



Harvard Guide to Using Sources

MLA

Citations provide information to help your audience locate the sources you consulted when writing a paper or preparing a presentation. Some of your instructors will specify which citation format you should use; others will tell you to choose your own citation format as long as you use it consistently. The most common citation formats are MLA (Modern Language Association) style, which is primarily used for papers in the humanities; [APA \(American Psychological Association\) style](#), which is primarily used for papers in the social sciences; and [Chicago style \(The Chicago Manual of Style\)](#), which is used for both humanities and social science papers.

The recommendations in this section are based on the *MLA Handbook* (9th ed., MLA, 2021), which you can find through [Hollis](#). If you are logged into Hollis with your Harvard key, you can check out an online version of the handbook.

No one expects you to memorize the format for every type of source you will include in your reference list. Instead, you should know where to look for models of each type of source. This section explains the basics of MLA style and provides samples for the most commonly used sources. For more information, you should consult the links below:

- You can find templates for generating citations in the [MLA quick guide](#).
- You can find samples of how to cite different types of sources in the MLA [Citations by Format guide](#).
- You can find answers to [questions about MLA format here](#).
- You can find MLA advice about [formatting a research paper here](#).
- If you are looking for information on how to generate citations using Zotero or other citation software, you can find links to [library resources here](#).

In-Text Citations

In MLA style, you use parenthetical citations within the text of your paper to credit your sources and to refer your reader to a more detailed citation of the source in the "Works Cited" list at the end of your paper. You should use parenthetical citations when you paraphrase, quote, or make any reference to another author's work. A parenthetical citation in MLA style should include the author's last name and the page number to which you refer in that author's work.

If you mention the author's name in the sentence or sentences preceding the citation, then you do not need to repeat the name in the parenthetical citation. If the work you are citing does not





have page numbers (many articles published online will not have page numbers), or if you are referring to the entire work, then you do not need to include a page number in the citation. If you are having trouble keeping track of the MLA guidelines, it might help to think of it this way: You are including citation information so that your reader will be able to find your sources easily if they want to take a closer look. That means you only need to include information that will help readers; you don't need to repeat information that you have already provided in your sentence.

You should **not** use a comma to separate author and page number in an MLA in-text citation. When the citation appears at the end of a sentence, the period goes outside the parentheses at the end of the sentence. If you need to put the citation before the end of the sentence (in cases where you have more than one citation in a sentence), place any necessary punctuation after the citation as well.

If you find an article through an online database and you have the option of choosing a PDF version or an HTML version, you should choose the PDF. The PDF version will have stable page numbers, which will make it easier for a reader to find the material you cite. You should not count the pages of a document yourself and add numbers to them. A reader could print or view that document differently, and your numbering will not make sense in that context.

E-book page numbers vary depending on how someone is reading the e-book. If you are referring to an e-book that has page numbers, you should not include those page numbers. You should include stable numbers like section numbers, line numbers, or chapter numbers.

In-Text Citation Examples

- When neither the author nor the page number is mentioned in the body of the sentence, you should include both the author's last name and the page number in the parenthetical citation.

Colleges and universities need to create policies that foster inclusion for low-income students (Jack 24).

- When the author's name is mentioned in the sentence, you should include only the page number in your parenthetical citation.

As Anthony Jack argues, colleges and universities need to create policies that foster inclusion for low-income students (24).





- If the source you are writing about does not have page numbers, or if you consulted an e-book version of the source, you should include only the author's name in the parenthetical citation:

Colleges and universities need to create policies that foster inclusion for low-income students (Jack).

- If you mention the author in the body of the sentence *and* there is no page number in the source, you should not include a parenthetical citation.

As Anthony Jack argues, colleges and universities need to create policies that foster inclusion for low-income students.

- If you are referring to an entire work rather than a specific page, you do not need to include a page number.

In *The Privileged Poor*, Anthony Jack describes many obstacles that low-income students face at selective colleges and universities.

- If you are referring to a source that has no listed author, you should include the title (or a shortened version of the title) in your parenthetical citation.

Harvard College promises “to educate the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society” (“Mission, Vision, & History”).

- If you are referring to a source that has two authors, you should include both authors in your parenthetical citation.

The researchers tested whether an intervention during the first year of college could improve student well-being (Walton and Cohen 1448).

