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What does “MLA Style” mean?

“MLA Style” refers to a system of documentation often used in literature, languages, and humanities disciplines for writing a research paper. MLA stands for Modern Language Association, a global academic professional organization that has published the conventions and rules of this system in the *MLA Handbook*, 8th edition, and on the MLA website: [https://style.mla.org](https://style.mla.org).

*MLA Style* uses **in-text citations** in the body of a paper; each corresponds to an alphabetized list of **works cited** at the end of the paper. Works cited entries are composed of **core elements** listed in a certain order, punctuated a certain way.

**In-text:**

The narrator remembers, “While Henry was not around we talked about what was going to happen to him” (Erdrich 415).

**Works Cited**

How Do I Format a Paper in MLA Style?

Use a **running head** on the top right, consisting of your last name and the page number. Number all pages consecutively.

The first page also serves as your title page. Your name, professor, course, and date should be double-spaced and flush with the top left margin.

Double-space once and then center the title of the essay (do not italicize, bold or underline).

Use a **standard font** (such as Times New Roman), font size (12), and **one-inch margins** throughout.

Do not justify the right margin; leave it **ragged**.

For sample MLA papers and other useful resources on formatting papers in MLA Style, go to https://style.mla.org/sample-papers/.
How Do I Know When to Quote, Paraphrase, or Summarize?

• Use **quotations** when you cannot improve on the original:

> Lyman says that his brother Henry’s face was “totally white and hard” and that it broke “like stones” (Erdrich 418).

• Use **paraphrase** when you can clarify the original thought by expressing it in your own words:

> Lyman describes his brother Henry’s face as pale and stony (Erdrich 418).

• Use **summary** when you need to condense and clarify the original:

> According to Erdrich, the vastness of the American continent first encountered by Europeans had vanished “piecemeal to agriculture” in only one century, somewhat evident in the way William Faulkner wrote “nostalgically” of the American wilderness (Erdrich, “Where,” 1).

**ALL** three require in-text citations of author and page in parentheses.

(MLA 9-10, 1.3.1)
Use direct quotations as evidence when you need to use the author’s exact words rather than paraphrasing or summarizing them. Incorporate quotations into your own sentences using **signal phrases** at the beginning, end, or middle of the quote:

Signal phrase | quotation

Lyman says that his brother Henry’s face was “totally white and hard” and that it broke “like stones” (Erdrich 418).

Note that the citation is placed outside the quotation marks and that final punctuation follows the citation. If you use the author’s name in your sentence you can omit it from the in-text citation.

Erdrich fashioned a scene in which Henry’s face was “totally white and hard” and it broke “like stones” (418).
What About Long Quotations in MLA Style?

- If a quotation is longer than **four lines**, set it off as a **block quotation** by indenting it half an inch from the left margin.

- Retain normal double-spacing and **omit quotation marks**.

- Place the **in-text citation** outside end punctuation, after one space. In this example, the title is included because the writer is using more than one source by this author.
How Do I Quote Verse, Poetry or Songs?

Incorporate 2-3 lines of poetry or lyrics into a sentence by using a single slash to show line breaks. If a poem is more than a page long, provide line numbers as locators. Use “line” or “lines” in the first one, then use only the numerals for subsequent ones:

In “Captivity,” the Christian woman who has been captured by a Native American says, “I told myself that I would starve/Before I took food from his hands” (lines 20-21).

For more than three lines of poetry, block-quote by indenting a half-inch from the left margin and omitting the quotation marks:

Erdrich’s “Captivity” is a dramatic monologue based on Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative. This “settler” remembers her initial fear before the rescue by her captor:

The stream was swift, and so cold
I thought I would be sliced in two.
But he dragged me from the flood
by the ends of my hair. (1-4)
How Do I Cite Dramas or Musicals?

If you are citing the work rather than a specific performance, for example, in-text citations of long modern verse works such as Shakespeare plays, provide act and scene numbers as **locational elements**:

Aldous Huxley’s 1932 classic novel that anticipates today’s reproduction technology takes its title from the final moments of Shakespeare’s The Tempest, when the naïve and trusting Miranda exclaims:

O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in’t! (*Tempest* 5.1.203-206)

(MLA 1.3.3; 3.3.2)
Do I Cite if I Paraphrase My Source?

To avoid plagiarism, provide an in-text citation at the end of a passage of your paraphrase of portions of a text, even if you do not quote directly:

In addition to the numbing associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, Henry also experiences flashbacks triggered by television. Lyman Lamartine notes that Henry’s teeth click as he watches an unnamed television show, one that causes his brother to think of smashing the television (Erdrich 414).
To avoid plagiarism, provide a citation when you summarize or condense a long passage. Here is an original excerpt from Louise Erdrich’s “Where I Ought to Be: A Writer’s Sense of Place,” published in the *New York Times* on 28 July 1985.

