

How to Format an MLA Paper

General Guidelines

This handout offers general guidelines for the typical college research paper. Before beginning your research paper, discuss it thoroughly with your instructor and follow his/her instructions. To write your paper use 8-1/2" x 11" size paper, 10 or 12 point type, and a standard font such as Time New Roman. Your paper should have a standard one-inch margin all around and typed on one side of the page only with all text double-spaced.

Cover Page (optional)

Cover pages are optional. The first section of your paper is the "cover page" which has a specific title that is also informative. The title should be placed about 1/3 the way down the page and centered. It should include your name several lines below the title – centered, the class you are in with the section number, the teacher's name, and the paper's due date or date turned in placed one inch from the bottom of the page and centered.

My title: A Sample Paper

by
Iam Student

Class and section number
Professor I. M. Wise
April 24, 2004

Formal Outline

The second section of the research paper is your outline. Begin by typing – double-spaced – at the top left hand corner of the page the following information: your name, the professor's name, your class and section number, due date or date submitted, followed by the word "Outline" centered on the page.

You are writing a topic outline that shows how your paper is actually organized. It uses phrases or words after the thesis statement but *no sentences*. The outline begins with your thesis statement. Thesis Statement is typed and underlined. It is presented as a single sentence and must be the same as the thesis statement in your paper's introduction. Each level of information is indented five spaces and requires two levels of detail – 1 must have a 2 although a 3 does not have to have a 4. Remember, the thesis statement is a statement of your plan for your paper

Ima Student

Professor I. M. Wise

Class and section number

Date Due or date of submission

Outline

Thesis Statement: Remember, Thesis Statement is underlined. This is a topic outline that uses phrases and words but *no sentences*.

I. Introduction

A. Supporting Details

1. Sub-detail

a. Detail about the sub-detail

(1)

(2)

(a)

(b)

b.

2.

B.

II.

Student ii

III. If you go to a second page, you must have your last name in the upper right hand corner and use lower case Roman numerals (ii).

In the upper right hand corner
will be your last name
and page number

Standard format for all MLA essays and research papers:

In the left hand margin will be your information:

Iam Student

Class and section

Your teacher

The assignment (i.e., WA #1, Argument, Cause and Effect, Research paper, etc)

Title is never underlined, within quotation marks, or in bold.

Your body paragraph text must be double-spaced. Remember that when you begin a paragraph, indent five spaces and double-space your text. Make sure that your margins are the standard one-inch all around which is the default setting if you are using a word processor or a computer. Write your paper in the third person (he, she, they) unless specified otherwise by your teacher.

OUTSIDE SOURCES: *Unless you are required* by your instructor to have in-text citation and a Works Cited page, you must read this section carefully. This reference is by no means an exhausted source. Your text, *The Little Brown Essential Handbook*, can give you a better description of citing sources. You must include a combination of direct quotes, paraphrases, combination notes, and your own conclusions. In a direct quote you use the author's exact words and enclose them in quotation marks ("quote") followed by the author's last name, and in parenthesis, the page number of the quotation. In a paraphrase, you restate in your own words the main ideas and important details of the source. In a combination note, you use some of your own words along with a direct quote. Your own conclusions are the ideas that come to you as you contemplate your research.

When using a long quote of more than four lines, set it off by indenting in 10-spaces. Thus, it will not need to be placed in quotation marks. For example, John Updike states that

The ancients said the purpose of poetry, of writing, was to entertain and to instruct; Aristotle put forward the still fascinating notion that a dramatic action, however terrible and piteous, carries off at the end, in catharsis, the morbid, personal subjective impurities of our emotions. The enlargement of sympathy, through identification with the lives of others, is frequently presented as an aim of narrative. (Kennedy and Gioia 17-18)

If you have a quotation inside of a quotation, which is called a combination quotation with an interior quotation, use a single quote mark for the interior quote. Here is an example from Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart": "He had been saying to himself—'It is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor, or it is merely a cricket which has a single chirp'" (Kennedy and Gioia 35). Note that there is no punctuation inside the parenthesis, and the closing punctuation from the sentence is placed after the parenthesis.

Page 2 and all subsequent pages will have your last name and the page number as a header typed ½-inch from the top of the page while the actual text begins at the one-inch margin.

