

MLA Documentation Style: The Basics

Revised July 2010

Whenever you borrow outside information and incorporate it into your essays, you must document the contributions of the writers or sources. Borrowed material that must be documented includes direct quotations, paraphrases, summaries, statistics, facts, tables, graphs, and diagrams.

In the humanities, MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation style is used. This is how an MLA in-text citation usually works:

- 1. The borrowed material is introduced by a signal phrase that names the author.**
- 2. The borrowed material is presented.**
- 3. The borrowed material is followed by a page or paragraph number (if available) in parentheses.**
- 4. A works-cited page (alphabetized by authors' last names) at the end of the essay provides complete bibliographic information about your source.**

I. Remember the purposes of documentation:

- A. to give credit to the source from which you are borrowing and**
- B. to inform the reader about the source of your information.**

II. Because of these purposes, remember that your in-text citations must lead the reader to the proper works-cited entries.

- A. In other words, any author's name that you cite in-text must also appear in the "author" position of one of your works-cited entries, and,**
- B. conversely, anything appearing in the "author" position of one of your works-cited entries must appear somewhere in the text of your essay.**

III. Here's a basic example: **a quotation from a book with an author, followed by the works-cited entry for the source:**

In-text citation:

In their book *Dynamic Argument*, Robert Lamm and Justin Everett claim, "While no one will deny that the Internet's accessibility from any home computer makes it convenient, its vastness (and its relative lack of organization) can make it difficult to find the kind of information you need" (220).

Works Cited

Lamm, Robert, and Justin Everett. *Dynamic Argument*. Boston: Houghton, 2007. Print.

IV. An MLA in-text citation must include the following:

A. An author's name (or title of work if author is unknown).

1. The author's name may appear either in the sentence that contains the borrowed information or in parentheses with the page number.
2. Do not put author's name in both places.

B. A page number in parentheses that follows the borrowed material.

1. Unpaginated sources such as pamphlets and Web sites do not require parenthetical page references, though a parenthetical paragraph reference is a good idea.
2. A few electronic sources (such as pdf files) have stable page numbers, in which case a parenthetical page reference is required. Other electronic sources may have paragraph or section numbers, in which case use of the abbreviations "par." or "sec.," followed by the appropriate number(s) is required.
3. Do not write "online" in parentheses after an electronic-source citation.
4. See the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed.; Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*; Faigley's *The Brief Penguin Handbook*; or any other recent grammar-and-style guide, for more information.

V. For information on **format of works-cited entries**, see the examples that follow.

Sample MLA In-Text Citations with Corresponding Works-Cited Entries
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1. Quotation from a Periodical with Author's Name in Sentence

In a recent article in *The New Yorker*, Bill Buford, discussing the rise of TV food programs, writes, "Ours is a different audience from the one that watched Julia Child" (47).

Works Cited

Buford, Bill. "TV Dinners." *New Yorker* 2 Oct. 2006: 42-47. Print.

2. Paraphrase from a Periodical with Author's Name in Parentheses

Amazingly, by the late 1990s, the list of top-ten killers of Americans did not include AIDS (Casey 100).

Works Cited

Casey, Nell. "A Mom—Not a Victim." *Good Housekeeping* Feb. 2007: 99-101. Print.

3. Quotation from a Periodical with Unknown Author (Title in Parentheses)

An article in *PC Magazine* mentions that "video and television content on the Web is exploding" ("Video" 19).

Works Cited

"Video Vaults Ahead." *PC Magazine* 22 Aug. 2006: 19. Print.

Notice that **the article title takes on the author position in the works cited** and that **the article title is abbreviated in the in-text parenthetical citation**.

4. Paraphrase from a Periodical with Unknown Author (Title in Sentence)

The article "The Dangers of Stingrays" reports that only 17 people worldwide have died of stingray wounds (63).

Works Cited

"The Dangers of Stingrays." *People* 18 Sept. 2006: 63. Print.

5. Quotation from an Electronic Source with Author's Name in Sentence

Writing in *The New York Times*, Natasha Singer elucidates the details: "The California Safe Cosmetics Act, which took effect on Jan. 1, requires cosmetics companies to tell state health authorities if a product contains any chemical on several government lists covering possible cancer-causing agents or substances that may harm the reproductive system."

Notice that there is no parenthetical reference for this unpaginated electronic source.

Works Cited

Singer, Natasha. "Should You Trust Your Makeup?" *New York Times*. New York Times, 15 Feb. 2007.
Web. 21 Sept. 2008

(Note: *New York Times* is listed twice because it is the name of the Web site and the name of the site publisher/sponsor.)

6. Paraphrase from an Electronic Source with Unknown Author

The core around which to build a home gym is an adjustable weight bench, which is relatively inexpensive (“How to Build”).

Notice that there is no parenthetical reference for this unpaginated electronic source.

Works Cited

“How to Build a Low Cost Home Gym.” *Virtual Fitness Trainer*. Virtual Fitness Trainer, 2008.

Web. 29 June 2009.

(Note: *Virtual Fitness Trainer* is listed twice because it is the name of the Web site and the name of the site publisher/sponsor.)

7. Quotation from a Library Database

According to Alan Greenblatt in his article “Television’s Future,” “Advertisers always pay dearly to run TV commercials during the Super Bowl, and this year was no exception—\$2.6 million for a 30-second spot.”

Notice that there is no parenthetical reference for this unpaginated electronic source.

Works Cited

Greenblatt, Alan. "Television's Future." *CQ Researcher* 17.7 (2007): n. pag. *CQ Researcher Online*.

Web. 29 June 2009.

8. Paraphrase from a Library Database

Robyn S. Shapiro, writing in the journal *Social Education*, explains that the inevitable destruction of human embryos is the most difficult ethical issue in stem-cell research.

Notice that there is no parenthetical reference for this unpaginated electronic source.

Works Cited

Shapiro, Robyn S. "Bioethics and the Stem Cell Research Debate." *Social Education* 70.4

(2006): n. pag. *Health Reference Center Academic*. Web. 29 June 2009.

9. Paraphrase from a Film or Videorecording

Indeed, in *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*, the great but mercurial Dylan presents himself in yet another guise: everyday guy.

Works Cited

No Direction Home: Bob Dylan. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Paramount, 2005. DVD.