Dancing Socks: An MLA Sample Paper

This sample paper will lay out some guidelines for papers in Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Disciplines using MLA style include humanities, history, and art. By default, most academic papers are written in third person, but for this sample I am writing in first person. Avoid writing I, you, and we in academic papers. Note that I use only one space after a period. Notice that all of my paper is double-spaced (including my name, the instructor’s name, the class, and the date in the upper left corner), aligned left, and is in a standard font (Times New Roman, 12-point font). Avoid colloquialism (writing as if you were talking and using slang), and do not use contractions (write do not rather than don’t). Words written as words are underlined.

MLA papers do not use cover (title) pages. Page numbers are inserted into the header, flush right, and your last name serves as the page header. The name should be one space to the left of the page number. On the toolbar, select insert, and then page numbers. Select top of page. Once the number appears, double click it to open the header box. Type your last name and then align it flush right. Note that the title is centered, double-spaced, not bold, not underlined, and that there is no extra spacing between the title and the text in the first paragraph. Do not capitalize articles (a, an, the) in the title unless they begin a title or come after a colon. Note that each new paragraph is indented half of an inch; do not use the space bar to indent. Note that there are no extra spaces between paragraphs.

Per MLA style, book titles, plays, newspaper names, magazines, films, television programs, artwork, and CD titles are underlined. Short stories, poems, newspaper and magazine articles, lectures, songs, and episodes of television shows are placed in quotation marks. MLA does not underline or place in quotation marks the following: sacred writings, including the Bible, Koran, Gospels, and Upanishads;
laws, acts, and similar political documents, including the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, and the Treaty of Verdun; seminars; courses; conferences; instrumental musical compositions identified by numbers; monuments; and more. See pages 104-108 of the sixth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers for further information. Notice how semicolons separated items in the list because some lists within the list also include commas. Here is another example: Speakers for Earth Day included the president of the St. Paul Environmental Protection Agency, instrumental in developing the recycling program in 1981; the mayor; and the baker, who provided cupcakes decorated to represent planet Earth.

According to Joseph Gibaldi, author of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, “…the first time you use a person’s name in the text of your research paper, state it fully and accurately, exactly as it appears in your source. […] In subsequent references to the person, you may give the last name only” (66-67). Gibaldi indicates that book titles should be underlined. Note that the ellipsis in the middle of the quote has one space on either side of the brackets and that since the first sentence is complete, it ends with a period before the bracket. Since I used a direct quote, I included the page number in the in-text citation parentheses, and I did not put a period at the end of the sentence within the quote because, unless it is an indented quote, the period follows the closing parenthesis.

Gibaldi states:

Titles to be underlined include the names of books, plays, long poems published as books, pamphlets, periodicals (newspapers, magazines, and journals), films, radio and television programs, compact discs, audiocassettes, record albums, ballets, operas and other long musical compositions, […] paintings, works of sculpture, ships, aircraft, and spacecraft. (75)

The direct quote is indented one inch since it runs over four lines. The indentation indicates that it is a quote and so no quotation marks are required. If a quote appears within the indented quote, use double
quote marks (Gibaldi 91). The text after the quote is not indented unless it begins a new paragraph. Note that the period goes before the parentheses enclosing the page number, an exception to the usual formatting. Most indented quotes are introduced by a colon.

Ellipses indicate missing words and can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a quote. They can appear between complete sentences, between an incomplete sentence and a complete sentence, or between a complete and incomplete sentence. Example: Whalen stated, “The poem The Road Less Traveled is one of my favorites of all time. [...] It can be found in the book Poems of Robert Frost, published by Penguin” (33). Note that poem titles are usually formatted in quotation marks, but because it appears in a quote already, it is underlined. Another example: Whalen stated the poem “The Road Less Traveled” is one of her “favorites [...]. It can be found in the book Poems of Robert Frost, published by Penguin” (33). Example: Whalen (33) remarked on some of her favorite poems, saying, “The Road Less Traveled is one of my favorites of all time [...] found in the book Poems of Robert Frost [...].” Brackets can also indicate that a word or phrase from the original source has been substituted by the author for clarity. If the original source stated, “I mistook Mrs. Westerly for the wife of my husband’s second step-father,” the author might write “I mistook Mrs. Westerly for [my mother-in-law].”

If you are quoting a poem that is more than four lines, it should be indented. Add the line numbers in parentheses at the end of the quote. If an entire line or several lines are missing from the quote, add a line of spaced periods within brackets, approximately the length of the line. For example, if you cut out lines 5-8 of Emily Dickenson’s poem “Hope is the Thing with Feathers,” you would write:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,
[.................................]

