

Tips for Writers • MLA Style Sheet

This style sheet has been compiled by the staff of the Speaking, Reading, and Writing Center. It highlights major elements of MLA that COM students are likely to use in their assignments. It is **not** intended to be inclusive of all MLA elements. For more detailed information, please consult the most current edition of the MLA Handbook, visit Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (the Purdue Owl), or ask an SRWC tutor for assistance.

Students should be aware that individual instructors, even within the same departments, may alter their requirements from the standard MLA guidelines. Students should always follow the instructor's preferences. Questions about those requirements should be brought to the instructor.

Format

The basic format of an MLA paper includes the following:

- ✓ The font Times New Roman, size 12, alignment flush left
- ✓ Double-spaced text, including the heading
- ✓ 1-inch margins all sides
- ✓ Paragraph indentations of ½ inch
- ✓ Header with last name and page number, flush right and ½ inch from top of page

Heading

The basic heading of an MLA paper includes the following:

John Smith	(Student Name)
Professor Ty McDavid	(Instructor name with title: Dr./Professor)
English 1301.102	(Course name and number; section optional)
15 January 2014	(Date)

In-Text Citations

Standard in-text citations include the author's last name and the page number on which the cited information was found. Punctuation comes after the citation:

The research showed that students often skimmed over information too quickly (Smith 125).

Page numbers only may be given if the author's name is mentioned in the same sentence or section of the text.

Smith's research showed that students often skimmed over information too quickly (125).

Block Quotes

Quotations that exceed four lines of prose or three lines of poetry must be in block format, which includes the following:

- ✓ Additional ½ inch indent from existing left margin
- ✓ Double-spaced text
- ✓ No quotation marks necessary
- ✓ Citation given after punctuation
- ✓ Additional ½ inch indentation if multiple paragraphs
- ✓ Poetry should maintain original line breaks, if possible

(Research Tips, Works Cited, and Editing Checklist on Back)

The Speaking, Reading, and Writing Center

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General Research

The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers emphasizes the importance of evaluating sources, cautioning writers that they “should not assume that something is truthful or trustworthy just because it appears in print or is on the Internet” (33). While more detailed information can be found in the SRWC’s Research Guidelines, the following tips are considered to be fundamental elements for college-level research:

- ✓ *Check the author’s credentials.* Today, anyone can publish a book or create a website. Simply having a venue for one’s rhetoric does not make one an expert. Research organizations and authors to evaluate their credentials and biases. Work with known databases for reliability, such as EBSCO, which is linked through the COM Library website.
- ✓ *Keep copies of all research.* Your instructor is entitled to ask to see copies of any information that you cite in your work. A failure to produce that information could lead to your source being disallowed. Keep in mind that websites are not stable; documents can be altered or even removed, making it impossible to ‘find’ the source at a later date.
- ✓ *Watch your wording.* In-text citations require quotations marks to signify exact quotes taken from a source. Putting research into your own words, however, still requires a citation. Changing the words around does not take away the citation requirement. Improper citations, as well as a lack of citations where required, is considered plagiarism.

Works Cited Page

All of the research used in your text should be appropriately listed in the Works Cited page. This allows instructors to see the research used, and also gives them the information needed to retrieve those sources, if need be. Failure to turn in a Works Cited page is considered plagiarism. Today, there are many websites and applications that will help you construct your Works Cited page. These can be time saving and helpful, but writers should always be cautious when using them because they are not 100% infallible. The following example of a Works Cited entry corresponds with the information cited from the MLA Handbook on page one of this tip sheet:

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 7th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

Editing Checklist

The following are reminders for self-editing:

- ✓ Check your assignment sheet to ensure that you have met all of your instructor’s requirements for length of text, number of sources, etc.
- ✓ Spellcheck your text in Microsoft Word. It is not error-proof, but it does catch many potential issues.
- ✓ Utilize at least one of the self-editing techniques described in the SRWC’s Self-Editing tip sheet.
- ✓ Compare the visual format of your paper with the MLA sample paper on the Purdue Owl’s website at www.owl.english.purdue.edu.
- ✓ Save your paper! If saving to the hard drive of your personal computer, save to a portable flash drive.
- ✓ Complete a tutoring session in the SRWC...getting a second opinion or having a second set of eyes look over your paper is always helpful and productive. You can make an appointment by calling us at 409-933-8703. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments are strongly encouraged ☺

Happy Writing!

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