MLA Format: Citing Research Sources

The 8th edition of the MLA Handbook indicates that citing sources should deal with "facts common to most works—author, title, and so on. The writer examines the source and records its visible features, attending to the work itself and a set of universal guidelines" (3). Writers should "*think* about the sources they are documenting, *select* the information about sources that is appropriate to the project they are creating, and *organize* it logically and without complication" (4).

Questions to guide your determining how to cite a source:

- Who? (Who wrote the source or claims responsibility for the source info?)
- What? (What is the title of the source? What type of source is it?)
- How? (How was the source info published?)
- Where? (Where did you find the source info?)
- When? (When was the source info published?)

When you use someone else's **words, ideas,** or **images** in your writing, you must give that person credit by documenting the source. In Modern Language Association (MLA) format, this is done by including citations (Author p#) within the text, along with a Works Cited page (that lists all the sources cited within the text) at the end of your paper.

Core elements to include in the Works Cited page citation for a source:

- Author
- Title of source.
- Title of container,
- Other contributors,
- Version,
- Number,
- Publisher,
- Publication date,
- Location. (page numbers, URL, Permalink, DOI, ect.)

Below is a sample citation format:

Author's last name, first name. "Title of Source." (in quotation marks). *Title of Container* (italicized), Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication date, Location.

- **Author:** May be a person, persons, or a group
- **Containers:** MLA's term for a larger work in which the source is found—an anthology, a website, a journal or magazine, a data base, even a streaming service like Netflix

The Writing Center

MLA Format: Citing Research Sources

- o Titles that should be in quotation marks: articles, stories, essays, songs, and other works that are part of a larger work.
- o Titles that should be italicized: Books, websites, films, journals, newspapers, magazines, and other complete works
- **Other contributors:** These may be editors, translators, ect.
- **Version:** If the source is an edition or a version, include the version or edition in your citation.
- **Number:** If the source is part of a series or located in a journal with volume and issue numbers, include these numbers in your citation.
- **Publisher:** The entity that makes the work available. For example, a publishing company, a museum, or a group. You don't have to include the name of a publisher for periodicals, a website whose title is the same as the publisher or a website that makes works available but doesn't actually publish them (ex. YouTube, JSTOR), or self-published works.
- **Publication date:** When a source has more than one publication date, such as an online version of an original source, use the date that is most relevant to your use of the source.
- **Location:** Be specific in identifying a work's location. The location might include page numbers for an essay in a book or a URL for online sources.
- **Optional elements:** You may also include any information that helps your readers locate the source. Just remember to keep your citations as streamlined and concise as possible. Some optional elements might be a date of access for online sources, DOIs for journal articles, the city of publication, or the date of original publication of a work.

Note: Get as much of the above information as possible. Locate the home page of the site, which often contains publication and author/ownership information.

Citing Research Sources in Your Own Writing:

*You may **use information from sources** in three ways: by **quoting**, by **summarizing**, or by **paraphrasing**.*

Whether you quote, paraphrase, or summarize a source, you are <u>required</u> to cite the source. For MLA, cite by using a parenthetical citation-Ex. (Smith 62)—**within the text of your paper** to refer your reader to the full bibliographical information for the source, which you provide on a Works Cited page at the end of your paper.

The **in-text citations work in conjunction with the Works Cited page** to cite your sources.

<u>Parenthetical In-text Citations</u>

Indicate when you have ideas, images, or words from a source by citing the information with **in-text parenthetical citations** (Author p#) within the text of your paper, along with a Works Cited page (that lists all the sources cited within the text) at the end of your

The Writing Center

MLA Format: Citing Research Sources

paper. In-text citations include just enough information to let a reader locate the source in your Works Cited page and the place within the source where you found the cited material. For MLA format, you usually list the author's last name and page number at the place in your writing where you use the source information.

For example, if you use a quote from page 53 of a book by John Smith, the in-text citation would be as follows:

The main point of the law is to "create guidelines for behavior" (Smith 53).

The quotation marks "…" indicate that you used the words exactly as they appeared in the source.

When to quote directly from a source:

- ✓ **When you want to lend authority to your writing**
- ✓ **When the original source has stated the point so well that it should not be restated**
- ✓ **When you are dealing with a complex issue and the ideas might be misconstrued in a paraphrase.**

You must also use a citation if you restate the ideas from the source in your own words (called paraphrasing), but do not quote directly.

Example: Providing individuals with guidelines for appropriate behavior is the main point of the law (Smith 53)

The citation for this book on the Works Cited page would look like this:

Smith, John. *Playing Poker for Fun and Profit.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015.

If there is no author, your Works Cited page citation will begin with a title, usually of a shorter work such as an article title. Your in-text citation for such a work should use keywords from the title in quotations marks within the parentheses.

Example: A good player will always "read the tells" ("Ways" 21) of other players.

Note: Be sure that you have a Works Cited page citation for all sources referred to in the in-text citations.

For all research writing, it is important that the writer make his/her best effort to follow the required documentation format and leave as little doubt as possible in the reader's mind about where the words, images, and/or ideas in the writing originated.

Responsible Research Writing, Or, Plagiarism is Bad! Don't Do It!

As a writer, you will sometimes need to incorporate others' information (generally referred to as *sources)* as support for your own writing. To appropriately incorporate others' information, you must give them credit for their words, ideas, or images through

MLA Format: Citing Research Sources

documentation of the sources. MLA format is traditionally used in the humanities disciplines to document the sources. MLA format is traditionally used in the humanities disciplines to document the sources used in research writing.

Plagiarism is using someone else's words, ideas, or images and passing them off as your own. **Plagiarism is a form of serious academic dishonesty.**

<u>**Quoting source information:**</u> You may use information from sources to support your own ideas in writing by quoting the source directly, using words <u>exactly</u> as they appear in the source in your own writing.

➢ You indicate to your reader that you've used someone else's words by putting quotation marks (ex. "quote") around the words you've taken from the source. Copy the words <u>exactly</u> when quoting.

➢ Work quotations smoothly into your own sentences or introduce the quote with a running acknowledgement; don't just stick quotations into your writing as separate sentences.

➢ Use a parenthetical citation (last name #) with the quote, in addition to the quotation marks (ex. "quote") to indicate the source of the information.

Example of a direct quote: Some people today believe they "should have no other aim or thought… but war and its organization and discipline" (Machiavelli 348), much the same as Machiavelli advised the prince to do.

Changing a quote: You can change a quote to make it fit grammatically into your sentence or to clarify the quoted information from the original.

- If you omit parts of a quote: Use an ellipsis (…) in the place where you left out part of the quote. (Create the ellipsis by typing three periods in a row, no spaces between).

- If you add to a quote: Use square brackets [ ] to enclose the info you add to a quote.

<u>**Paraphrasing or summarizing source information:**</u> You may also use information from a source by restating (summarizing). Generally, paraphrase or summarize information as much as possible. Over-quoting can detract from the impact of the paper.