

# MLA Style in a Nutshell

By: Gloria M. Custodio, University of Puerto Rico at Cayey, English Department

In this class, you will be required to use the MLA style of citation for all written material you turn in. This ensures that any reader can go back and access the original sources used. The MLA style is only one of several possible citation styles (including the APA and Chicago styles), but it is the standard used in the humanities.

## ***What is the MLA?***

MLA stands for Modern Language Association, the professional organization for professors of English, comparative literature, and other languages. The MLA came up with a standardized way to cite and reference all sources used in printed materials, from student papers to professional journals.

The MLA publishes two books on MLA style:



- The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition – for students
- The MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition – for teachers and other professionals



In addition, the American publishing house Houghton Mifflin publishes a short compendium of the most important guidelines, The Essentials of MLA Style.

This summary is based on those three sources.

## ***MLA Basics***

MLA style has three basic components:

- 1) the document format;
- 2) citation within the text; and
- 3) list of Works Cited.

## **Document Format**

- **Paper size:** 8 ½ x 11 (letter size), white
- **Margins:** 1” all around
- **Line spacing:** double, even for long quotes and the list of Works Cited
- **Page numbering:** Every page (including the first) must be numbered in the upper right hand corner.
- The last name of the document’s **author** must appear just before the page number on each page.
- **First page:** Do NOT use a separate cover sheet.

Instead, use the following format:

María Pérez López  
 Prof. Gloria M. Custodio  
 INGL 3246  
 August 19, 2002

**Reaction Paper 1: Edith Wharton's The Other Two**

Here's the start of your paper. Remember to start with an introductory sentence or two before launching into the bulk of your paper. And don't forget to write a conclusion where you wrap up your major point(s) – don't leave your professor up in the air!

**Remember:**  
 \* The first line of every paragraph must be indented.  
 \* The entire document should be double spaced; don't add extra spaces between paragraphs.

- **Footnotes/endnotes:** Although MLA style favors endnotes over footnotes, for this class you will use footnotes only, because they are easier to read (no flipping back and forth). Footnotes are the only thing that is single-spaced, with an extra space between each.

Use notes only for the following purposes:

1. To provide additional information related to but not essential to the main text; and
2. To mention (and evaluate) other sources, or refer the reader to additional sources.

Any additional source mentioned in a note must be included in the list of Works Cited.

- **Cited works:** The list of Works Cited should appear on the page following the last page of text, and should be numbered consecutively. So, for example, if the text ends on page 5, the list of Works Cited should start on page 6.

### Citation Within the Text

When citing within our text, we should keep in mind the two most important criteria:

- Interrupt as little as possible the reading flow; and
- Provide the reader with enough information to go to the list of Works Cited, and from there to the exact place in the source material where the referenced information appears.

The bibliographical information must always be enclosed within parenthesis, at the end of the material cited, referenced, or mentioned. Never use a footnote or endnote for these bibliographical purposes.

The way we cite within a text varies depending on how much information we choose to incorporate in our writing; the more information we give in our text, the less information we need to include within the parenthetical reference. Here are a few examples of how this works:

When we mention the name of the author in the sentence, we should include the following information within the parenthesis:

- **If the author has more than one work in the list of Works Cited:** The (abbreviated or short) title of the work cited and the page where we got the quote/information;

***La Guaracha vs. the Beat***

According to Rabassa, “[p]robably the most difficult aspect of translation is the necessary but often futile attempt to preserve or convey a cultural milieu and its concomitants through words” (“No two snowflakes” 10). For Rabassa, words are slippery things that shift meaning, tone, register:

If things are ambiguous, words are even worse. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, meaning is in the eye of the observer. A word, like an object, will take on new meanings with new uses. Most often this is due to some cultural influence upon the language, some attempt to convey a new idea or action or description when there is no traditional term extant. (*Translation of Cultures* 37)

Note the difference in the placement of the punctuation mark.

- **If the author has only one work cited:** You need only include the page number to which the text refers.

Pay attention to the punctuation signs: When citing within a text, the punctuation signs are place **AFTER** the bibliographical parenthesis.

According to Vollendorf, “[t]he emphasis on spatial confinement communicates an obsession with containment on the part of the sister-in-law, husband, and brother. By enclosing Inés in the smallest space possible, her relatives choose a method of torture that symbolically responds to her ‘loose’ sexuality” (*Reclaiming the Body* 153). Grieve remarks as well that “this kind of story in hagiography, where the female penitent lives in her own filth, deprived of food, light, and even sufficient space in which to recline, appears to be linked to the stories of the penitent whore, and it is precisely fornication that Zayas’ heroine is accused of [note omitted]” (91-92).