**Original source**

To Europeans the American Continent was so vast that only a hundred years ago it seemed that nothing and no one could ever truly affect it. Yet William Faulkner wrote nostalgically of a wilderness that had already vanished. What is invented, and lamented, is the bigness and vastness that was lost piecemeal to agriculture. The great bear, which is the brooding and immense spirit of the land, had all but disappeared from settled areas before Faulkner was born and exists today largely by virtue of human efforts on his behalf. The wilderness that once claimed us is now named and consumed by us. Carefully designated scraps of it are kept increasingly less pristine to remind us of what was.

**Summary**

According to Erdrich, the vastness of the American continent first encountered by Europeans had vanished “piecemeal to agriculture” in only one century, somewhat evident in the way William Faulkner wrote “nostalgically” of the American wilderness (Erdrich, “Where,” 1).
Why Are Some In-text Citations So Different?

In-text citations differ because available information differs from source to source.

Here are some types of frequently used parenthetical citations.

If there is no author, start with the next core element, the title.
If there are no page numbers given, use paragraph or section numbers if available.
To cite scenes in films, indicate the “location” in hours, minutes, and seconds.
For illustrations, use the in-text citation to refer readers to the captioned image.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 author:</th>
<th>(Erdrich 418)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>more than one work by same author:</td>
<td>(Erdrich, “Red Convertible,” 418)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Erdrich, <em>The Round House</em>, 91)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 authors:</td>
<td>(Erdrich and Dorris 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more authors:</td>
<td>(Webb, Smith, and Jones 66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency or corporate author:</td>
<td>(Poetry Foundation 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no author given:</td>
<td>(“Edrich’s Symbols” 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no pagination given:</td>
<td>(Erdrich)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Erdrich, par. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website:</td>
<td>(Birchbark Books, par 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film, audio, or time-based media</td>
<td>(<em>Broken Cord</em>, 01:02:35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting, photo, table, or visual data</td>
<td>(See Figure 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Do I Format the Works Cited Page?

- Position the “Works Cited” page at the end of the paper.

- Continue the pagination of the paper through the “Works Cited” page.

- Use the title “Works Cited” in the title position at the top of the page, centered.

- Alphabetize by authors’ last names. If no author is given, the title of the source determines the alphabetical order.

- Begin at left margin, double-space, and use a hanging indent of 1/2 inch.

- Include reference books, encyclopedias, and dictionaries in the list.

- Include sources for illustrations, tables, graphs and figures in the list.

Works Cited


Books, sec. 1. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*,

http://ezproxy.iu.edu/docview/1112112237?accountid=7090


Poetry Foundation, "Louise Erdrich." *Poetry Foundation*,


What Are the Core Elements of a Works Cited Entry?

Works cited entries consist of a few **core elements**, with a specified punctuation pattern. A **container** can be a book, a periodical, or even a database.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author.</td>
<td>Erdrich, Louise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of source.</td>
<td>“The Red Convertible”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of container,</td>
<td><em>Fiction: A Pocket Anthology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other contributors,</td>
<td>R.S. Gwynn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version,</td>
<td>6th edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number,</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher,</td>
<td>Pearson Longman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication date,</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location.</td>
<td>pp. 411-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Do I Cite My Literature Textbook?

One of the most common sources in MLA style research papers is an edited literature anthology. For the in-text citation, cite the author. Include the editor or editors as contributors, and use the title of the anthology as the container.

How Do I Cite a Book With One Author?

The in-text citation is simple. Cite the author and page number:

(Erdrich 95)

The Works Cited entry needs to show how you accessed the book. Digital sources require inclusion of the container:

Print:

Digital:
How Do I Cite a Scholarly Journal Article?

In-text citation:

One critic maintains that Erdrich relies heavily on the Native-American tribal tradition of oral storytelling, incorporating its conventions into her fiction (Sergi 279).

Works cited:

Print:


Digital:

What If I Have More Than One Source by the Same Author?

In-text citation: Add shortened titles to authors’ names to distinguish between sources written by the same author:

In Henry, we see the warrior taking up the weapons of the culture that once conquered his tribe (Erdrich, “Red Convertible,” 412). Elsewhere the author has stated that the task of the Native-American writer is to show the land “still informed with old understandings (Erdrich, “Where,” 1).

