) Does watching violence on television affect children's behavior?

- As you begin your research, be sure to record on an index card the essential information you will need for your final bibliography:
 - title of book or article
 - author
 - date
 - city of publication
 - publisher
 - page numbers used
 - also, the Library of Congress call number on the spine of the book in case you need to find the book again.
- When using a book (e.g., on researching Shakespeare's Hamlet), it is not necessary to read the entire book. Check the Table of Contents first to determine if a chapter of the book is devoted to Hamlet. Then check the Index to determine if a portion of the book is devoted to Hamlet; those are the only pages that need to be consulted.

As you progress through the research, take notes only on the ideas you plan to cover in the paper. Specifically

(1) Take notes on what you need to know in order to answer your question.

(2) Take notes on those facts and ideas that support the answer to your question.

Verify each point to ensure that it relates to answering your question.

When you find an idea or fact that you think will be useful, you have two choices. Using an index card, you may quote it exactly, in which case you copy the author's words very carefully, put them in quotations marks, and record the author's name, the date, and the page number at the end. Your second choice is to summarize what the author has said. In this case, you must be extremely careful that this summary is entirely in your own words. You will still put down the page number.

Put each new idea or fact on a separate index card, always putting the author's name and the date at the top, the page number at the end. It also helps if you put a key word at the top of each card to indicate the focus of the information on that card.

Take notes on any source you think is related to your topic, even if you are not sure you will use it. But remember always to use index cards, to put the author's name and the date at the top, note the page number, and separate your sources' words from your own. Check the bibliography and footnotes in each source (book) for ideas for other sources.

Develop an organized process for taking research notes.

Continue reading and taking notes from your materials until you feel that you have fully answered your question.

Thesis Statement

After you have completed most of your reading and research, you have probably answered your initial question, so you are ready to turn the answer into a thesis statement - a sentence that summarizes the conclusion or opinion you have reached from your research. The thesis statement must identify the predominant ideas of the paper. The thesis statement appears in the introduction and perhaps again - phrased differently - in the conclusion. Therefore, your selection of a thesis statement is important. Consider its purpose, your audience, and the paper's requirements.

Outline

Consider using an outline to organize your thoughts and the logical progression of your argument. Outlines may change to address the direction of your argument.

Parenthetical Documentations

When you take information - fewer than four lines in length - word-for-word from a resource, set it off in the body of the paper with quotation marks, followed by the reference in parenthesis. The parenthesis will contain the author's last name and the page number: (Smith 25). The punctuation for the end of the sentence is placed after the parenthesis.

According to one critic, "Hamlet meticulously plotted the murder of each of his victims." (Smith 2001).

If the quotation is longer than four lines, do not use quotation marks; instead indent the left margin by 1" with the reference in parenthesis at the end (*see the sample research paper at the end of this guide*).

If you *summarize an idea* or *use an idea that originated from someone else* - even though you do not use the exact words - you still cite the source in parenthesis at the end.

Do not repeat any information in the parenthesis if you have used that information in the text; e.g., if you state the author's name in the text, omit the author's name from the parenthesis and cite only the page number.

Bibliography
Reference List/Works Cited

The last page of the research paper is a list of sources used to write the paper.

- A Bibliography lists all the sources you consulted, even if you did not cite them.
- Reference List/Works Cited - lists only those sources cited in the paper.

The above lists are arranged in strict alphabetical order by author's last name or by the first major word in the title if no author exists.

Plagiarism is theft, the use of other peoples' words or ideas in research without giving them written credit in the research paper.

Giving Proper Credit - Avoiding Plagiarism

You owe it to your sources and your readers to give credit for anyone else's ideas or words that you use in your research paper. If you don't, you may be guilty of *plagiarism* - the act of presenting someone else's ideas as your own. The guidelines that follow will help you avoid plagiarism:

- When using a writer's idea, credit the author by name and also cite the work in which you found the idea.
- Give a new citation even when using additional information from a previously cited source.
- When summarizing or paraphrasing, remember to use quotation marks around key words or phrases taken directly from the source.
- Cite everything you borrow unless you're sure that the information is common knowledge.

Writing Paraphrases

There are two ways to share information from another source: (1) quote the source directly or (2) paraphrase the source. When you quote directly, you include the exact words of the author and put quotation marks around them. When you paraphrase, you use your own words to restate someone else's idea. In either case, you must cite your source. To paraphrase, follow the steps below.

1. **Skim the selection first** to get the overall meaning.
2. **Read the selection carefully;** pay attention to key words and phrases.

