

Writing Research Essays: A Workshop Series: Step 3

Presented by The Writing Center at Trident Technical College

Step 3: MLA format and documentation

Checklist for Step 3:

- Understanding MLA format
- Setting up a paper in MLA format
- Using info from sources (quoting and paraphrasing)
- In-text citations
- The Works Cited page

MLA format

- MLA format refers to two things: how you set up a piece of research writing on the page and how you use and document information from sources in research writing.

- Setting up the research paper in MLA format:

- The **header** should include your last name and page numbers

- **Heading** (at the top left of the first page of the paper) should have on sequential lines:

Your name ex. Jane Doe

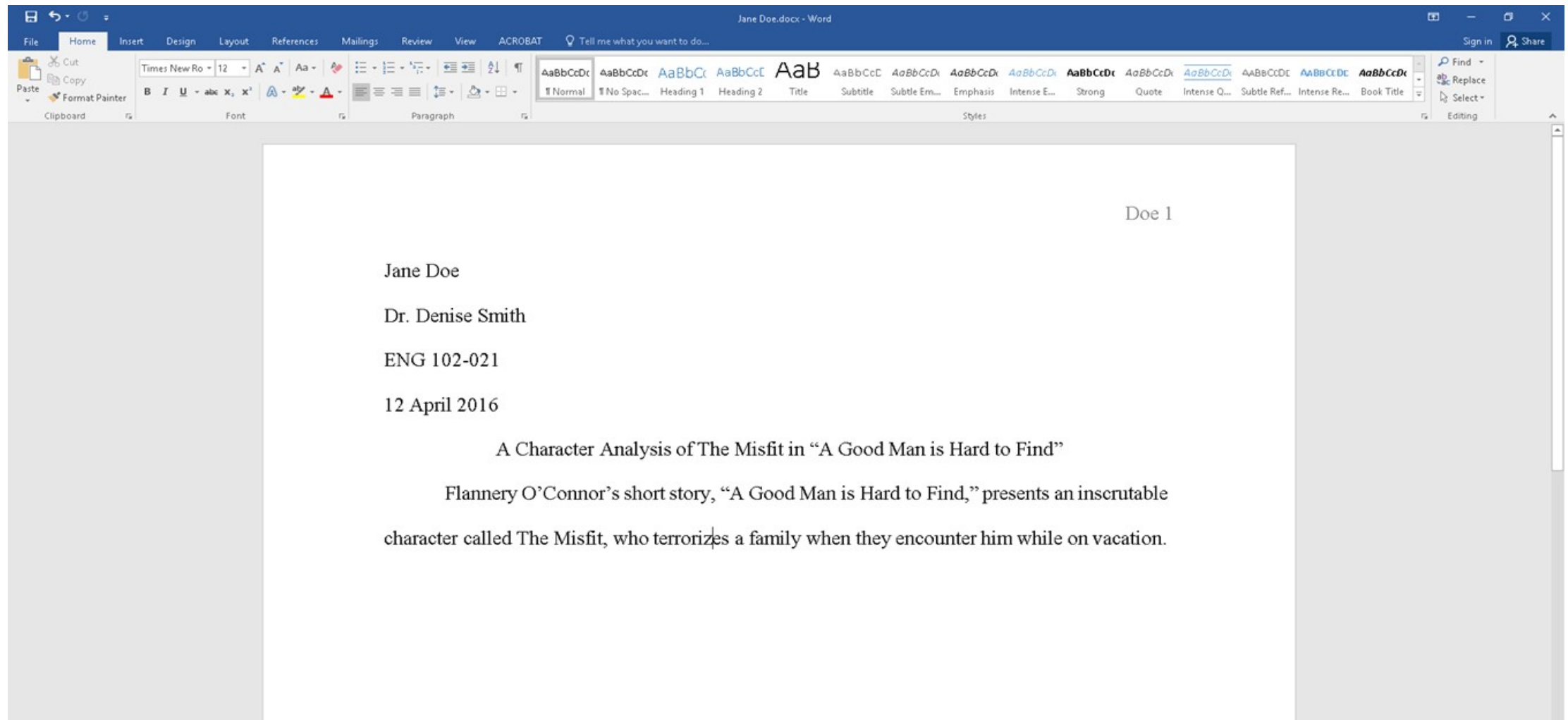
Your instructor's name ex. Dr. Denise Smith
The course name and
section ex. ENG 102-021
The date, in day month year format

ex. 12 April 2016

The next line of text should be the title of the paper, centered on the page. The following line will begin the text of your paper and will be indented 1/2". The entire paper should be double-spaced.

An example of a paper set up in this format is on the following slide.

Sample first page of paper in MLA format



The image shows a screenshot of the Microsoft Word interface. The title bar at the top reads "Jane Doe.docx - Word". The ribbon includes tabs for File, Home, Insert, Design, Layout, References, Mailings, Review, View, and ACROBAT. The Home tab is active, showing options for Clipboard, Font, Paragraph, Styles, and Editing. The document content is as follows:

Doe 1

Jane Doe

Dr. Denise Smith

ENG 102-021

12 April 2016

A Character Analysis of The Misfit in “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Flannery O’Connor’s short story, “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” presents an inscrutable character called The Misfit, who terrorizes a family when they encounter him while on vacation.

