General Format

MLA style specifies guidelines for formatting manuscripts and using the English language in writing. MLA style also provides writers with a system for referencing their sources through parenthetical citation in their essays and Works Cited pages.

Writers who properly use MLA also build their credibility by demonstrating accountability to their source material. Most importantly, the use of MLA style can protect writers from accusations of plagiarism, which is the purposeful or accidental uncredited use of source material by other writers.

If you are asked to use MLA format, be sure to consult the <u>MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers</u>. Publishing scholars and graduate students should also consult the <u>MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing</u>. The <u>MLA Handbook</u> is available in most writing labs and reference libraries; it is also widely available in bookstores, libraries, and at the MLA web site. See the Additional Resources section of this handout for a list of helpful books and sites about using MLA style.

Paper Format

The preparation of papers and manuscripts in MLA style is covered in chapter four of the <u>MLA Handbook</u>, and chapter four of the <u>MLA Style Manual</u>. Below are some basic guidelines for formatting a paper in MLA style.

General Guidelines

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper,
- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font like Times New Roman or Courier. The font size should be 10-12 pt.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks (unless otherwise instructed by your instructor).
- Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides. Indent the first line of a paragraph one half-inch (five spaces or press tab once) from the left margin.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor may ask that you omit the number on your first page. Always follow your instructor's guidelines.)
- Use either italics or underlining throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.
- If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Works Cited page.

Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

- Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.
- Double space again and center the title. Don't underline your title or put it in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case, not in all capital letters.
- Use quotation marks and underlining or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text, e.g.,
  - Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas as Morality Play
  - Human Weariness in "After Apple Picking"
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.
- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number; number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor or other readers may ask that you omit last name/page number header on your first page. Always follow their guidelines.)

Here is a sample first page of an essay in MLA style:

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                                          Smith 1
Pete Smith

Dr. B. Boilermaker

English 101

12 October 2005

      Building a Dream: Reasons to Expand

             Ross-Aide Stadium

       During the 2000 football season, the

Purdue Boilermakers won the Big Ten

Conference Title, earned their first trip

to the Rose Bowl in thirty-four years,

and played every game in front of a

sold-out crowd. Looking ahead...
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Image Caption: A sample first page of an MLA-formatted paper.

Cite the Purdue OWL in MLA:

Entire Website

The Purdue OWL. 26 Aug. 2008. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue
  University. 23 April 2008 <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

Individual Resources

Purdue OWL. "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." The Online Writing Lab at Purdue. 10

May 2008. Purdue University Writing Lab. 12 May 2008

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>.