If you mention an author's name in the text, you need only give the page number in the parenthesis. This is also true if you are continuing to quote from another author. "She's a real Pre-Madonna" (152). If the quote comes from a book with two authors, list both in parenthesis. (Author 1 and Author 2 10). If a book has three authors, you may name them or name the first followed by the abbreviation for "and others" which is *et al.* (Author et al, 10). In the event the quote is a quote from another work which can't be found, indicate that it was quoted from another place (qtd in Author 10).

If you use an abbreviation, always spell the name first. For example, the Modern Language Association (MLA) is the source of this information. If you do not wish to use a complete quote, you may use an ellipsis (...) to indicate that text is missing. For example: "... and the quote" or "The ... quote" or "The quote ...". If you need to offer an explanation about the quote or extra details, you can do this by placing the explanation in square brackets [].

When you feel that you have proven the points of your thesis, you then write your conclusion which sums up all that has been written *without introducing any new topics*. Like with any project, make sure that you allow yourself enough time to complete it. Quoting an old proverb, "Procrastination is the thief of time." This is never more true than when you leave a project to the last minute.

Works Cited Page

The works cited page is separate! Click on the Insert tab and select Blank Page. This page will be separated from the main text. Continue numbering your paper with your name and page number in the header.

Works cited is a list of all the works included in our paper, listed alphabetically by author. *If no author is given for a work listed, use the title of the work placed in alphabetical order between authors.*

Type the title, Works Cited, at the one-inch margin using upper and lower case-that is capitalizing the first letters only. Begin the first line of the entry at the one-inch margin with the second and subsequent lines of the entry indented five spaces. Double-space between entries and place punctuation marks exactly as noted in the examples below. As long as you keep each entry separate, you can format the

works cited page automatically. You can do this by first highlighting all entries, and then clicking the Home tab. In the Paragraph toolbar, click the arrow at the bottom right-hand corner. Next, under Special (which is another pull down menu), select Hanging. This will automatically format your works cited entries.

You may abbreviate publisher's names, and when you give dates, give them as *day, month, year* (16 May 2004). And, in some cases, your instructor may want you to list every work you looked at regardless of whether you used it or not. Such a list is called a Bibliography.

Desai, Anita. "Scholar and Gypsy." *The Oxford Book of Travel Stories*. Ed. Patricia Craig. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. 251-73. Print.

Works Cited

Book with one author.

Last, First. *Title of the Book in Italics*. City of Publication: Publisher's Name, year published. Print.

Lederer, Richard. *More Anguished English*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1993. Print.

Two Books by the same author

Use the form above for the first entry- the second entry follows this sample.

---*Title. City: Publisher, year*

Books with two or three authors.

Last, First, and First Last2. *Title*. City: Publisher, year.

Last, First, First Last2 and First Last3. *Title*. City: Publisher, year. Print.

Books with four or more authors.

Last, First, et al. *Title*. City: Publisher, year. Print.

Book with an editor.

Last, First, ed. *Title*. City: Publisher, year. Print.

Magazines, periodicals, journals or newspapers.

Last, First. "Title of the Article in quotes." *Title of the Magazine in italics*.

Volume or Issue Number (Year) OR full date: Starting page-ending page (for newspapers include the section letter with the page number). Print. Treat articles with no author just as you treat books with no author.

Government Publications.

Last, First (if given) OR the State OR United States Department or Committee. City where it is printed, like Washington, D.C.: the agency preparing it, like GPO Government Printing Office)/State OR Dept. of Education, year. Print.

E-mail

Last, First. "Title of E-mail." E-mail to the author. Full date. Email.

Listserv or Usenet, bulletin board, or discussion group

Last, First. "The title in quotes." Full date of the posting. Online Posting (type those words). Name of the group- may include the subject. Your source (Like-Usenet). Web. Date you took it off line.

An Online source with a print version

Last, First. "Title of Work." *Name of the Print Source (Magazine)*. Full date, pages and section. *Name of Online Source*. Web. Date you found this online.

An Online source without a print version.

Last, First. "Title." Date written. *Name of Source*. Web. Date you found this online.

An Online source with no author.

Begin entry with title of document. Date written. *Name of Source*. Web. *Date you found this online*.

A movie or video.

Title of the Work. Dir. director's name. Perf. performers' names (only main ones). Name of the studio/distributor, year. Film.

Television or radio

"Title of the Episode." By Writer of Episode. Dir. Director's name. *Name of the show.* Network. Full date. Television.