

MLA-style Documentation

What is MLA-style documentation?

The Modern Languages Association (MLA) has come up with a useful system that you can use to reference research materials in an assignment.

How do I use MLA-style documentation?

MLA-style documentation is very simple to use. At certain points in your essay or report, you will insert **citations**. A citation is a piece of information contained within brackets that tells the reader (AND your teacher) where you obtained your information.

When should you use citations? The following points in your assignment are good places to insert a citation:

- If you use a direct quote (in quotation marks) from another book or source.
- If you have a paragraph that contains information that is not 'common knowledge.' Common knowledge is information that many people would know. For instance, the fact that it rains frequently in a rainforest would be common knowledge. The annual precipitation figures for Brazil would NOT be common knowledge, and you would have to cite your source for that information.

How do I insert a citation?

MLA format makes citations easy. Citations consist of two pieces of information:

- 1) the author's name (or the title of the book or article if the name isn't available)
- 2) the page number that you obtained that information from (if available)

You put these two pieces of information in brackets, and insert these brackets at the end of the sentence that contains the material requiring a citation. Usually, you put the brackets BEFORE the final punctuation mark of the sentence.

For example, look at some of the following citations:

According to statistics, many young women prefer the colour red, while older women prefer blue (Smith 413).

Experts agree with this perspective. "We can't stand around and wait for another tragedy to strike," one scientist stated in an interview (Thorpe 35).
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The Walrus said to the oysters, "The time has come [...] to talk of many things: of shoes and ships and sealing-saw, of cabbages and kings" (Carroll 180).
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NOTE: If you refer to one book multiple times in a row, you only need to provide the page number in your subsequent citations. The reader will automatically assume your citation is from the same work.

As you can see, not ALL of the bibliographical information is contained within a citation. For more information, a reader (or your teacher) will have to consult your **bibliography**.

What does MLA-style bibliography look like?

An MLA –style bibliography is a separate sheet that is placed at the end of your assignment. On this sheet, you'll list all of the important information about the books you've consulted.

The title of your bibliography should be '**Works Cited.**'

You will list your sources in alphabetical order, sorted by the last name of the author. (If there is no author, or if the source has many authors, you will sort in alphabetical order by the name of the work.)

Here are some examples of how to list various types of sources in your bibliography. As a general rule of thumb:

- FIRST, you list the author's name (last then first)
- SECOND, you list the title of the book, article or website
- THIRD, if you're referring to an article, you list the name of the publication that you got the article from (e.g. an encyclopedia, a newspaper, or a magazine)
- FOURTH, you list the publication information (closest location of publisher, name of publisher, and most recent date published). If your source is from the Internet, you will list the date that you accessed the website, and the site's URL (the address of the website)

Here are some examples:

Book by one author:

Trudeau, Pierre. Federalism and the French Canadians. Toronto: Macmillan, 1968.

Book by two or more authors:

Scardamalia, Marlene, Carl Bereiter, and Bryant Fillion. Writing for Results. Toronto: OISE, 1981.

Encyclopedia article:

Shadbolt, Harris. "Russia." Encyclopedia Britannica. 1994 ed.

Website without an author:

"How to Install Fencing Properly." 23 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.fastfencing.html/1002>>

Website with an author:

Langley, Bob. "The Red Baron Info Site." 17 Jan. 2007
<<http://www.aviationkings.com/redbaron.html>>

Website with an author from a major site:

Caldwell, Hank. "The Strange World of Fish." The Discovery Channel Online.
19 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.discoverychannel.com/wishfish.html>>

When writing out your bibliography entries, it's generally good form to INDENT the lines following the first line of each entry. (Look at the entries above for guidance.)