APA Versus MLA: Citation and Formatting

Why cite sources?
Citing sources is important for several reasons:
- Citing information from experts shows the reader that you “know your stuff”—you’ve done the research, you know “who’s who,” and you have a general understanding of the topic.
- Citing experts who support what you are saying makes you more credible. Imagine your reading thinking, “Well, if the experts agree with what this writer is saying, then this writer must be correct . . .”
- Citing information from experts helps readers and other researchers understand the connections between current knowledge and new ideas.
- Citing sources protects you from accusations of plagiarism.

Why use a particular style?
- Using a widely-accepted style ensures that readers can track down your original sources if they need to.

How do I know which style to use?
Style refers to how the writer formats his/her document, uses language, and incorporates outside sources. MLA (Modern Language Association) and APA (American Psychological Association) provide two styles that tell writers exactly how to do each of these things.

Whether you use MLA, APA, or another style depends upon the subject you are writing about and the conventions of that subject. For example, one of the primary differences between MLA and APA is APA’s emphasis on a source’s date of publication. Readers in the sciences, social sciences, business, and education want to know how recent information is because they generally consider recent information more credible and because they are often comparing older information to new research. MLA, used for the humanities (English, art, music, etc.), includes page numbers rather than the year of publication in
its in-text citations because writers are often doing a close analysis of an author’s words and/or ideas; therefore, readers need to know exactly where those words and ideas appear.

How do APA and MLA differ in paper formatting?

General formatting guidelines in APA include the following:

Title page
- shortened version of the paper title and the page number appear in the header and are right justified
- full title of the paper in the horizontal and vertical center of the page
- writer’s name two spaces below the full title
- course title two spaces below the writer’s name
- instructor’s name two spaces below the course title
- due date two spaces below the instructor’s title

Abstract
• the word “abstract” appears centered at the top of the first page after the title page
• the abstract is not indented

Body of the Paper
- shortened version of the title and page number appear in the header and are right justified
- all paragraphs are double-spaced
- the first line of each paragraph is indented
- section headings are appropriate, and first-level section headings are in italics and left justified
  (for more information about section headings, refer to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association)

General formatting guidelines in MLA include the following:

Title page
- full title 1/3 from the top of the page
- “by” and the author’s full name at the horizontal and vertical center of the page
- instructor’s name 1/3 from the bottom of the page
- institution’s name two spaces below the instructor’s name
- course title two spaces below the institution’s name
- due date two spaces below the institution’s name

Abstract
- except in rare instances, MLA does not include an abstract
- First Body Page of Paper
- writer’s last name and page number in the header and are right justified
- writer’s full name in upper left corner, one inch from the top of the page
- instructor’s name two spaces below the writer’s name
- course title two spaces below the instructor’s name
- due date two spaces below the course title
Body of the Paper

- all paragraphs are double-spaced
- the first line of each paragraph is indented
- except in rare instances, MLA does not include section headings

How do in-text citations differ in APA and MLA style?

When you **paraphrase** information from a source in **APA**, you should include the author’s last name and the year that the source was published. This citation can take two forms:

• Form 1: Using the author’s name in your sentence
  - Example: According to Whalen (2007), citing sources correctly is important.
  - Example: Lisa Whalen (2007) claims that citing sources correctly is important.

• Form 2: Not using the author’s name in your sentence
  - Example: Citing sources correctly is important (Whalen, 2007).

Note that the sentence punctuation, in this case a period, comes after the citation, not before it.

When you **quote** a source in **APA**, you should include the author’s last name, the year that the source was published, and the page number where the quote appeared. This citation can also take two forms:

• Form 1: Using the author’s name in your sentence
  - Example: According to Whalen (2007), “Correctly citing sources is important for anyone who is writing in an academic setting” (p. 2).
  - Example: Lisa Whalen (2007), claims, “Correctly citing sources is important for anyone who is writing in an academic setting” (p. 2).

• Form 2: Not using the author’s name in your sentence
  - Example: “Correctly citing sources is important for anyone who is writing in an academic setting” (Whalen, 2007, p. 2).

Note that the closing quotation marks come before the citation and the sentence punctuation, in this case a period, come after the citation.

When you include a **long quote** (40 words or more) in **APA**, you should start the quote on a new line, do not use quotation marks, indent the entire quote from the left side of the page, and double space the entire quote. The sentence punctuation in this case comes **before** the citation.

When you **paraphrase** a source in **MLA**, you should include the author’s last name and the page number on which the information appears. This citation can take two forms:

• Form 1: Using the author’s name in your sentence
• Example: According to Whalen, citing sources correctly is important (2). 
• Example: Lisa Whalen claims that citing sources correctly is important (2).

**Form 2: Not using the author’s name in your sentence**
• Example: Citing sources correctly is important (Whalen 2).

When you **quote** a source in **MLA**, you should include the author’s last name and the page number on which the information appears. This citation can take two forms:

**Form 1: Using the author’s name in your sentence**
• Example: According to Whalen, “Correctly citing sources is important for anyone who is writing in an academic setting” (2).
• Example: Lisa Whalen claims that “Correctly citing sources is important for anyone who is writing in an academic setting” (2).

**Form 2: Not using the author’s name in your sentence**
• Example: “Correctly citing sources is important for anyone who is writing in an academic setting” (Whalen 2).

Note that the sentence punctuation, in this case a period, comes after the citation, not before it, and that you do not include “p.” or “pg.” before the page number.

When you include a **long quote** (four or more typed lines) in **MLA**, you should start the quote on a new line, do not use quotation marks, indent the entire quote from the left side of the page, and double space the entire quote. The sentence punctuation in this case comes **before** the citation.

*How does the bibliographic page differ in APA and MLA style?*

The **bibliographic page** in **APA** is called “References.” Sources listed on this page follow these conventions:

• Use author’s first initials only, not their full first names
• Do not include authors’ professional titles (Dr., Ph.D., M.A., etc.)
• Italicize the titles of books, journals, magazines, and other major works
• Do not italicize or place in quotation marks the titles of articles, presentations, papers, etc.
• Except for the titles of academic journals, capitalize only the first word, the first word after a colon, and proper nouns in all titles
  • For academic journals, capitalize all words except articles (a, an, the) and prepositions

A basic APA References page citation contains the following elements:
• Author’s last name
• Author’s first initials
• Date of publication (in parentheses)
• Title of minor work (article, chapter, presentation, paper, etc.)
• Editor’s first initials and last name
• Title of major work (book, journal, magazine, etc.)
• Place of publication (city only, unless the city is not well-known)
• Publisher
- Volume, issue, and page numbers, if applicable

Example:


Note that each line after the first line of an entry is indented.

The bibliographic page in MLA is called “Works Cited.” Sources listed on this page follow these conventions:

- “Works Cited” should appear in regular, 12-point font and be centered at the top of the page
- Use author’s full last and first name
- Do not include authors’ professional titles (Dr., Ph.D., M.A., etc.)
- Italicize the titles of books, journals, magazines, and other major works
- Put the titles articles, presentations, papers, etc. in quotation marks
  - Capitalize each word in a title except articles (a, an, the) and prepositions

A basic APA References page citation contains the following elements:

- “References” should appear in regular, 12-point font and be centered at the top of the page
- Author’s last name
- Author’s first name
- Title of minor work (article, chapter, presentation, paper, etc.)
- Title of major work (book, journal, magazine, etc.)
- Editor’s first and last name
- Place of publication (city only, unless the city is not well-known)
- Publisher
- Volume and issue, if applicable
- Year of publication
- Page numbers, if applicable

Example:


Note that each line after the first line of an entry is indented.