

Using MLA to Format Your Paper

Below are some basic guidelines for formatting a paper in MLA style. ¹

General Guidelines

- 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 like Times New Roman or Courier.
- 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 a paragraph one half-inch (five spaces or press tab once) from the left margin.
- 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.
- Use either italics or underlining 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.

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. Don't underline your title or put it in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case, not in all capital letters.
- Use quotation marks and underlining or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text, e.g.,
 - 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.

¹ <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>

- 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.

The first page of your paper should use the format shown below:

The diagram illustrates the required format for the first page of an essay. It shows the following elements and their placement:

- Your Name**: Located in the upper left corner. A vertical double-headed arrow next to it is labeled "1\"", indicating a one-inch margin from the top.
- Instructor's Name**: Located below the student's name.
- Class information (English 1A)**: Located below the instructor's name.
- Date**: Located below the class information.
- Center Title of Essay**: Centered below the date.
- Paragraph text**: The main body of the paper. The first line is "Begin your paragraph one double-spaced line below". A horizontal double-headed arrow to its right is labeled "1\"", indicating a one-inch margin from the right. The following lines are "your centered title; the paragraph should begin with a 1/2\" tabbed indent. The paper's heading goes in the upper-left corner of the first page only. Use 1\" margins all around. Double space everything, including blocked quotes. Do not justify the right margin." A horizontal double-headed arrow to the left of the first line of this paragraph is labeled "1\"", indicating a one-inch margin from the left. A horizontal double-headed arrow to the right of the last line of this paragraph is labeled "1\"", indicating a one-inch margin from the right. The text "double space text" is written in red to the right of the paragraph, with a red arrow pointing left towards the text.

Pages that follow the first page of your paper should use the format shown below:

1" (vertical margin)

1/2" (vertical margin)

last name and pg #

1" (horizontal margin)

1" (horizontal margin)

double space text

On all consecutive pages, place a header in the upper right-hand corner; the header should include your last name followed by the page number. All the text on these pages should be double spaced, including any blocked quotes. Paragraphs should be separated by a single space--do not add extra spaces between paragraphs.

When you quote an author or use her ideas, be sure to document your source correctly with a parenthetical reference.

In-Text Citations ²

In MLA style, referring to the works of others in your text is done by using what's known as parenthetical citation. Immediately following a quotation from a source or a paraphrase of a source's ideas, you place the author's name followed by a space and the relevant page number(s).

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

When a source has no known author, use a shortened title of the work instead of an author name. Place the title in quotation marks if it's a short work, or italicize or underline it if it's a longer work.

Your in-text citation will correspond with an entry in your Works Cited page, which, for the Burke citation above, will look something like this:

Burke, Kenneth. Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method. Berkeley: U of California P, 1966.

It's important to know that parenthetical citations and Works Cited pages 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.

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).

² <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/02/>

Works Cited Page

According to MLA style, you must have a Works Cited page at the end of your research paper. All entries in the Works Cited page must correspond to the works cited in your main text.³

Basic Rules

- Begin your Works Cited page on a separate page at the end of your research paper. It should have the same one-inch margins and last name, page number header as the rest of your paper.
- Label the page **Works Cited** (do not underline the words Works Cited or put them in quotation marks) and center the words Works Cited at the top of the page.
- Double space all citations, but do not skip spaces between entries.
- List page numbers of sources 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.
- If you're citing an article or a publication that was originally issued in print form but that you retrieved from an online database, you should provide enough information so that the reader can locate the article either in its original print form or retrieve it from the online database (if they have access).

Capitalization and Punctuation

- Capitalize each word in the titles of articles, books, etc, but do not capitalize articles, short prepositions, or conjunctions unless one is the first word of the title or subtitle: Gone with the Wind, The Art of War, There Is Nothing Left to Lose
- Use italics or underlining for titles of larger works (books, magazines) and quotation marks for titles of shorter works (poems, articles)

³ <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/06/>

Listing Author Names

Entries are listed by author name (or, for entire edited collections, editor names). Author names are written last name first; middle names or middle initials follow the first name:

Burke, Kenneth
Levy, David M.
Wallace, David Foster

Do not list titles (Dr., Sir, Saint, etc.) or degrees (PhD, MA, DDS, etc.) with names. A book listing an author named "John Bigbrain, PhD" appears simply as "Bigbrain, John"; do, however, include suffixes like "Jr." or "II." Putting it all together, a work by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would be cited as "King, Martin Luther, Jr.," with the suffix following the first or middle name and a comma.

More than One Work by an Author

If you have cited more than one work by a particular author, order the entries alphabetically by title, and use three hyphens in place of the author's name for every entry after the first:

Burke, Kenneth. A Grammar of Motives.
---. A Rhetoric of Motives.

When an author or collection editor appears both as the sole author of a text and as the first author of a group, list solo-author entries first:

Heller, Steven, ed. The Education of an E-Designer.
Heller, Steven and Karen Pomeroy. Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design.

Work with No Known Author

Alphabetize works with no known author by their title; use a shortened version of the title in the parenthetical citations in your paper. In this case, Boring Postcards USA has no known author:

Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacra and Simulations.
Boring Postcards USA.

Burke, Kenneth. A Rhetoric of Motives.

Sample MLA Works Cited Page:

The diagram shows an MLA Works Cited page with several annotations in red. At the top center, the words "Works Cited" are centered, with a red arrow pointing to them from the word "centered" on the left. A vertical double-headed arrow above "Works Cited" is labeled "1\"", indicating the vertical spacing between entries. To the right of "Works Cited", a vertical double-headed arrow is labeled "1/2\"", indicating the vertical spacing between the last name and page number of the first entry. The first entry is: Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing. 3rd ed. Robert Connors and Cherly Glenn. New York: St. Martin's. 408-21. Annotations include: "double space text" with a red arrow pointing to the entry; "indent 5 spaces or 1/2\"" with a red arrow pointing to the start of the entry; and "1\"" with a red arrow pointing to the start of the entry. The second entry is: Bennett, Noel. "Halo of the Sun." Connection: A Multicultural Reader for Writers. Judith A. Stanford. Mountainview, CA: Mayfield, 1993. 311-319. Annotations include: "1\"" with a red arrow pointing to the start of the entry; and "1\"" with a red arrow pointing to the end of the entry. The third entry is: Killingsworth, M. Jimmie. "Product and Process, Literacy and Orality: An Essay on Composition and Culture." College Composition and Communication. 44 (1993): 26 - 39. The fourth entry is: Momaday, N. Scott. The Way to Rainy Mountain. N.p.: U of New Mexico P, 1969.