3. **List the main ideas** on a piece of paper without looking at the selection.
4. **Review the selection** again.
5. **Write your paraphrase;** restate the author's ideas in your own words.
 - Stick to the essential information (drop anecdotes and details).
 - State each important idea clearly and concisely.
 - Put quotation marks around words taken directly from the source.
 - Arrange the ideas into a smooth, logical order.
6. **Check your paraphrase** for accuracy by asking these questions:
 - Have I kept the author's ideas and viewpoints clear in my paraphrase? Have I quoted where necessary?
 - Have I cut out enough of the original? Too much?
 - Could another person understand the author's main idea by reading my paraphrase? (Sebranek 256).

Sample Forms of Documentation

The proper use of MLA style also shows the credibility of the student writer; such writers show accountability to their source material. Most importantly, the use of MLA style can protect writers from accusations of plagiarism--the purposeful or accidental use of source material by other writers without giving appropriate credit.

Your essay should be typed, double-spaced on standard-sized paper (8.5 X 11 inches) with margins of 1 inch on all sides. 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.)

Your works cited list should begin on a separate page from the text of the essay under the label Works Cited (with no quotation marks, underlining, etc.), centered at the top of the page. Double space all entries, with no skipped spaces between entries.

Works Cited List

This list, alphabetized by the first word in each entry (usually the author's last name), should appear at the end of your essay. It provides the information necessary for a reader to locate and be able to read any sources you cite in the essay. Each source you cite in the essay must appear in your works-cited list; likewise, each entry in the works-cited list must be cited in your text.

Basic Rules

- Authors' names are inverted (last name first); if a work has more than one author, invert only the first author's name, follow it with a comma, then continue listing the rest of the authors. If you have cited more than one work by a particular author, order them alphabetically by title, and use three hyphens in place of the author's name for every entry after the first. When an author appears both as the sole author of a text and as the first author of a group, list solo-author entries first.

- If no author is given for a particular work, alphabetize by the title of the work and use a shortened version of the title for parenthetical citations.
- The first line of each entry in your list should be flush left. Subsequent lines should be indented one-half inch. This is known as a hanging indent.
- All references should be double-spaced.
- Capitalize each word in the titles of articles, books, etc. This rule does not apply to articles, short prepositions, or conjunctions unless one is the first word of the title or subtitle.
- Underline or italicize titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and films.
- Use quotation marks around the titles of articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers. Also use quotation marks for the titles of short stories, book chapters, poems, and songs.
- List page numbers efficiently, when needed. If you refer to a journal article that appeared on pages 225 through 250, list the page numbers on your Works Cited page as 225-50.

Books

Author(s). Title of Book. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication.

- **Book with one author:**

Henley, Patricia. The Hummingbird House. Denver: MacMurray, 1999.

- **Two books by the same author**

(After the first listing of the author's name, use three hyphens and a period for the author's name. List books alphabetically.)

Palmer, William J. Dickens and New Historicism. New York: St. Martin's, 1997.

---. The Films of the Eighties: A Social History. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993.

- **Book with more than one author**

Gillespie, Paula, and Neal Lerner. The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring. Boston: Allyn, 2000.

N.B. If there are more than three authors, you may list only the first author followed by the phrase et al. (the abbreviation for the Latin phrase "and others") in place of the other authors' names, or you may list all the authors in the order in which their names appear on the title page.

- **Editor**

Haase, John Edward, ed. Beyond Category - etc.

- **No author**

Beyond Category - The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington. New York: Simon, 1993.

N.B. For parenthetical citations of sources with no author named, use a shortened version of the title instead of an author's name. Use quotation marks and underlining as appropriate. For example,

(Encyclopedia 235)
("Cigarette" A17).

- **Article from a reference book**

"Jamaica." Encyclopedia Britannica. 1999 ed.

Periodicals

- **Journal (with volume number):**

Wilson, Andrea. "Hamlet's Ascent to Madness." English Journal 25 (2000): 33-49.

- **Signed article in a periodical:**

Murphy, Jerry. "Hamlet: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." Literature Monthly.
Feb. 1994: 80-88

- **Unsigned article in a periodical:**

"Hamlet: Murder, Madness and Mayhem." Newsweek 7 Mar. 1999: 42-3.

- **Newspaper (signed):**

Alan, Barbara. "They Lived Happily After." New York Times 12 May 1998:
A 25.

- **Newspaper (unsigned):**

"They Lived Happily After." New York Times 12 May 1998: A25.

