

# HCC's Guide to MLA Documentation of Sources

By Joan Johnson  
Associate Professor of English  
Chair, English and Humanities Division

## MLA Documentation and Citing Sources

MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation, used primarily in the humanities, is a method of documenting sources in a research assignment. This documentation method uses parenthetical citations instead of footnotes or endnotes. The author's last name and the page number are most often included in the parentheses. A Works Cited page at the end of the assignment provides complete bibliographical information for each source used in the assignment. The advantage in using MLA format is that it gives the reader the most pertinent information about sources used in the paper without distracting the reader from the content.

As part of an academic community, students must learn how to properly give credit for information used that is not their own. Citing one's sources not only gives credit where credit is due, but it also allows your own ideas and thoughts to be clearly expressed as your own and not someone else's.

In addition, scholars also use bibliographic information to add to their own stock of information. For instance, a person researching an obscure poet might use one article's works cited to track down more sources about that poet. Therefore, accurate information is essential in academic writing.

Finally, accurate documentation of sources also protects a student from charges of plagiarism. A carefully and precisely documented assignment shows the professor that the student understands how to give credit to his or her sources.

## Source Evaluation

- To a large extent, sources determine the quality of the assignment. Dependence on low quality, non-authoritative sources will seriously undermine the evidence and support in the assignment.
- For literary papers, the best sources are literary critics who are rarely found on random web sites. Look in the databases accessed through the HCC website (go to [www.hagerstowncc.edu](http://www.hagerstowncc.edu), click on "Library," rest your mouse on "Find," and select "Article Databases" from the menu), in books and in journals and maybe even magazines. Occasionally, a newspaper article might provide good information on an author, also. In general, web sites that are put up by laypersons-hobbyists, students, or others- would not count as academic sources.

- Remember that if an Internet site is trying to sell something, no matter what it is, it is not an academic, scholarly site. If you cannot find the credentials of the author, or any author at all, it is highly suspect, no matter what the information is like. If the information is written by another student, it is not acceptable. Other students' work just isn't the same as a professor's or literary critic's work.
- Eliminate from consideration any site that offers student essays for sale or free. Even though the pretence is that these are for "research" purposes, they are really for students who would rather cheat than write their own papers. Be very wary of sites that run banners or ads. Very often, these sites are low quality.
- You must be ruthless in determining how good the source is. If you can find similar information from a better source, go to the better source.

The following guidelines will help you in determining if an internet site is useful for academic, scholarly research.

- Authorship - Can you determine who wrote the information? Does this person have credentials in the field? Is the article or information peer reviewed or subject to some other gatekeeping process? Is the information reprinted from a print source? If so, you must also include the previous publication information in your bibliographic citation. For instance, if an article is printed on a website that was originally printed in *The New York Times*, you must include the newspaper publication information, also.
- Sponsor - Who is sponsoring or hosting the site? Is it a general site that features fairly basic and superficial information? You may have to go to the home page of the site to find out this information. If the sponsor is selling or promoting any services or products, it is not an academic site.
- Credibility - Is this sponsor biased and does that matter for your purposes? Are there any errors in spelling, grammar, or facts? What can you tell from the URL? Is it followed by .com, .org, .edu or another ending? Don't assume that all academic sites must come from .edu web sites. Many .edu sites could be from students and many .com sites are actually quite scholarly. You need to investigate the site thoroughly to tell if it is academic. Is it a paper mill site that is offering student papers? Are any sources cited? Does the author attempt to present all sides?
- Audience and Purpose - For whom is this site intended? Is it an academic, scholarly source or an encyclopedia? Why is the information available: to argue a position? to sell something? to promote a certain point of view?
- Quality of Presentation - Is the site professional or amateurish? Is it well laid out or sloppy? Do links work? Has it been recently updated? Does the author cite references if necessary?

The following web site offers more information on source evaluation:

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>

- Don't forget that books and other print materials can be superior sources of information, particularly for English and history assignments.

## Hagerstown Community College Library's Databases

- HCC's Brish Library subscribes to many scholarly and academic databases that are free for students to use. These include Academic Search Premier, Lexis-Nexis, Literature Online, the Gale Literature Resource Center, and many others. Usually, information from these sources can be trusted to be of a very high quality.
- To access these, go to the HCC website: [www.hagerstowncc.edu](http://www.hagerstowncc.edu), click on "Library" at the left. Rest your mouse on "Find" and select "Article Databases" from the menu. After choosing the database that you want, the program will ask for your last name. Enter that and another box will ask for your password or ID number, which is on the back of your HCC ID card or on your registration information. If you cannot find that number, contact your instructor and he or she can get it for you.
- Remember - your user or login name is your last name and your password is your HCC ID number. Every time you access a different database, you will need to enter this information. These databases may also be directly accessed on campus.

