

# MLA Citation Basics (8th edition)

In college you may have to rely on sources to help you in your research. Most classes will use a specific method for documenting your research. Here, you will learn about MLA, which is from the Modern Language Association, is used in many of the humanities and literature fields. Make sure to familiarize yourself with all of this information.

Generally, MLA is a fairly simple form of documentation: that is, **the citation in the paper must correspond to the very first word or name it matches in your works cited entry.**

For example, below the author's name is used in a **signal phrase**, which is a few short words that introduce the source by the author's name before the quote, summary, or paraphrase:

According to Rosenberg, "Many regard Fredrico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) as the greatest Spanish author since Cervantes (101).

Of course, it then follows that any reader should be able to turn to the end of the document and scan the works cited page, which is alphabetically ordered, to find a full citation that will help the reader locate and validate the author's use of the source:

Rosenberg, Donna. *World Literature: An Anthology of Great Short Stories, Drama, and Poetry*. NTC Publishing. 1992.

Therefore, the two most important things to remember with citations is the honest inclusion of a 1) **name or title of source when and where used in your essay** AND the inclusion of a 2) **full citation at the end of the document** in a section titled Works Cited.

The full citation includes the full name of the author or creator, the title of the source, the container (such as website, book, publisher, etc.), the date created, the date accessed or used in your research, and location of the source.

## To signal phrase or use parentheses? That is the question.

It is important to note where exactly you are referencing your source material within your own writing. Do not leave it to assumption of your reader that he or she will know the difference between your ideas and someone else's. The citation within the essay can be done using either a signal phrase or a parenthetical citation.

Whether to use a signal phrase or a parenthetical citation (sometimes called an **In-text citation**) is a question student will often ask.

Both are equally correct.

However, as a general rule, the signal phrase is preferred because it provides built in transitions that draw the connection between the source (and its evidence) and the point or claim you are

trying to make. Likewise, if you are preparing a speech, the use of signal phrases works themselves right into the oral portion of your document, thus forgoing the awkwardness of trying to inform your listening audience of your citations.

If, however, you can't use a signal phrase in a given context, then you may opt for the parenthetical citation. When you do use the signal phrase, though, make sure to include your parenthesis containing the page number at the end of the passage...unless you don't have a page number.

## **Key Things to Remember with the full bibliographical citations:**

- If there are three or more people performing same function (as author, editor, etc.), list the first person and then write **et al.** et al. is a Latin abbreviation meaning "and others."
- Abbreviate Press or University Press in publisher names to P and UP.
- Abbreviate months to the first three letters except for May, June, and July. For example: Aug, Dec.
- If you are missing any components, such as author or date, leave it blank and continue to the next component.
  - A consistent error that many students make happens when there is no identifiable author, editor, or translator. When you encounter a useful source that does not have an author, then you must cite by the title of the work in question.
  - Since the item does not have an author's name, then you would necessarily cite it by the articles title either in a signal phrase such as this: According to an editorial entitled "Policing Ohio's Courses,"... or in a parenthetical citation ("Policing Ohio's Courses"). If the item is a long title, use the first few words of the title followed by ellipsis to indicate the title is longer. For example, "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" you could shorten in a citation to ("A Very Old Man..."). In the signal phrase, use the entire title.
- When you are using web sources, you may find it necessary to scroll down to the bottom of the page to see if the author's name is available or examine the home page. Keep in mind that if the article was written by an organization or government agency, then you must cite by those.
- Remember to use a hanging indent (hit Control+T in Word) and double spacing to organize your Works Cited list.
- The Works Cited should start at the top of a new page at the end of the document.
- The items in your Works Cited page will be in alphabetical order. That is the first letter of either the author's last name of the article's title determines placement in the works cited. There is an exception though; if a title is preceded by "the, a, or an" then the next major word in the article title will determine placement. Take the title "A Very Old Man with

Enormous Wings" as an example: Instead of placing it at the front of the works cited page, it would actually be toward the end listed under the letter V.

- Common knowledge (anything the average high school graduate would know) and personal experiences do not need citation; however, putting ideas gathered from a source into your own words does indeed need citation.

### **Never do the following:**

- Students will often take shortcuts when attempting to cite sources in a paper. It is not unusual that every semester, students will cite in one of the following ways: (PBS.org, History.com, A&E.com). Never do that as it doesn't really tell your reader anything specific. In almost all instances, it doesn't directly cross reference to the first letter in the works cited entry. Remember, if you don't have an identifiable author, then your works cited entry and citation must be by the title.
- Students will take a shortcut when they create their Works Cited page; when this happens, they will only list URLs...that is the web address. Never do that. In the ninth edition of the textbook, the authors direct you to provide the URL after you have provided the correctly formatted works cited entry.
- Copy a source, change every other word, and attempt to call the writing your own. Anytime you copy a source, you must put quotation marks around the copied word(s) and you must cite the source. Likewise, you must also cite the source even when you change the wording as it is not solely yours.