- **Newspaper or magazine**

(Note: When citing the date, list day before month; use a three-letter abbreviation of the month (Jan, Aug).

- **Article in a scholarly journal:**

Allen, Paul. "Sallinger's Concept of Holden Caulfield." English Journal 31
(1998): 4210-29.

- **A web site**

N.B. It is necessary to list your date of access because web postings are often updated, and information available at one date may no longer be available later. Be sure to include the complete address for the site. Also, note the use of angled brackets around the electronic address; MLA requires them for clarity.

Author(s). Name of Page. Date of Posting/Revision. Name of
institution/organization affiliated with the site. Date of
Access <electronic address>.

- **Web site example**

Felluga, Dino. Undergraduate Guide to Literary Theory. 17 Dec. 1999.
Purdue University. 15 Nov. 2000
<<http://omni.cc.purdue.edu/~efelluga/theory2.html>>.

- **An article on a web site**

N.B. It is necessary to list your date of access because web postings are often updated, and information available at one date may no longer be available later. Be sure to include the complete address for the site. Also, note the use of angled brackets around the electronic address; MLA requires them for clarity.

Author(s). "Article Title." Name of web site. Date of posting/revision.
Name of institution/organization affiliated with site. Date of
access <electronic address>.

- **Article on a web site**

Poland, Dave. "The Hot Button." Roughcut. 26 Oct. 1998. Turner Network
Television. 28 Oct. 1998 <<http://www.roughcut.com>>.

Miscellaneous Sources

- **Sound Recording:**

Holiday, Billie. The Essence of Billie Holiday. Columbia. 1991.

- **Video/Film:**

Looking at Our Earth. Sound filmstrip. National Geographic Educational Services. 1992.

Mifure, Toshio. perf. Roshomon. Dr. Akira Kurosawa. 1950. video cassette.
Embassy, 1986.

- **Interview (conducted by the researcher)**

Pei, I.M. Personal interview. 22 July 2001

- **Book with a Corporate Author:**

American Diabetes Association. Diabetes in Children. New York:
Random. 2002.

(Note: For parenthetical citations of sources with no author, use a shortened version of the title instead of the author's name; e.g., the parenthetical citation of the above source would be written as follows (American Diabetes 17).

Handling Quotations In Your Text

- **Author's Name**

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

Examples:

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).

For nonprint (films, TV series, etc.) or electronic sources, try to include the name that begins the entry in the Works Cited page.

Sometimes you may have to use an indirect quotation, that is, a quotation that you found in another source that was quoting from the original. For such indirect quotations, use "qtd. in" to indicate the source:

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

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 her or his full name if different authors share initials) in your citation. If you cite more than one work by a particular author, include a shortened title for the particular work from which you are quoting to distinguish it from the other works by that same person.

Examples:

- **Two authors with the same last name:**

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).

- **Two works by the same author:**

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

- **Short Quotations**

To indicate short quotations (fewer than four typed lines of prose or three lines of verse) in your text, enclose the quotation within double quotation marks and incorporate it into your text. Provide the author and specific page citation (in the case of verse, provide line numbers) in the text, and include a complete reference in the works-cited list. Punctuation marks such as periods, commas, and semicolons should appear after the parenthetical citation. Question marks and exclamation points should appear within the quotation marks if they are a part of the quoted passage but after the parenthetical citation if they are a part of your text.

Examples:

According to some, dreams express "profound aspects of personality" (Foulkes 184), though others disagree. According to Foulkes's study, dreams may express "profound aspects of personality" (184). Is it possible that dreams may express "profound aspects of personality" (Foulkes 184)? Cullen concludes, "Of all the things that happened there/ That's all I remember" (11-12).

- **Long Quotations**

Place quotations longer than four typed lines in a free-standing block of typewritten lines, and omit quotation marks. Start the quotation on a new line, indented one inch from the left margin, and maintain double-spacing. Your parenthetical citation should come after the closing punctuation mark. When quoting verse, maintain original line breaks. (You should maintain double-spacing throughout your essay.)

Examples:

Nelly Dean treats Heathcliff poorly and dehumanizes him throughout her narration: They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room, and I had no more sense, so, I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it would be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr. Earnshaw's door, and there he found it on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how it got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house. (Bronte 78)

In "Sources," Adrienne Rich explores the roles of women in shaping their world:

The faithful drudging child the child at the oak desk whose penmanship, hard work, style will win her prizes becomes the woman with a mission, not to win prizes but to change the laws of history. (23)

- **Adding or Omitting Words In Quotations**

If you add a word or words in a quotation, you should put brackets around the words to indicate that they are not part of the original text. For example:

Jan Harold Brunvand, in an essay on urban legends, states: "some individuals [who retell urban legends] make a point of learning every rumor or tale" (78).

