

The MLA Campus Writing Style and Format Guidelines

Rethinking Documentation – For the Digital Age

Since 2008, the middle and high school students here at Christian Academy of Indiana have been required to follow the Modern Language Association (MLA) format guidelines for class assignments and papers. Now it is 2017. Between 2008 and 2016, MLA made some significant revisions and updates to these format guides, first in April 2009 with the publication of the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook* and recently in April 2016 with the publication of the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*.

In the spring of 2016 the Modern Language Association, the authority on research and writing, took a fresh look at documenting sources in the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*. As many are aware, works are being published today in a dizzying range of formats. A book, for example, may be read in print, online, or as an e-book—or perhaps listened to in an audio version. On the Web, modes of publication are regularly invented, combined, and modified. Previous editions of the *MLA Handbook* provided separate instructions for each format, and new formats required additional instructions. In a groundbreaking new eighth edition, the MLA recommends instead one universal set of guidelines, which writers can apply to any type of source.

Below is a summary of the *general* and *specific* MLA format guidelines (as a review), which have mostly remained unchanged, and the *MLA documentation* format guidelines, which have significantly changed in several areas.

General Manuscript Format Guidelines

1. When writing a paper, the final thing to consider is manuscript format – how the paragraphs, sentences, and words look on the page. These guidelines are designed for typed manuscripts, but they can apply to handwritten papers as well. To *double-space* a handwritten paper, the student merely writes on every other line.
2. Under normal circumstances, these guidelines will be followed for course compositions.
3. In the MLA system and style, the Title page and first page are combined.
4. Beginning ½ inch (0.5) down from the top right-hand margin (in the “header”) should be the student’s last name and page number, starting with the Arabic number *1*.
5. Then 1 inch down from the top on the left-hand side of the page should be the following information in double-spaced format:
 - Student name
 - Teacher name
 - Course name
 - Due date of assignment (written this way in MLA style: **26 July 2017**)

6. Next, double-space below this heading and place the title of the composition, using center alignment. The title is not punctuated, since it is unique to the student or the assignment.
7. Finally, double-space below the title and begin the text of the composition (or the assignment), continuing to use a double-spaced format throughout the entire paper.
8. If all formatting guidelines have been followed correctly, the final product should look like this:

Hess 1
Tony Hess
Mr. Mast
AP English Language and Composition
26 July 2017
Their Eyes Were on Realism
For many readers, the novel <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> by Zora Neale Hurston has become a “cult classic” in various literary circles. For others, it ...

Specific Manuscript Format Guidelines:

For any given writing situation, there may be other elements that you as the instructor want to assign. Here are some additional MLA format guidelines for consideration:

1. Paper / Font

Use only white standard typing or computer paper. Use only size 12 font for all text. Use standard font styles, such as Times New Roman and Ariel.

2. Margins / Indentions

Except for page numbers, leave margins of one inch at the top and bottom and on both sides of the text. Indent the first word of a paragraph one-half inch (or 5 spaces) from the left-hand margin. Indent long, formal (“block”) quotations (those over 4 lines) **one-half inch (or 5 spaces) from the left-hand margin (new!)**. This applies to all lines of the formal quotation.

3. Spacing

Papers should be double-spaced throughout, including long formal quotations, notes, and the list of the works cited.

4. **Pagination (Page Numbers)**

Number all pages consecutively throughout the manuscript in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right-hand margin. Student's last name goes before the page number. Do not use the abbreviation *p.* before a page number or add a period, a hyphen, or any other mark or symbol.

5. **Works Cited / References**

The list of the works cited appears at the end of the paper. Begin the list on a new page and number the page (or pages), continuing with the next consecutive number after the final page of the text. Continue with the same page numbering format. Center the title, *Works Cited* or *References*, one inch from the top of the page. Double-space between the title and the first source entry. Begin each entry flush with the left-hand margin (just the opposite of a paragraph's indentation). If an entry runs more than one line, indent all subsequent lines one-half inch from the left-hand margin. Double space the entire list, both between and within entries, using as many pages as needed. Entries are alphabetized.

If all formatting guidelines have been followed correctly, the final product should look like this:

Hess 7

Works Cited

Aron, Stephen. "The History of the American West Gets a Much-Needed Rewrite."

Smithsonian.com, 16 Aug. 2016, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-american-west-gets-much-needed-rewrite-180960149/.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. "We Real Cool." *The Norton Introduction to Literature*.

Edited by Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter, Shorter 7th ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 654.

Carroll, Meg. "Identities in Dialogue: Patterns in the Chaos." *The Writing Center*

Journal, vol. 28, no. 1, 2008, pp. 43-62.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Harper Perennial, 2006.

Lee, Wendy Anne. "Resituating 'Regulated Hatred': D.W. Harding's Jane Austen."