More than one of Vollendorf’s works is cited in this paper, but only one of Grieve’s. See the difference in the information included in the parenthesis?

Remember: Do **NOT** use **commas** between the title and the number of the page cited.

If we don’t mention the name of the author in the sentence, then we have to include it in the parenthesis:

inscribed in the original text. Through a wide readership, a translation can even become “the site of unexpected groupings, fostering communities of readers who would otherwise be separated by cultural differences and social divisions yet are now joined by a common fascination” (Venuti 477).

If the author has more than one cited work, we must also include the short/abbreviated title, separated from the author’s last name by a comma: (Rabassa, *Translation of Cultures* 42).

**Quotes exceeding four lines of text must be set apart from the text and indented:**

Remember:  
This kind of quotation does not use quotation marks (“ ”) to mark the quote, because its distinctive format is enough.

Rabassa’s own translation practice seems to straddle both of Schleiermacher’s ‘penetration’ strategies; he seeks to preserve some of the foreign feel of the original while at the same time striving to present an English version that flows well. Rabassa, in fact, seems aware of the difficult path he has chosen to pursue:

[u]nfortunately, there is no way we can preserve the grammatical structure of the original in a translation to show that this book was really written in Spanish or Portuguese or whatever. To do so would be to produce some kind of gibberish that would be unintelligible to both sides. At the same time, however, there ought to be some kind of under-current, some background hum that lets the English-speaking reader feel that this is not an English book. This is due to the sad realization that cultures do not translate easily. (*Translation of Cultures* 42)

Pay attention to the punctuation marks:  
In this type of quotation, the punctuation mark goes **BEFORE** the parenthesis.

**Indirect quotes** (quotes of material that appears quoted/cited in the source material) must be identified correctly:

from the original language and culture. But even where there are many points of cultural and linguistic contact, “[n]o two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered

---

Custodio 7

as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached” (Edward Sapir, cited in Bassnett 13).

**Other common situations:**

- Works that have more than one volume: (author volume: page) (Jones 3: 1567)
- Works with more than one author: (last-name-of-the-author-cited-first-in-the-Works-Cited-list et al. page) (Smith et al. 34)
- Literary works that have more than one edition: (page; sec., ch.) (345; sec. 4, ch. 25)
- Works without an author or by an anonymous author: (short-title page) (*Beowulf* 35)
- Reference to several works within one parenthesis: (author page; author page) (Jones 3: 1567; Smith et al. 34)

## How to Create a List of Works Cited

The list of Works Cited contains the bibliographic and reference information of ALL books, documents, websites, articles, and materials to which you refer in your document. Do NOT include sources that you consulted but didn't use.

To avoid omissions, make a habit of adding the bibliographical reference of a source to the Works Cited list immediately after using it in the text.

General ways to cite materials in the Works Cited list:

- **Books:** Last name, name. Title. Additional information. City: Publisher, date.
- **Articles:** Last name, name. "Title of the Article." Title of the Publication date: pages.
- **E-books:** Last name, name. Title. Date of the website. Name of the website. Date accessed. Web address placed within <>.

This is an example of a Works Cited list:

The list is alphabetized by the author's last name. Different works by the same author should then be arranged by title.

If the work has no author, then use its title to alphabetize.

***Works Cited***

Bassnett, Susan. Translation Studies. 1980. Revised ed. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Bhum-Kulka, Shoshana. "Shifts of Cohesion and Coherence in Translation." 1986. The Translation Studies Reader. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2000. 298-313.

Jakobson, Roman. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." Theories of Translation. Eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992. 144-151.

Lefevre, André. "Mother Courage's Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature." 1982. The Translation Studies Reader. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2000. 233-250.

---. Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context. New York: MLA, 1992.

Levine, Suzanne Jill. The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf P, 1991.

Popovic, Anton. "The Concept "Shift of Expression" in Translation Analysis." The Nature of Translation. Ed. James S. Holmes. Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1970. 78-87.

Rabassa, Gregory. "Introduction." Macho Camacho's Beat. Aut. Luis Rafael Sánchez. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. 1980. Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001.

---. "No Two Snowflakes are Alike: Translation as Metaphor." The Craft of Translation. Eds. John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989. 1-12.

Remember to indent each entry from the second line on.