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me. (1-4, 9-12)

Some situations require you to include what book you took the poem from and what page it is on. If the quoted lines of a poem are less than four, you can separate the lines with a slash: Dickenson indicates undying hope when she writes “…and sings the tune without the words/and never stops at all” (3-4).

Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes. Professor Poullada’s PowerPoint presentation stresses how “Mayan religion was characterized by the worship of nature gods, especially, according to O’Brien, ‘the gods of sun, rain, and corn’” (slide 4). Some sources do not have page numbers. Websites, for example, can be cited by indicating the paragraph the text comes from. The Purdue OWL, an online reference site created by the Purdue University Writing Center, states that “in MLA style, the w in Web is capitalized, and Web site or Web sites are written as two words” (par. 8). If it were more than one paragraph, I would abbreviate it pars. (Gibaldi 211).

Titles that are in quotation marks and are not underlined include the names of newspaper and magazine articles, encyclopedia articles, short stories, essays in books, poems, chapters in books, episodes of television shows, songs, and lectures (Gibaldi 76). Since I paraphrased Gibaldi and did not mention his name in the sentence, I included his name and the page number I took the list from in the in-text citation parentheses. Note there is no comma between the name and the page number. Note the period goes after the closing parenthesis. Gibaldi provides examples for quotes that are found on more than one page (28-29). If you paraphrase ideas that appear in several pages of a source, include the different pages in the citation (Troyka 614, 622-23, 701).
MLA expert Florence Freeman advises not using commas for numbers over three digits (2588-89). Wright and Tewes’s 2008 article, “MLA is fun,” published in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, was the topic on the “Grammar” episode of Public Television’s Opinion Today. If the authors’ names are included in the sentence with the paraphrase or quote, you only need to put the page number in parentheses. If the authors are not evident, include the names in the parentheses, along with the page number (Pritz 433; Tewes and Wright A4). If you cite more than one source, separate the items with a semicolon. According to Lynn Quitman Tryoka (565), and confirmed by Wright and Tewes (A4), the parenthetical page citation can be placed within the sentence, but generally, it appears at the end. In-text citations for newspaper articles include the section and the page. If I had not mentioned the authors in the sentence, the in-text citation would look like this (Tryoka 565; Wright and Tewes A4).

When I quote Merry Celeste’s poem that I actually read about in somebody else’s book, it is called an indirect quote and is formatted this way (qtd. in Cushing 14). Cushing’s book, article, or other material would be the source listed in the works cited section. When you are referring to material that comes from three or more authors, use all of the authors’ last names, or use et al.—either in the parenthetical citation or in the sentence (Jackson, Poullada, and Ames 25). Jackson et al. stress that one should not underline or italicize et al., even though it is Latin (but underline words when referred to as words). Gibaldi states that foreign words are generally underlined, with the exception of common words such as e.g., etc., genre, ad hoc, and raison d’etre (95). Et al. is short for et alli, Latin for and others (Jackson et al. 22).

According to Eileen Brown II, if you reference information you obtained through personal communication (such as an interview, email, telephone call, letter, electronic discussion board, or blog), include it in the body of the text and on the reference page (telephone interview, Mar. 3, 1991). Depending on the situation, you might write personal, face-to-face, email, etc. Unlike APA style, personal communication is included in the works cited section (Troyka 585). Months are abbreviated to
the first three letters, except for September, which is abbreviated to the first four letters (Rose Gehan, email, Jun 7, 2008).

If there is no author for a book, journal article, or brochure, identify the source by the title (MLA Brochure par. 4; Donating Socks 1). Unlike APA style, you do not need to write *anonymous*. Unlike APA style, you do not use the organization as author, such as American Red Cross as author for the pamphlet on donating socks (unless it is a government or corporate author). Gibaldi notes that if you are citing a work with no author listed, abbreviate the title, beginning with the word by which it is alphabetized (248). Shorten the title. For example, an article entitled “How to Cook the Perfect Omelet,” could be shortened it to “How to Cook.” Note that article titles are in quotation marks. Note the period goes *inside* the end quotation mark. An in-text citation of the anonymous article might look like this (“How to Cook” 4). The entire title would be written out in works cited, alphabetically under *h*.

To include a quote from a film, cite the film title but not the director, such as “The sun will come out tomorrow” (*Annie*, film). The works cited entry would include the name of the film first, underlined, followed by the director, the distributor, and the year (Gibaldi 198). Troyka suggests including the original release date before stating if you viewed it as a DVD, etc., and to include the writer, producer, and major actors if you so desire. Troyka says it is “optional but helpful” (586).