- If you refer to a source that has more than two authors, you should include the first author's name followed by *et al.* (*Et al.* is an abbreviation for *et alia* which means “and others” in Latin.) When you use *et al.* in a citation, you should not put it in italics.

The researchers studied more than 12,000 students who were interested in STEM fields (LaCrosse et al. 8).

- If you refer to more than one source by the same author in your paper, you should include the title (or a shortened version of the title) in your parenthetical citation so that readers will know which source to look for in your Works Cited list. If you mention the author's name in





the sentence, you only need to include the title and page number. If you mention the author and title in the sentence, you only need to include the page number.

Colleges and universities need to create policies that foster inclusion for low-income students (Jack, *Privileged Poor* 24).

According to Anthony Jack, colleges and universities need to create policies that foster inclusion for low-income students (*Privileged Poor* 24).

As Anthony Jack writes in *Privileged Poor*, colleges and universities need to create policies that foster inclusion for low-income students (24).

- If you want to credit multiple authors for making the same point, you can include them all in one parenthetical citation.

Students who possess cultural capital, measured by proxies like involvement in literature, art, and classical music, tend to perform better in school (Bourdieu and Passeron; Dumais; Orr).

- If you refer to a source that includes line numbers in the margins, numbered paragraphs, numbered chapters, or numbered sections rather than page numbers, you should include the number in your parenthetical citation, along with “line,” “ch./ chs.,” or “sec./secs.” You can include stable numbering like chapters even when there are no stable page numbers (as in an e-book). You should separate “line” or other designation from the work’s title or author’s name with a comma. If the source does not include this type of numbering, you should not include it either.

We learn that when he went to the store to buy clothes for his son, “a frantic inspection of the boys’ department revealed no suits to fit the new-born Button” (Fitzgerald, ch.2).

- If you are citing a play, you should include the act and scene along with line numbers (for verse) or page numbers, followed by act and scene, (for prose).

Guildenstern tells Hamlet that “there has been much throwing about of brains” (Shakespeare, 2.2. 381-382).

Chris is in this mindset when he says, “a couple minutes, and your whole life changes, that’s it. It’s gone” (Nottage, 13; act 1, scene1).





- If you are referring to a video or audio recording that contains time stamps, you should include the time in your parenthetical citation to make it easy for your readers to find the part of the recording that you are citing.

In the *Stranger Things* official trailer, the audience knows that something unusual is going to happen from the moment the boys get on their bicycles to ride off into the night (0:16).

Works Cited Format

What is a Works Cited list?

MLA style requires you to include a list of all the works cited in your paper on a new page at the end of your paper. The entries in the list should be in alphabetical order by the author's last name or by the element that comes first in the citation. (If there is no author's name listed, you would begin with the title.) The entire list should be double-spaced.

For each of the entries in the list, every line after the first line should be indented one-half inch from the left margin. "Works Cited" should be centered at the top of the page. If you are only citing one source, the page heading should be "Work Cited" instead of "Works Cited." You can see a sample [Works Cited on page 13 of this PDF](#).

Building your Works Cited list

MLA citations in the Works Cited list are based on what the Modern Language Association calls "core elements." The core elements appear in the order listed below, in a citation punctuated with the punctuation mark that follows the element. For some elements, the correct punctuation will be a period, and for other elements, the correct punctuation will be a comma. Since you can choose the core elements that are relevant to the source you are citing, this format should allow you to build your own citations when you are citing sources that are new or unusual.

Author.

The author you should list is the primary creator of the work—the writer, the artist, or organization that is credited with creating the source. You should list the author in this format: last name, first name. If there are two authors, you should use this format: last name, first name, and first name last name. For three or more authors, you should list the first author followed by *et al.* That format looks like this: last name, first name, et al.





If a source was created by an organization and no individual author is listed, you should list that organization as the author.

Title of source.

This is the book, article, or website, podcast, work of art, or any other source you are citing. If the source does not have a title, you can describe it. For example, if you are citing an email you received, you would use this format in the place of a title:

Email to the author.

Title of container,

A container is what MLA calls the place where you found the source. It could be a book that an article appears in, a website that an image appears on, a television series from which you are citing an episode, etc. If you are citing a source that is not “contained” in another source—like a book or a film—you do not need to list a container. Some sources will be in more than one container. For example, if you are citing a television episode that aired on a streaming service, the show would be the first container and the streaming service would be the second container.