If you omit a word or words from a quotation, you should indicate the deleted word or word by using ellipsis marks surrounded by brackets. For example:

In an essay on urban legends, Jan Harold Brunvand notes that "some individuals make a point of learning every recent rumor or tale [...] and in a short time a lively exchange of details occurs" (78).

Note: If there are ellipsis marks in the quoted author's work, do not put brackets around them; only use brackets around ellipsis marks to distinguish them from ellipsis marks in the quoted author's work.

Electronic Sources
Internet/Web Sources

In-Text Parenthetical Citations - Web Sites - IMPORTANT

Normally in works that are printed, in-text citations include, in parentheses, the author's last name and the page cited, as in "(Roever 355)." However, because electronic documents have no pagination or other type of reference markers, the MLA Handbook recommends that such **parenthetical references be avoided if possible**. More preferable are direct references in the text to the name of the author or sponsoring organization.

Example of an In-Text Citation of an Electronic Publication With a Known Author:

William J. Mitchell's City of Bits discusses architecture and urban life in the context of the digital telecommunications revolution.

Example of an In-Text Citation of an Electronic Source Without a Known Author but With a Known Sponsor:

More companies today are using data mining to unlock hidden value in their data. The data mining program "Clementine," described at the SPSS Web site, helps organizations predict market share and detect possible fraud.

In the works-cited list, the reader will be able to find a fuller version of each of these brief references by locating the author's name or the organization's name.

In-Text Citation of Electronic Sources in MLA-style Papers

(2) Internet sources should use the parenthetical (in-text) citations in MLA style. For most Web pages, however, you will not have a page number so will include the author's last name, if known (e.g., Walker), or title if no author's name is given (e.g., "Columbia Online style"). If page numbers, sections numbers, or paragraph numbers are included on the Web site by the author, you may include those in the reference as well.

Remember that the purpose of the parenthetical citation is (1) to point to the location of the quotation or the paraphrase in the referenced work or (2) to point to the referenced work in the list of Works Cited. Whatever entry begins the reference on the Works Cited page (i.e., author's last name or title of work) should also be used in the parenthetical reference.

However, for Internet sources, it is still better to reference the site in the body of the text, if possible, rather than including parenthetical information.

Works-Cited List: Internet/Web Sources Only

- To refer to electronic sources, include print information, if available, along with other information necessary for a reader to locate a source. Underline the title of a database, periodical, or Web site. For sites without titles, include a description such as "Home page" (not underlined).
- Although MLA style does not require the insertion of the word "Retrieved" or the word "Accessed" before the access date, you may wish to include one of these words to distinguish a retrieval date from a publication date.
- Use a hanging indent for each entry; that is, indent the second and succeeding lines five spaces.
- Divide an electronic address only at a logical place, such as at a slash ("/"), period, or hyphen.
- The word "online" may be written as "online" or "on-line." Select one of these alternate forms and then use it consistently.
- MLA style requires that the years of journal publications be shown in parentheses. The dates of newspaper publications are not to be shown in parentheses.
- The use of italics in references can result in ambiguities. For printed student writing submitted for grading and for printed writing submitted for professional editing, the MLA therefore suggests the use of underlining. If you wish to use italics instead, check with your instructor or organization before doing so.
- Either one or two spaces may be left after concluding punctuation marks. The use of a single space after a concluding punctuation mark is becoming increasingly common, however. That is the style followed in our forms and examples below.
- MLA style recommends that Web addresses (URLs) and e-mail addresses be enclosed by angle brackets.
- MLA style suggests that writers avoid showing network and e-mail addresses as hyperlinks, unless the document containing them is to be read on screen. (To follow this suggestion, turn off your word processor's automatic hyperlink function.)

1. WORLD WIDE WEB SITE (HOME PAGE)

Basic Form

Name of author or creator (if given). Title of Web site. (If no title is available, provide description such as name of site plus *Home page*, neither underlined nor in quotation marks.) Name of any institution or organization associated with the site. Access date <URL>.

Examples

Gesterland, Richard. WorldBiz.com Page. Retrieved 1 May 2001 <<http://www.worldbiz.com/>>.

Edmunds.com. Home page. Retrieved 28 Apr. 2000 <<http://www.edmunds.com/edweb/>>.

Business Ethics Resources on WWW. Centre for Applied Ethics. Retrieved 2 May 2001
<<http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/resources/business/>>.

