The Modern Language Association style, commonly referred to as MLA style, is a system of documentation generally used in the humanities, such as language arts or history. MLA documentation requires in-text citations for brief references to sources used in the body of the text and a works-cited page featuring full citation information for all of your sources.

The most recent edition of the MLA Handbook shifts the style of documentation away from individually customized entries for each type of source and towards a single universal model for entries that can be adapted to each new source. In this new format, the writer creates an entry by listing all of the core elements of source in a specific order. Instead of asking “How do I cite a book?” or “How do I cite a DVD?” the writer follows one general format and asks “Who is the author?” and “What is the title?” Those items are in the chart to the right.

### WORKS CITED ENTRIES

**Book**

**Book with an Editor**

**Work from a Collection**

**Newspaper Article**

**Journal Article**
Online Journal Article


Website


Short Work from a Website


Personal Interview


ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR WORKS-CITED LISTS

- **Printed Works:** Page numbers in the works-cited list (but not in in-text citations) are now preceded by p. or pp. (46).
- **Journals:** The volume/issue identifier is now “vol. 5, no. 5” rather than “5.5” (39-40). Additionally, if an issue of a journal includes a month or season as part of the date, then the month or season is always included with the year (45).
- **Online Works:** Accessed dates are now optional (53). Additionally, the use of URLs and DOIs is encouraged but not required (110). Also, placeholders for unknown information like n.d. are no longer used; missing information available from reliable outside sources can be included inside square brackets (111).
- **Multiple Authors:** With sources that have three or more authors, the first author’s name is given followed by et al. (22).
- **Publishers:** Publishers’ names are now given in full; additionally, business words like Company (Co.) are dropped and the abbreviations U, P, and UP are still used with academic presses (97). City of publication is no longer given, unless needed for clarity (51). When an organization is both the author and publisher, the organization’s name is given only once, usually as the publisher, and no author is stated (25).
- **Miscellaneous:** Medium of publication is no longer stated, unless needed for clarity (52). Terms like editor, edited by, and translator are no longer abbreviated (96-97). Full publication information is now given for widely used reference works, with page-number spans given for articles in alphabetically arranged reference books in print.

IN-TEXT CITATIONS

In MLA, every time you use the work or thoughts of another, you need to cite the original author. Use of others’ work or thoughts include summary, paraphrase, and direct quotations. To cite the source, you will need an in-text citation, which typically consist of the author’s last name and the page number where the material comes from. This is enclosed in parenthesis and followed by a period.

For example, this quotation from Jim Dougan is found on page one of his article:

“After the release of their first album in 1987, The Cows were roundly derided as a talentless, tasteless joke (a charge that would be leveled a few years later against Babes in Toyland)” (Dougan 259).

If you introduce the author before quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing, then only the page number is included in the in-text citation:

According to music critic Mark Prindle, Minneapolis rock combo The Cows are an acquired taste (259).

If the author’s name is not given, include a shortened version of the publication title (117-118):

Minneapolis rock combo The Cows are widely considered to be an acquired taste (“All Music Guide” 259).

Block Quotations

When using a direct quotation that runs four or more lines long, the quotation is introduced by a colon, set off from the main text, and indented an extra half inch from the left margin. Do not indent the first line, add quotation marks not present in the original, or adjust the line spacing. Include the parenthetical citation after the final period or punctuation mark of the block quote.

Fitzgerald movingly describes how Gatsby contains the same personality traits:

Only in Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. (Fitzgerald 6)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR IN-TEXT CITATIONS

• For time-based media like videos, times are now cited in the text (57).
• In-text citations with multiple sources are separated by a semicolon (e.g., Smith 6; Johnson 7). Citations that come from different locations within a single source are separated by commas (e.g., Smith 6, 16, 60). And, citations that includes multiple works by the same author are listed with commas where appropriate (e.g., Smith, “Kung” and “Fu” [126–27]).

INTEGRATING QUOTATIONS IN MLA

Quotations are a sources’ exact words set off in quotation marks. In contrast to paraphrases and summaries, which present your source’s ideas in your own words, quotations give your reader the chance to encounter your source’s words directly. There are three components for integrating these quotations in MLA:

The First Component is the introduction of the quotation. This includes the author’s introductory sentence such as:

In his article, “The Importance of Writing Badly,” Bruce Ballenger describes his take on the beginnings of the writing process.

The quotation introduction could follow a number of templates like the following:

X states, “ _______________ .”
According to X, “ _______________ .”
X writes, “ _______________ .”
In her/his book, _______________ , X maintains that “ _______________ .”

Or something else that introduces the author and/or title before the quote is used.

The Second Component is the actual quotation being used.

The Third Component is what the writer gathers from the quotation. This is the part most writers forget about. This is the analysis. The third component is the explanation of why the quote is important to your argument. This is crucial, as it tells the reader how your research fits into your main claim, idea, or thesis.

Possible templates for the third component look like the following:

Basic, X is saying _______________ .
In other words, X believes _______________ .
X is insisting that _______________ .
The essence of X’s argument is that_________________.

Example Paragraph

Not every single piece of writing may be perfect or have a purpose or function. In his essay, “The Importance of Writing Badly,” Bruce Ballenger says, “Giving myself permission to write badly makes it much more likely that I will write what I don’t expect to write, and that from those surprises will come some of my best writing” (1). I agree with Ballenger, who says it usually takes at least a couple of rough drafts before he feels comfortable and confident in his writing. I “write badly” in rough drafts because I just try to get the main ideas and the body written down in a rough draft. Then I go back and revise the rough drafts to polish off the writing. All of those rough drafts add together to make one final, hopefully good, piece of writing.

A Call to Action: Cell Phone Use on the Road

When a cell phone goes off in a classroom or at a concert, we are irritated, but at least our lives are not endangered. When we are on the road, however, irresponsible cell phone users are more than irritating: they are putting our lives at risk. Many of us have witnessed drivers so distracted by dialing and chatting that they resemble drunk drivers, weaving between lanes, for example, or nearly running down pedestrians in crosswalks. A number of bills to regulate use of cell phones on the road have been introduced in state legislatures, and the time has come to push for their passage. Regulation is needed because drivers using phones are seriously impaired and because laws on negligent and reckless driving are not sufficient to punish offenders.

No one can deny that cell phones have caused traffic deaths and injuries. Cell phones were implicated in three fatal accidents in November 1999 alone. Early in November, two-year-old Morgan Pena was killed by a driver distracted by his cell phone. Morgan’s mother, Patti Pena, reports that the driver “ran a stop sign at 45 mph, broadsided by vehicle and killed Morgan as she sat in her car seat.” A week later, corrections officer Shannon Smith, who was guarding prisoners by the side of the road was killed by a woman distracted while using her phone and driving. The driver said in court that when he looked up from the cell phone he was dialing, he was three feet from the car and had no time to stop (Stockwell B8). Expert testimony, public opinion, and even cartoons suggest that driving while phoning is dangerous.
Works Cited