Contributor,

Contributors include editors, translators, directors, illustrators, or anyone else that you want to credit. You generally credit other contributors when their contributions are important to the way you are using the source. You should always credit editors of editions and anthologies of a single author’s work or of a collection of works by more than one author.

Version,

If you are using a particular version of a source, such as an updated edition, you should indicate that in the citation.

Number,

If your source is one of several in a numbered series, you should indicate this. So, for example, you might be using “volume 2” of a source. You would indicate this by “vol. 2” in the citation.

Publisher,

For books, you can identify the publisher on the title or copyright page. For web sites, you may find the publisher at the bottom of the home page or on an “About” page. You do not need to include the publisher if you are citing a periodical or a Web site with the same name as the publisher.





Publication date,

Books and articles tend to have an easily identifiable publication date. But articles published on the web may have more than one date—one for the original publication and one for the date posted online. You should use the date that is most relevant to your work. If you consulted the online version, this is the relevant date for your Works Cited list. If you can't find a publication date—some websites will not include this information, for example—then you should include a date of access. The date of access should appear at the end of your citation in the following format:

Accessed 14 Oct. 2022.

Location.

The location in a print source will be the page number or range of pages you consulted. This is where the text you are citing is *located* in the larger container. For online sources, the location is generally a DOI, permalink, or URL. This is where your readers can locate the same online source that you consulted. MLA specifies that, if possible, you should include the DOI. Television episodes would be located at a URL. A work of art could be located in the museum where you saw it or online.

Your citations can also include certain optional elements. You should include optional elements if you think those elements would provide useful information to your readers. Optional elements follow the source title if they provide information that is not about the source as a whole. Put them at the end of the entry if they provide information about the source as a whole. These elements include the following:

Date of original publication.

If you think it would be useful to a reader to know that the text you are citing was originally published in a different era, you can put this information right after the title of the source. For example, if you are citing *The Federalist Papers*, you would provide the publication date of the edition you consulted, but you could also provide the original publication date:

Hamilton, Alexander, et al., editors. *The Federalist Papers*. October 1787-May 1788.

Oxford University Press, 2008.

City of publication.

You should only use this information if you are citing a book published before 1900 (when books were associated with cities of publication rather than with publishers) or a book that has been





published in a different version by the publisher in another city (a British version of a novel, for example). In the first case, you would put this information in place of the publisher's name. In the second case, the city would go before the publisher.

Descriptive terms.

If you are citing a version of a work when there are multiple versions available at the same location, you should explain this by adding a term that will describe your version. For example, if you watched a video of a presidential debate that was posted to YouTube along with a transcript, and you are quoting from the transcript, you should add the word “Transcript” at the end of your citation.

Dissertations

If you are citing a dissertation or thesis, you should include both the degree granted and the type of manuscript. (BA thesis, MA thesis, PHD dissertation).

Examples of Commonly Cited Sources

Below you'll find sample citations for books, journal articles, and websites. To see examples of other types of citations, you should consult the MLA [Citations by Format guide](#).

Book

To cite the book *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* by Karen Ho, you would follow the format described in this section, choosing only the core elements that are available for a published print book. In that case, you would use the following elements and punctuate them the way they are punctuated below:

Author (last name, first name): Ho, Karen Zouwen.

Title: *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*.

Publisher: Duke University Press,

Publication date: 2009.





Complete citation:

Ho, Karen Zouwen. *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Duke University Press, 2009.

For books with a single author, you do not need to list any other elements. For other types of sources, you will need to pick other relevant elements that will help interested readers locate the source.

Academic journal article

If you were going to cite Amanda Michiko Shigihara’s article about restaurant employees, “I Mean, Define Meaningful!: Accounts of Meaningfulness among Restaurant Employees,” you would need to decide which core elements a reader would need to locate the version of the article that you read.

You would start with the author and title.

Author: Shigihara, Amanda Michiko.

Title: “I Mean, Define Meaningful!: Accounts of Meaningfulness among Restaurant Employees.”

Because this is a journal article, your readers need to know which “container” they need to find in order to locate the article. In this case, the container is a journal called *Qualitative Sociology Review*. So, this would be listed next:

Container: *Qualitative Sociology Review*

Since there are multiple issues of this journal, your readers also need to know which issue of the journal to look for. That means you should also supply the volume and/or issue number. In this case, the journal provides both a volume and an issue number:

Number: vol. 15, no. 1

Publication Date: May 2019

Location: pp. 106-31. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.1.05>.





