MLA Style Citations

Most writing within the humanities adheres to Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Properly using MLA style helps writers to be consistent in formatting their text, allowing readers to focus on the writer's ideas. Incorporating and citing sources in MLA style also increases a writer's credibility and directs others to resources where they can learn more about the subject or topic.

This handout focuses specifically on citing sources in MLA style. The information in this handout is based on the *MLA Handbook, Eighth Edition* and The MLA Style Center Online (style.mla.org). For each element of a citation, the corresponding pages in the handbook are listed in parentheses.

Citing Sources: The Core Elements (*MLA Handbook* pages 20–53)

Each citation on a works cited page is constructed from a selection of core elements given in a specific order. This handout briefly explains and provides an example of each element. The correct punctuation mark to use after each element is shown in bolded parentheses and follows the element name. As you make your own works cited entry for each source, gather as much information corresponding to the core elements as possible. Recognize, however, that some sources may not have all the elements. In that case, simply move on to the next element.

1. **Author (.)** (pages 21–24)

   One author: Last name, First name. (Include middle names and initials after the author's first name.)
   Two authors: Reverse the first listed author's name (same as for one author), follow it with a comma and *and*, and give the second name in normal order. (Pratchett, Terry, and Neil Gaiman.)
   Three or more authors: List the first author and then et al. (Booth, Wayne C., et al.)

   Indicate if the author is an editor, translator, performer (for film), creator, etc.

   Example: Shea, Victor, and William Whitla, editors. *Victorian Literature: An Anthology.* Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

2. **Title of source (.)** (pages 25–29)

   Titles are placed in quotation marks or italicized depending on the source. When the source is part of a larger work, place the title in quotation marks. If the source is not part of a larger work, italicize the title.

   Italicized: titles of books, websites, television series, plays
   Example: Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.* A.A. Levine Books, 1999.

   Quotation marks: titles of poems or short stories in a collection, articles or pages on a website, episodes of a television series, articles in a journal or magazine.
   Example: Sanders, Scott Russell. "The Way of Imagination." *The Georgia Review,* vol. 66, no. 2, 2012, pp. 251-263.

3. **Title of container (,)** (pages 30–36)

   When a source is part of a larger work, the larger work is considered a container that holds the source. Italicize the title of the container and follow it with a comma.

   Some possible containers: a book that is a collection of short stories, poems, or essays; a periodical; a television series; a website

Examples: *The New York Times, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, The Office*

In some cases, this container is nested in a larger container. A journal, for example, may be stored on a database such as *JSTOR*. In these cases, add core elements 3–9 (with the information from the larger container) to the end of the entry for the first container.

4. **Other contributors (,)** (pages 37–38)

In some sources, people other than the author may be credited in the source as contributors. When contributors are important to your research or to the identification of the work, include them in your entry and introduce each with a description of their role (for example: adapted by, directed by, edited by, illustrated by, introduction by, narrated by, performance by, translated by).

Example: Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* Translated by Gregory Rabassa, HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.

5. **Version (,)** (pages 38–39)

Some sources indicate that it is a version of a work released in more than one form. Versions can be editions of books, unabridged or abridged editions, or an expanded or updated edition.

Example: Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction.* Updated ed., Harper Perennial, 2014.

6. **Number (,)** (pages 39–40)

Some sources are part of numbered sequences such as volumes, issues, episodes, or seasons.

Example: McGill, Meredith L., and Andrew Parker. "The Future of the Literary Past." *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 4, Oct. 2010, pp. 959-967.

7. **Publisher (,)** (40–42)

The organization primarily responsible for producing the source is the publisher.

Example: Lowenstein, Roger. *America's Bank.* Penguin Press, 2015.

For the following kinds of sources, you do not need to include the publisher: a periodical, a work published by its author or editor, websites whose titles are the same as the publisher, websites not involved in producing the work (JSTOR, YouTube, ProQuest, etc.).

8. **Publication Date (,)** (pages 42–49)

Include as much information about the publication date as possible. Books, for example, will list only the year on the copyright page. A news article, on the other hand, will often list the day, month, and year. The general rule is to write the full date as listed in the source, in the order of day month year.