Citing sources

- When you use someone else's words, ideas, images, videos, etc. in your writing, you must give that person credit by documenting the source. Failure to give this credit is considered plagiarism.
- When using MLA, document sources by including parenthetical 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.
- The *Works Cited page* only includes sources you actually cite within the text of your essay.
- A *bibliography* includes all sources you consult in doing research for the essay, whether or not you cite the sources in your essay. Unless the assignment specifically calls for a bibliography, you will include a Works Cited page at the end of your essay.

Paraphrasing and quoting

Don't use quotation marks if you restate the ideas in your own words, *but you must still cite the source.*

Example of a paraphrase:

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

Compare to the direct quotation:

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

Reasons to quote rather than paraphrase info

Usually, you should paraphrase source information in your writing. However, there are some reasons why you might quote a source directly rather than paraphrase the info, including:

- Quote if you are trying to lend authority to the information. For example, if you are writing about curing cancer, quoting a top cancer researcher would lend authority to the information.
- Quote if the idea has been stated in a particularly eloquent or effective way in the source.
- Quote if the information is so complicated that a paraphrase might be misunderstood or misconstrued by your readers.

Use of quotations

- Use quotation marks (“”) around the words you take directly from a source.
- When you quote a source directly, be sure you have copied the quote correctly. Double-check the quotations you’ve included in your essay.
- Work the quotations into your own sentences, rather than having quotations stand alone as sentences. You do not have to quote complete sentences from a source. Just quote the part that you need to support your point.
- You may also quote more than one sentence. Open quotation marks at the beginning of the info you are quoting, keep the punctuation the same as it is in the source, and close the quotation marks at the end of the part you are quoting.
- Do not change quotations in any way unless you indicate to your reader that you have changed the quotation from the original source.
 - If you add words or information to a quotation, use square brackets ([]) around the added info.
 - If you leave words out of a quotation, use an ellipsis (...) in place of the words you’ve omitted.
 - An exception is that when you quote source info that is already in quotation marks, change the source’s quotation marks to single quotation marks, and use double quotation marks around all the information you’ve quoted.

Long quotations (aka block quotations)

- Prose quotations longer than four lines of text and verse quotations longer than three lines should be set off from the text of your essay as block quotes.
- A block quote is indented half an inch from the left margin and should be introduced with some of your own words, usually followed by a colon (:). Don't use quotation marks, as the indentation serves the same purpose as quotation marks. Begin the quotation on the line following the introduction words.
- This sentence is an example of how a block quotation should be set up:

A block quote is indented half an inch from the left margin and should be introduced with some of your own words, usually followed by a colon. Don't use quotation marks, as the indentation serves the same purpose as quotation marks. Begin the quotation on the line following the introduction words. The period goes at the end of the quotation, before the in-text citation. (Author 76)

Parenthetical in-text citations

MLA format for in-text citations is: (Author's last name p#)

For Direct Quotations

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).

Notice there are quotation marks around the words that came directly from the source.

Plagiarism issues

- Plagiarism is using someone else's words, ideas, images, videos, etc. and passing them off as your own. Plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty.
- To avoid plagiarizing info from sources when you are writing a research essay, you must cite any information you get from a source.
- In MLA format, the parenthetical in-text citations work in conjunction with the Works Cited page to cite source info. Therefore, you must have both parenthetical in-text citations and a Works Cited page for your essay.
- When you use information that you could not have known without consulting a source, you should include an in-text citation immediately following that information to refer your reader to the correct source on your Works Cited page list. *Even if you have paraphrased the information rather than quoting it directly, you should include an in-text citation for the source of the information.*
- You do not have to cite common knowledge. Common knowledge is information that is widely available, such as biographical facts about public figures or dates and circumstances of historical events.

Core elements of MLA reference citations

To be able to create an **MLA citation**, you should try to locate as much of the following basic info about a source as possible:

- Author. *May be a person, persons, or a group. Determine who is claiming responsibility for the information in the source.*
- Title of source.
- Title of container, *These are the larger whole works in which the source is located* ○ Other contributors, *May be editors, translators, etc.*
- Version, *If the source is an edition or a version*
- 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. Use vol. and no. abbreviations before the volume and issue numbers. Example: vol. 12, no. 16*
- Publisher, *The entity that makes the work available*
- 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. *The location might include page numbers for an essay in a book or a URL for online sources.*
- Optional elements (for example, a date of access for online sources, DOIs for journal articles, etc.)

Miscellaneous info about the Works Cited page

Punctuating titles:

- Put the title of a short work that is part of a larger work in quotation marks (ex. short stories, articles, poems)
- Italicize the title of a complete work (ex. a book, a film, a journal or magazine)
- Don't underline or bold your own title. The title should be in the same font as the rest of the essay.
- The heading on the Works Cited page should be in the same font as the rest of the paper:

Works Cited *Not:* ~~Works Cited Page~~ ~~Works Cited~~ Works Cited **Other:**

- Alphabetize citations on the Works Cited page.
- Use a hanging indent for citations.

Basic MLA citation format:

Information to include:

Author's name (reversed for alphabetizing). "Title of source." (in quotation marks). *Title of Container* (italicized), Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication date, Location. Optional elements

Sample citation:

Jones, David S. "The Leadership Debate." *Newsday*, vol. 12, no. 16, Jan. 2015, pp. 4552, www.newsday.com/jan15/leadership.123678. Accessed 15 Feb. 2016