Works Cited: Each source should have its own entry in the list. Alphabetize by title and replace the author’s name with three hyphens:

What About Sources With More Than One Author?

For two authors, list each author by name in the in-text citation. For three or more authors, list only the first, followed by the Latin abbreviation et al.

In-text citation:

(Dorris and Erdrich 112)
(Erdrich et al. 13)

Works Cited:
Only the first listed author’s name should be reversed.

Do I Cite Dictionaries or Reference Books?

You can attribute information from reference books in the text with or without formal in-text citation. In the Works Cited entry, include page numbers if given. If the entry is signed by an author, include the author’s name in the normal position for signed articles.

**In-text attribution:**

The *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature* identifies Erdrich’s hometown as Wahpeton, North Dakota; her parents were teachers at a Bureau of Indian Affairs school there (“Louise Karen Erdrich” 387).

**Works Cited:**

**Print:**


**Digital:**

How About Newspaper and Magazine Articles?

In-text citations:
The writer’s sense of place is “a place to love and be irritated with” (Erdrich 1).

Works Cited :

Print:


Digital/Database:

In a contemporary revisionist version of Native-American conflict, the Wampanoag chief King Philip says, “We were the first in doing good to the English and the English the first in doing wrong” (“After the Mayflower”).


How Do I Cite a Film?

In-text citations can be conventional or can include **time markers** rather than page numbers as **locators**:

Often cited as revisionist Native-American history, Arthur Penn’s 1970 masterpiece *Little Big Man* portrayed the U.S. Army in a negative light, causing some critics to review it as an anti-war film. Some historical scenes, such as U.S. cavalry attacks on indigenous communities (*Little Big Man* 1:13:50) actually echoed the sentiments of Vietnam War opponents.

**Works Cited:**

**DVD or screening:**


**Digital streaming from an archive:**

How Do I Cite Illustrations?

Illustrations such as cartoons, ads, posters, paintings, figures or tables should be acknowledged within your paper. Place them close to the text they relate to, and label and number them as figures. Use a parenthetical note as a text anchor such as (See Figure 3). Embed abbreviated source information in a caption by inserting a text box below the image. Also include figures in the Works Cited.

Caption with the text:


Digital viewing:

Should I Quote a Source Mentioned in Another Source?

If an original source is not available, you can cite it from a secondary source:

As an example of fiction with a post-agrarian sense of place, Louise Erdrich cites Douglas Unger’s novel *Leaving the Land*, in which “The prairie filled with black smoke whirling up day after day” (qtd. in Erdrich 1).

The Works Cited format cites the “container” source.

How Do I Cite Comics or Graphic Novels?

Comics

In-text citation:

(Ellis and Deodato 5)

Works Cited:


Graphic Novels

In-text citation:

(Hawke and Ruth 13)

Works Cited:

Do I Have to Cite Social Media Sources?

Cite social media sources such as tweets, blog posts, and Facebook status updates by following the MLA template:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Element</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author.</td>
<td>@sherman_alexie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title.</td>
<td>“I’m not that far from being a tribal elder.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of container,</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other contributors,</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version,</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number,</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher,</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication date,</td>
<td>10 June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location.</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Sherman_Alexie/status/741303912376897540">https://twitter.com/Sherman_Alexie/status/741303912376897540</a>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-text citation: (@sherman_alexie)

Works Cited: (MLA 24, 29, 112)
How Do I Cite E-mail?

In-text citation:
(Ringgold 14 Aug.)

Works Cited:
Should I Spell out Numbers or Use Numerals?

- Spell out numbers that can be expressed in one or two words:
  
  The study showed six patterns of PTSD among 4,000 subjects.

- Spell out numbers that begin a sentence with a number:
  
  Four thousand respondents completed the questionnaire.

- Use Arabic numerals for quantities that cannot be expressed in a word or two, and for Works Cited elements:

  The study polled 4,345 respondents who completed a six-item questionnaire.
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book With One Author</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block Quotes</td>
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<td>Comics</td>
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<td>Citing Literary Anthologies</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Dramatic Works</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Dictionaries</td>
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<td>E-mail</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formatting MLA Papers</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Films</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Graphic Novels</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-text Citations</td>
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<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Magazines</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>MLA Style</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Multiple Authors</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Multiple Sources by Same Author</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Poetry</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quoting</td>
<td>5-8</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Reference Books</td>
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<td>Scholarly Journals</td>
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<td>Social Media</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>Songs</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source Within a Source</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Summaries</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Television</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Verse</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited Page</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited, core elements</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tbody>
</table>