Sample MLA Passage

MLA style may seem unwieldy and complex at first, but whether you are a student or a professional, it is essential to your ability to ethically and accurately document sources. John Smith, author of “Avoiding Plagiarism At All Costs,” likens plagiarism to identity theft. He writes, “when someone steals your identity, they rob you of a life that you have worked for: your name, your money, your credit standing, and your integrity. Likewise, when someone steals a writer’s words or ideas, they are robbing that writer of his or her identity as well, as writing is so personal and a product of hard work” (34). MLA allows for a standard of documentation that clearly and accurately gives credit where credit is due. In this way, “the writer maintains his or her integrity and likewise his or her hard work is recognized by fellow writers, instead of recklessly and disrespectfully stolen,” notes the site “MLA and You.” Thus, when a writer’s words or ideas are used, MLA documentation requires writers not only to indicate when they are using a source’s information, through source introductions or attributive tags like “According to Author Jones,” but to also indicate, through parenthetical citations, where those ideas end (Smith 35). In those parenthetical citations, readers receive the very important information of the source and page number so that they, too, might research and find that same information. Finally, the source, and all of its relevant information, is documented in a works cited list, further identifying and crediting the work. This, as Smith notes, keeps writers honest and sources recognized (36-38).

Betty Jackson states that writers will do well to remember that MLA documentation is a four-step process (qtd. in Smith 38). The first time a source is used, he or she should be introduced in full: full name and full article or book title. After that point, the author’s or authors’ last name(s) can be used. Second, all directly quoted material must be enclosed in quotation marks. Remember, however, that it is not enough to change only a few words; either directly quote the text, or rewrite it completely in your own words and writing style through summary or paraphrase (Jackson qtd. in Smith 38-39). No matter what kind of source treatment
you use, all three require citations in the text; this is the third step. Unfortunately, it is a step that many writers forget. According to Irene McKibbin: all paraphrases, summaries, and quotes require a parenthetical citation with page number, and some will require the addition of the source’s name if he or she is not introduced in the sentence lead-in, or if readers might be confused as to which source is being used. Even if you use your own writing, you are still using the source’s ideas, and these ideas must be credited. (26)

Finally, all sources that appear in the essay must appear in a correctly formatted works cited page at the end; likewise, all sources that appear in the works cited list must appear in the essay itself (“MLA”). These are the four steps that will help keep you safe when citing; if you are in doubt, it is better to over-cite than risk unethical source treatment, which carries heavy consequences in academia.

Works Cited


MLA Quick Reference: Common Source Formats

Recent MLA Changes:
• Underlining has been fired: Titles of larger texts such as books and magazines are placed in italics.
• Web addresses have been fired: Web addresses for databases and web pages are not needed unless the professor instructs you to use them. If required, enclose web address in brackets <url>.
• All entries require a listing of the source’s format (print, web, CD-ROM, etc.).
• Missing information is noted: If the date of publication is missing, write n.d. If there is no publisher, write n.p. If the site doesn’t have page numbers write n. pag.
• All scholarly journal articles now require both volume and issue numbers.

Online Newspaper Article

Article on Web Site

Notice that for online sources we provide the author of the article, the title of the article, the website name, the sponsor, date of last update, the medium, and the date of access. You may have to search for some of this information, even returning to the main URL site of the page to find publisher and sponsor.

Online Periodical

Google Scholar Article or Book Chapter

Scholarly Journal Article from Database

Periodical in an Online Database

Online-only Publication (Or Database articles that do not provide page numbers)

Online Book

Map

Book by Two or More Authors
**Selection from an Anthology or Edited Collection**

**More Than One Selection from An Anthology or Edited Collection**


**Article in a Reference Work**

**Scholarly Publication (Journal)**

**Newspaper Article**

**Article by an Unknown Author**

**Government Publication**
For government publications that name no author, start with: 1. The name of the government or government body; 2. The government agency; 3. Use GPO (government printing office) for the publisher


**Online Video Clip**

**Interview (indicate whether in person, by email, or by phone)**

In-text citations: Introduce source in full at first use, including credentials. For second and subsequent uses, the last name appears in the citation: (Dyson).

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