Example: "You Jump, I Jump, Jack." *Gilmore Girls,* created by Amy Sherman-Palladino, performance by Alexis Bledel, season 5, episode 7, WB Television Network, 2 Nov. 2004.

For sources listing more than one date, cite the date most meaningful or relevant to your purpose.

9. **Location.** (pages 46–50)

The location of a source may be a series of page numbers, a URL, a DOI, a disc number, etc.

Example: Collins, Jim. "Reading, in a Digital Archive of One's Own." *PMLA*, vol. 128, no. 1, Jan. 2013, pp. 207-212.

In-Text Citations (*MLA Handbook* pages 54–58, section 3)

Another essential component of MLA style is the use of in-text citations. In-text citations follow any incorporated sources and direct the reader to the source on the works cited page.

In-text citations are usually placed in parentheses and consist of the author's last name (or the first element in the works cited entry if no author is provided) followed by a space and a page number. To cause the least disruption possible, in-text citations are placed where there is a natural pause in the text. In-text citations come after the closing quotation mark of quoted material and any sentence punctuation follows the citation.

> **Example:** In the digital age "reading is no longer a uniquely solitary practice—it is alternately solitary and social" (Collins 208).

The author's name may also appear in the text itself when introducing the quoted or paraphrased material. In this case, only the page number would appear in the in-text citation.

> **Example:** Jim Collins argues that in the digital age "reading is no longer a uniquely solitary practice—it is alternately solitary and social" (208).

When the works cited entry begins with the title of the source, the title is included in the in-text citation. As with using the author, the title may appear in the text itself when introducing the source material, or with the page number in parentheses. The abbreviated form of the title usually consists of either the first word or first couple of words in the title (see *MLA Handbook* section 3.2.1).
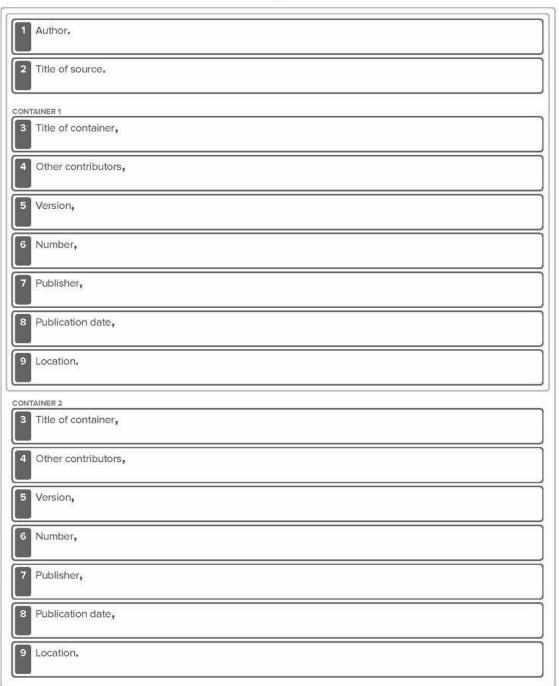
> **Example:** *Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy* reports that in contrast to previous studies, there has been a rise in literary reading from 2002-2008 and "a slight majority of American adults now read literature or read books" (8).

> **Example:** In contrast to previous studies, there has been a rise in literary reading from 2002 to 2008 and "a slight majority of American adults now read literature or read books" (*Reading* 8).

MLA Practice Template (*MLA Handbook* page 129)

The practice template included in this handout can be found both in the *MLA Handbook* and on the companion website (style.mla.org). Use this template to better understand how core elements work together to form complete works cited entries. This template can be used for practice or the creation of actual citations.

MLA Practice Template

1 Author.

2 Title of source.

CONTAINER 1

3 Title of container,

4 Other contributors,

5 Version,

6 Number,

7 Publisher,

8 Publication date,

9 Location.

CONTAINER 2

3 Title of container,

4 Other contributors,

5 Version,

6 Number,

7 Publisher,

8 Publication date,

9 Location.

From *MLA Handbook* (8th ed.), published by the Modern Language Association (style.mla.org).