2. WORLD WIDE WEB (SECONDARY PAGE)

Basic Form

Name of author or creator, if available. "Title of topic or article" (if given). Title of page (if named). Name of any institution or organization associated with the site. Latest update (if given). Access date <URL>.

Example

Anderson, Greg. "Can the Trooper and SLX Stand Up?" Edmunds.com. Retrieved 12 Mar. 2001
<<http://www.edmunds.com/edweb/anderson/rollover.html>>.

"Privacy Protection in Other Countries." Media Awareness Network. Updated Nov. 1999. Retrieved 2 May 2001
<<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/issues/priv/laws/lawintl.htm>>.

"Data Mining Makes the Difference." SPSS, Inc. Retrieved 2 Feb. 2001 <<http://www.spss.com/datamine/>>.

3. BOOK (ONLINE)

Basic Form

Author. "Chapter." Book Title. Publication information for printed source (if available). Date of electronic publication, of the latest update, or of posting, if given. Name of any institution or organization sponsoring or associated with the Web site. Access date <URL>.

Example

Strunk, William, Jr. "Elementary Rules of Usage." The Elements of Style. Project Bartleby Archive, Columbia University. Retrieved 20 Aug. 2001
<<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk/strunk.html#11>>.

4. BOOK REVIEW (ONLINE)

Basic Form

Author of review. Review of Book Title by Author. Journal or Magazine Title: Volume, Issue, or other identifying number (Year of publication in parentheses): pages (if given). Access date <URL>.

Example

Hansen, Richard. Review of A Pragmatic Approach to Business Ethics by Alex Michalos. The Online Journal of Ethics 1.1 (1995). Retrieved 5 May 2001
<<http://condor.depaul.edu/ethics/michalos.html>>.

5. ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLE (ONLINE)

Basic Form

Author (if given). "Title of Material Accessed." Date of material (if given). Title of Encyclopedia. Publication information for any print version of the source if available. Date of electronic publication, of the latest update, or of posting (if known). [search term if necessary for retrieval]. Access date <URL>.

Example

"Stock Market Crash of 1929." Britannica Online. Vers. 98.2. April, 1998. Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved 20 August 1999
<<http://www.eb.com:180/cgi-bin/g?DocF=micro/567/22.html>>.

6. JOURNAL ARTICLE (ONLINE)

Basic Form

Author. "Article Title." Journal Title Volume.Issue or other identifying number (Year of publication in parentheses): paging. Access date <URL>.

Example

Koehn, Daryl. "The Ethics of Handwriting Analysis in Pre-Employment Screening." The Online Journal of Ethics 1.1 (1995). Retrieved 2 June 2001 <[http://condor/depaul.edu/ethics/hand.html](http://condor.depaul.edu/ethics/hand.html)>.

7. MAGAZINE ARTICLE (ONLINE)

Basic Form

Author. "Article Title." Magazine Title. Date: page (for magazines published every month or two months, do not give volume and issue numbers even if they are listed). Access date <URL>.

Example

Murphy, H. Lee. "Saturn's Orbit Still High With Consumers." Marketing News Online. 31 Aug. 1998. Retrieved 1 Sept. 2001 <<http://www.ama.org/pubs/mn/0818/n1.htm>>.

8. NEWSPAPER ARTICLE (ONLINE)

Basic Form

Author. "Article Title." Newspaper Title. Date, edition, section: page (if given). Database name (if applicable). Access date <URL>.

Example

Verhovek, Sam Howe. "Some in Seattle Believe Two Microsofts Might Be Better Than One." The New York Times. 1 May 2000. Retrieved 3 June 2001 <http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/00/05/biztech_articles/01seat.html>.

9. POSTING (ONLINE)

Basic Form

Author (if given). "Title of document" (as given in subject line). Online posting. Date. Name of forum (if known). Access date <URL>.

Examples

Manning, Kelly Bert. "E-Businesses and Privacy Leadership." Online posting. 7 Apr. 2001. Society Privacy Forum. Retrieved 26 Apr. 2001
<alt.comp.society.privacy>.

Stevens, Melissa. "Take Our Daughters to Work Day." Online posting. 24 Apr. 2001. Career and Workplace Issues Forum. Retrieved 2 May 2001
<http://forums.nytimes.com/webin/WebX?13@@efded73>.

Works Cited

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Retrieved 6 Dec. 2002
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- Walker, Janice R, and Todd Taylor. The Columbia Guide to Online Style. NY: Columbia University Press, 1998.