ELH, vol. 77, no.4, 2010, pp. 996-1014. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40963117.pdf?seq=1471459730771.

Warnke, Georgia. "Hermeneutics and Social Identity." *New Literary History*,

vol. 45, no. 4, Autumn 2015, pp. 575-94. doi: 10.1353/nlh.2014.0036.

What's new in MLA style?

<http://pages.mail.bfwpub.com/whatsnewinMLA/>

The Modern Language Association (MLA) has updated its guidelines for college and high school writers. What follows is an overview of the major changes in MLA style in the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (2016).

Italics

- *Italics* is now used everywhere in place of underlining—for titles, for words, etc.

On the Works Cited List

1. **No Print/Web designation.** Remember the “Print” and “Web” components of a 7th-edition entry? **Gone!**

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Harper Perennial, 2006.

2. **No city of publication.** Listing the publisher is enough, except for some old and atypical sources (*MLA* 41, 51).

Keillor, Garrison, editor. *Good Poems*. Penguin Books, 2002.

3. **No abbreviations for contributors' roles.** Words like “editor” and “edited” are spelled out. Role information listed *after* the source's title is followed with “by”: “edited by,” “translated by,” “illustrated by.” Depending on your emphasis, a film or television entry might include roles like “performance by” or “created by” (*MLA* 37).

Seamus Heaney, translator. *Beowulf*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. “We Real Cool.” *The Norton Introduction to Literature*.

Edited by Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter, Shorter 7th ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 654.

4. **Numbers now have labels.** For journal and magazine articles, “vol.” precedes the volume number and “no.” precedes the issue number. When pages are listed, “p.” comes before single page numbers and “pp.” now comes before page ranges. The format of parenthetical in-text citations, however, does **not** change (*MLA* 39-40, 46, 54).

Shaw, George Bernard. “Pygmalion.” *The Norton Introduction to Literature*.

Edited by Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter, Shorter 7th ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 1998, pp. 1080-1154.

Carroll, Meg. “Identities in Dialogue: Patterns in the Chaos.” *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2008, pp. 43-62.

5. **Access date is “optional,” and usually omitted.** Unless your teacher requires it, you don’t have to list the day you looked up an online source. (MLA 48; see also 53).

Aron, Stephen. “The History of the American West Gets a Much-Needed Rewrite.”

Smithsonian.com, 16 Aug.2016, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-american-west-gets-much-needed-rewrite-180960149/.

6. **Punctuation changes.** Periods follow the author and source names; commas separate all other elements of the citation. As before, the entry ends with a period (20).

Carroll, Meg. “Identities in Dialogue: Patterns in the Chaos.” *The Writing Center*

Journal, vol. 28, no. 1, 2008, pp. 43-62.

7. **URLs are required.** URLs are required for online sources, and (unlike APA style) they end with a period. **No angle brackets are used and http:// and https:// are omitted.** As in APA style, DOIs are preferred if available (48).

Gay, Penny. “A Hypothetical Map of Highbury.” *Persuasions On-Line*, vol. 36,

no. 1, Winter 2015, www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol36no1/gay.html.

Warnke, Georgia. “Hermeneutics and Social Identity.” *New Literary History*,

vol. 45, no. 4, Autumn 2015, pp. 575-94. doi: 10.1353/nlh.2014.0036.

8. **URLs are required in database citations, too** (32).

Lee, Wendy Anne. “Resituating ‘Regulated Hatred’: D.W. Harding’s Jane Austen.”

ELH, vol. 77, no.4, 2010, pp. 996-1014. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40963117.pdf?eq=1471459730771.

9. **“Et al.” is now used for all groups of more than two authors.** If a source has three authors or more, those names appear as First Author et al., even on first reference. This is true in-text, in parenthetical citations, and on the “Works Cited” list (23, 16).

10. **Missing information is no longer indicated by “n.p.” and “n.d.”** MLA’s online guide to the changes (“What’s New in the Eighth Edition”) clarifies the handbook’s discussion on page 111 by explaining that “placeholders for unknown information like *n.d.* (“no date”) are no longer used. If facts missing from a work are available in a reliable external resource, they are cited in square brackets. . . . Otherwise, they are simply omitted.”

11. **Journal dates now include seasons.** Examples in the handbook suggest—and MLA’s online guide confirms—that “if an issue of a scholarly journal is dated with a month or season, the month or season is now always cited along with the year (45).”

12. **No publisher is required for many works originally published on the web.** If you’re citing a newspaper, journal, or magazine website, or if the publisher’s name is basically the same as the website’s name anyway, then naming the website itself is enough (42).

Aron, Stephen. “The History of the American West Gets a Much-Needed Rewrite.”

Smithsonian.com, 16 Aug.2016, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-americanwest-gets-much-needed-rewrite-180960149/.