If an entire paragraph is summing up some ideas appearing in several places of one source, you may put the in-text citation information at the end of the paragraph rather than adding repeat citations after every sentence. The citation would include the various pages or paragraphs the information is taken from. For example, if all three of the sentences in this paragraph were taken from the book *MLA is My Friend* by Marsha DeMellow, the in-text citation might look like this (DeMellow 5, 8, 11). If the information was from a Web site put up by the same author, it might look like this (DeMellow pars. 2 and 4). Subsequent entries for the same author replace the name with three hyphens. If the one author or set of authors has more than one entry in the paper, you need to distinguish them in the text by including
a shortened version of the title before the page number. See DeMellow in the works cited section for how to format more than one entry by the same author. The in-text citation for the first DeMellow reference would be (DeMellow MLA 5, 8, 11) and the second would be (DeMellow Homepage pars 2, and 4).

If you have different authors who share the same last name, include the first initial in the in-text citation, unless you wrote out the name before the parentheses. For example, research indicates that socks dance in the dryer (R. Taoz 23). Opposing research suggests that socks tumble and not dance (M. Taoz 3). See Min Taoz’s entry for how to cite proceedings form a conference and Ruema Toaz’s entry for how to cite a lecture.

Formatting the in-text citation for material obtained electronically (usually through the Internet) is the same as for hard copy material. Basically, cite the author’s last name and include a page or paragraph number. Include additional information only if appropriate, as explained above for hard-copy material. (Note that if I refer to internet sources I do not capitalize the i, but if I refer to the proper noun the Internet, the i is capitalized.) Some Web sites do not have an author, in which case you would cite the name of the site (Dancing Foxes par. 14).

Troyka divides the type of electronic sources into two categories: material obtained through databases and those obtained through a specific URL (Uniform Resource Locator) (587). For material from a database or subscription service, include the following information in works cited:

- Details about the source (author, title, print source if any, publication date)
- The name of the database, underlined
- The name of the service
- The name of the library [you accessed it through, if applicable]
- The date you accessed the work
- The URL of the service, in angle brackets (if you must break a URL at the end of a line, break only after a slash)
- A key word, if you used one. (588)
In-text, one would include the author or article title shortcut and the paragraph number. For the works cited, it would be: Author’s name. “Title of document.” Information about print publication. Information about electronic publication. Access information. (Gibaldi 208). Situations vary.

Insert a page break at the end of your paper to ensure that the works cited section begins at the top of a new page. The words **Work Cited** (if there is just one entry) or **Works Cited** (more than one) is centered, not in quotation marks, and not bold, underlined, or italicized. (In the sentence before it is underlined because I refer to it as a word.) The list of entries is alphabetized. Begin with the author’s last name, followed by a comma and the first name, first and middle name, or initials—type the name as it appears on the title page of the source. Do not include titles such as Ph.D., Sister, Lady, Sir, M.D., etc. Do, however, include Jr. or III with the name. If there is no middle name or initial, place a period after the first name.

For Biblical citations, follow Purdue University’s online Writing Lab Web site (OWL) guidelines:

In your first parenthetical citation, you want to make clear which Bible you're using (and underline or italicize the title), as each version varies in its translation, followed by book (do not italicize or underline), chapter and verse. For example: Ezekiel saw “what seemed to be four living creatures,” each with faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (**New Jerusalem Bible**, Ezek. 1.5-10). All future references can then just cite book, chapter, and verse, since you've established which edition of the Bible you will be using. (7)

What comes next depends on what sort of material the source is. If it is a book, the title is underlined; all main words begin with capital letters (of, and, or, and the, etc., are all lower-cased unless they begin the title or come after a colon. If it is a chapter of a book, a poem from a book, a lecture, etc, that comes **before** the book, journal (magazine), newspaper, symposium title, or other source, and is in quotation marks. Books, journals, newspapers, maps, radio and television shows, art, and Web site
names are underlined. Volume, issue, episode, or other information details follows, if applicable.

Example: if an article appears on pages 16-18 of *Time* magazine and the volume is six and the issue is two, and the publication date is April 1, 2001, the entry might look like: Peterson, Oliver. “Hats Off to Cats.” *Time* 6.2 July 2000: 16-18. Note the colon between the date and the page numbers. For entries from databases, end the entry with the database’s URL, beginning with a < and ending with a >. Unlike APA style, MLA includes a period after the URL, and accepts hyperlinking.

For books, begin with the author’s name (or authors’ names), followed by the book title, underlined. Next provide the publisher information, beginning with the city of publication followed by a colon, and then the name of the publisher. Only include the state abbreviation if the city is foreign or if the city name is used in more than one state, Amsterdam or Austin, for example. Last is the year of publication. The best way to know how to format specific information, since there is so much variety, is to look up examples in a reference book or the works-cited section of this sample paper.
Works Cited

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Pritz, Charlie. *Socks in Spring*. 1999. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota. [This is art work]

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