INKWELL

MLA: A GUIDE TO MLA FOR BEGINNERS

DAN LOWE

Here it is, a way to handle the nasty chore of citation and MLA style. But at least with this article you won't have to page through one of those massive tomes we are all required to buy (or have perma-checked-out from the library). Sometimes MLA isn't the most elegant style to use, but it's almost always acceptable. Use this as a handy guide to answer most of your questions on what to cite and how to cite it.

MLA citation is composed of two parts: in-text citation and a works cited page. There must be complete agreement between the two, meaning that for every work you cite in the text there must be the information for that book, article, film (or whatever) in the works cited page. Your paper can, but does not need to, include a bibliography. The bibliography includes all the works researched, cited or not. This sounds complicated, but let's persevere—this won't be nearly as painful as you might think.

IN-TEXT CITATION

When you are citing something in your paper, you'll need to include two pieces of information: the author and the page numbers. The author is usually introduced in the sentence itself, not in the parentheses, as the page numbers are:

According to Sandy Yannone, "There just aren't enough Twinkies to satisfy the modern world's need for cream filling" (34-35).

Notice how the quotation marks end, then there's the citation, then the punctuation. Keep in mind that you must cute things even if they are not quotations. If you are borrowing the author's ideas or paraphrasing them, you still need to include the same citation information:

According to Sandy Yannone, the modern world's craving for cream filling can't be satisfied by the existing number of Twinkies (34-35).

As before, the parentheses come before the punctuation. There is no strict requirement for an author to be mentioned in the sentence itself, but it can be helpful to call attention to who the author is, for

example if they are a major thinker or their claim is controversial. If you don't want to mention the author in the sentence (it can be awkward or repetitive at times), it is acceptable to tuck the author's name away in the parentheses along with the page numbers:

World history "can be divided into pre-snack cake and post-snack cake" (Hostess 43).

Variations depend on whether you are citing multiple authors, if there is no author, if you are citing a web page, the Bible, or any other number of cases. A more comprehensive list can be found in the MLA manual at the Writing Center, where our tutors can negotiate the labyrinth of MLA with you, and use our library and handouts to help you figure out any tricky problems you might be having.

THE WORKS CITED PAGE

Like our brief foray into in-text citation, there is only space to mention how to build the standard entry in the works cited page. To make the most of our time, let's use a complicated example so you can learn most of the different fields of information. Here's a tough one: an essay called "Gender and Nation: Anticipations of Modernity in the Second Tetralogy" by multiple authors in an anthology, *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender*, in the series New Casebooks. Here's the general pattern and our application of it:

THE PATTERN	AN EXAMPLE
Author's name(s).	Author's name(s). (First name as last, first)
"Title of the article."	"Gender and Nation: Anticipation of Modernity in the Second Tetralogy."
Book Title.	Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender.
Name of editor (as Ed.), then Ed. translator (as Trans.).	Kate Chedgzoy.
Edition.	N/A
Volume.	N/A
Series name.	New Casebooks.
Publication city: Publisher's name, publication date.	Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.
Page numbers.	93 - 114.
Supplementary bibliographic information and annotation.	N/A

Pay attention to the punctuation and style for each section in the pattern. #3, *Book Title*, is italicized and capitalized because when you write the works cited page the book title is italicized and capitalized. Each field ends with a period because all fields of information are demarcated by a period. So, for the works cited page take the information in the order you have written it down and write it linearly, like this:

Howard, Jean E., Phyllis Rackin. "Gender and Nation: Anticipations of Modernity in the Second Tetralogy." *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender*, Ed. Kate Chedgzoy. New Casebooks. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. 93 - 114.

That's pretty elaborate, but most citations are easier. Now that wasn't so awful, was it? Just remember to indent after the first line. Of course there are a hundred variations on this general pattern. Use the Writing Center as a resource to figure out unusual cases. The general pattern will not work for every kind of source, but it does work for most single author books.

Once you have create the different entries, create your works cited page. Organize the entries, create your works cited page. Organize the entries alphabetically, whether the first word in the entry is the author's last name, a corporate author, or even the title if the author is unknown. When using more than one source by the same author, organize each alphabetically according to the first word after the author's name. After the author is mentioned the first time, use a dash instead of the name. For example:

SAMPLE WORKS CITED PAGE

Beowulf. Trans. Seamus Heaney. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.

Howard, Jean E., Phyllis Rackin. "Gender and Nation: Anticipations of Modernity in the Second Tetralogy." *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender*, Ed. Kate Chedgzoy. New Casebooks. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. 93 - 114.

-----. "The Patriarchal Bard." *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender*, Ed. Kate Chedgzoy. New Casebooks. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. 115 - 121.

NOTE

For styles which pertain to other disciplines, like APA, check http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/. If your faculty does not specify a citation style in a writing assignment, it is a good practice to ask.