Complete citation:

Shigihara, Amanda Michiko. “I Mean, Define Meaningful!': Accounts of Meaningfulness among Restaurant Employees.” *Qualitative Sociology Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, May 2019, pp. 106–31. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.1.05>.

Website

If you wanted to cite a page from website version of the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*, you would begin by looking to see if there is an author listed on the page. There is no single author credited for the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*, so you would begin your citation the page about MLA citations with the title of the page.

Title: “MLA”

You would then include the title of the whole web site, since that is the container in which the MLA page is located: *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*.

Then you would include the location: <https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>

Since there is no publication date for each article listed on this site, you would include the date you accessed the website at the end of your citation.

“MLA.” *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*. <https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>. Accessed 15 October 2022.

To cite an article published on a website that does provide publication dates, you should list the article’s publication date instead of an access date. While access dates appear at the end of the citation, publication dates appear before the location of the source.

Strub, Spencer. “Pandemics have long created labor shortages. Here’s why.” *The Washington Post*, 3 June 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/06/03/pandemics-have-long-created-labor-shortages-heres-why/>.





Frequently Asked Questions about Citing Sources in MLA Format

How do you cite social media posts?

You should cite a post on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, or other social media using the same format of core elements that you use for other sources. In this case, the “author” is the author of the post, with their handle (if it is different from their name) in parentheses. The title is the first part of the post (if text) or a description of the image (if the post is an image). The container is the platform (X, Instagram, or another social media platform). The location is the URL, and the date is the date posted rather than the date accessed.

Example

Kayyem, Juliette. “A school district police department that did not need to exist should never exist again.” *Twitter*, 7 Oct. 2022,
<https://twitter.com/juliettekayyem/status/1578447720720699392>.

How do you cite an episode of a podcast?

When citing a podcast, the narrator or host should be listed in the author position, and the title of the episode should be listed as the title. The title of the whole podcast is the “container,” followed by season and episode numbers. You should then provide either the date of the podcast or the copyright date of the website, followed by the URL.

Nancy Updike, narrator. “Black Box.” *We Were Three*, episode 1, 13 Oct. 2022,
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/we-were-three/id1648534112>.

What if the source I am citing has no page numbers?

If the source has no page numbers, then you should not include any in your citations. Don’t count the pages yourself and number them since a reader may print or view the document differently, and this will create confusion.

What if I want to cite a quotation that is quoted in someone else’s book?

You should avoid citing a source you have not consulted. If you can consult the original source in which the quotation appeared, then you should do that. If you cannot consult the original source,





you should cite the source where *you* found the quotation. When you are citing a quotation that was quoted in someone else’s book, you should indicate this in the following way:

Author Amy Bloom described her husband’s early symptoms of Alzheimer’s as “names disappearing, repetition, information turned upside down, appointments and medications scrambled” (qtd. in Van Booy).





Sample Works Cited List

Below, you'll find a Works Cited page adapted from a research paper that was written by Sonia Kangaju for her Expos class about Shakespeare. The Works Cited list should always begin on a separate page from the paper itself.

Works Cited

- Balme, Christopher. "Race and Theatre." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, edited by Dennis Kennedy, Oxford University Press, 2003. 1096-1098.
- Coles, Darrell. "When Will the Black Community Practice Unity?" *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*, 23 Nov. 2018, <https://spokesman-recorder.com/2018/11/23/when-will-the-black-community-practice-unity/>.
- Douglas, Daniel. "Middle Class." *Encyclopedia of African American History 1896 to the Present*, edited by Paul Finkelman, Oxford University Press, 2009, Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195167795.001.0001/acref-9780195167795-e-0795>.
- LeRoy, Admiral. "The Black Community Must Find Unity." *Pensacola News Journal*, 14 Jun. 2014, <https://www.pnj.com/story/opinion/2014/06/15/black-community-must-find-unity/10482387/>
- Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado About Nothing*. Directed by Kenny Leon, Public Theater Company, 22 Nov. 2019, Delacorte Theater, New York City.
- Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado About Nothing*. Edited by Peter Holland, Penguin, 2017.
- Thompson, Ayanna. "Race." *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, edited by Michael Dobson, et al., 2nd ed, Oxford University Press, 2015, Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198708735.001.0001/acref-9780198708735-e-3147>.