## MLA Format

- In MLA format, everything in the paper is double-spaced. Nothing is single-spaced – not long quotations, not works cited entries – nothing. Put your line spacer on 2 and leave it there.
- Most professors who prefer MLA format dislike title pages, but check with your particular instructor for his or her preference and format for the title page. Unless your professor specifically requires it, an outline is also not necessary for submission.
- Put your full name in the upper left corner, about one inch below the top of the paper. Put the instructor's name, the course and due date on subsequent lines. Place your last name and the page number in the upper right. It is easier to put these in manually rather than using the header feature in MS Word since that puts these on every page, and you do not want all of this information on every page. Place the title of the paper below the date. See the example below:

<p>Sarah Student</p> <p>Prof. Joan Johnson</p> <p>Eng 102</p> <p>December 12, 2004</p>	<p>Student 1</p>
<p>Title of Paper</p>	
<p>Begin writing your paper here.</p>	

- Subsequent pages require only your last name and the page number in the upper right:

Student 2

Notice that there is no comma and no “page” or “pg” needed.

- Use one inch margins all around and do not triple space between paragraphs. Use normal paragraph indentation of 5 spaces to indicate a new paragraph. Many professors prefer Times New Roman, Courier or other similar fonts. Be wary of using italics or any other fancy fonts. They are very irritating to read. Use either 10 or 12 pt. type size and regular white paper.
- Fancy binders are rarely necessary unless your professor requests them. Usually they are far more trouble and bother than a simple staple or paper clip. If sources are required with your assignment, place them and the paper in a cardboard folder’s pockets. Simplicity is better than complicated bindings.

### **How and what to document using in-text citations**

- Any information that you take from a source, unless it is common knowledge, must be documented within the paper so that the source can be credited for that information. This includes quotations, summaries, and paraphrases.
- How do you know what to document? If you did not know it before you began the assignment, cite it. If you are using exact words from the source, put them in quotation marks and cite them. If you put the information into your own language, the information must still be cited. Research, statistics, studies, and interpretive comments from any source should always be cited.
- What is common knowledge? The general rules for common knowledge include facts that are generally and commonly known: Alcoholism is a serious disease; George Washington led the Continental Army; Emily Dickinson was a reclusive poet. The other general rule is that if the same information can be found in three or more sources, it can be considered common knowledge. Keep in mind that this does not mean that you may copy the information word for word unless you use quotation marks and document the source. Stealing someone’s language is just as serious as stealing someone’s ideas and work.
- Place your in-text citation as close to the borrowed material as possible:

**Since the advent of the modern women’s liberation movement in the 1970’s, her fictional writings have been recognized as revolutionary in the advancement of women’s issues in the late nineteenth century (Kibble 1).**

Use the author’s last name (Kibble) and the page from which the information came: (1). Your works cited entry at the end of the paper will give the full bibliographical information:

**Kibble, Matthew. "Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, 1860-1935." *Literature Online***

***Biography. Literature Online. ProQuest. Web. 8 July 2004.***

- In in-text citations, if there is no author use only the page number. If there is neither an author, nor a page number; for instance, if it is a web page, use the first main word of the title in the in-text citation: ("Gilman") Put quotation marks around it.
- If you use the same author and two different articles or books by that same author, put the last name, the first main word of the title, and the page number in the citation: (Kibble "Gilman" 1). This tells the reader which Kibble source you are citing.
- Never put a URL (web address) in an in-text citation. New MLA guidelines also suggest eliminating URLs from the works cited entries because of their changeable nature. If you feel a URL is necessary or if your professor requests their inclusion, follow those principles.
- A smoother way to document sources is to integrate the information into your writing:

**In *Love, Sex, and Marriage Through the Ages*, Bernard I. Murstein states, "The vast majority felt that each person had a duty to marry, to preserve the fabric of society, and to rear sons and daughters for the sustenance of the republic" (371).**

- When you do this, you do not need to put the author's last name in the parentheses.
- If you do this with internet or non-print sources, you may have nothing to put in parentheses, which is fine.
- If you quote a source within a source, use "qtd in" in your citation:

**According to Cutter, a change in the language came about with the writings of authors such as Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Anna Julia Cooper, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Frances Harper. These writers, according to Cutter, strove to give their women characters depth through what readers assumed was a "masculine voice" (qtd. in Glasser 2).**

This indicates that the information from Cutter came from the Glasser source. On the works cited page this information would then match up with the full bibliographic information about the Glasser source.

- Punctuate in-text citations carefully. Periods always follow citations if the citations come between sentences:

**...new opportunities available to women in the work force (Seitler 4). Gilman and others promoted the premise that young white women...**

- Periods are taken out of quotations and placed behind the citation:

**He blames her condition on "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency" (Gilman 12).**

- If question marks and exclamation points are part of the quotation they remain within the quotation marks. "... tendency?" (Gilman 12). If they are the writer's emphasis, they follow the citation: "...tendency" (Gilman 12)?
- Do not put "page," "pg," or commas in in-text citations.
- In-text citations do not need to come only at the end of paragraphs. They should be placed wherever information from a source ends, and either your own comments begin or another source's information or a different page number from the same source begins:

**He blames her condition on "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency" (Gilman 12). He tells her that in entertaining thoughts about the "ghostliness" of the house, she "shall neglect proper self-control" (Gilman 25). He tells her he will send her to another doctor that she fears going to if her condition does not improve. John's sister represents the ideal wife. "She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession" (Gilman 77-78).**

- Avoid citation clutter. If all of the information in several sentences is from the same source and the same page, one citation at the end is sufficient:

**Chopin's short story, "Dèsirée's Baby," does not adhere to her usual theme of a woman struggling with her sexuality, but it does illustrate how an assumed failure by a wife to meet the highest social criteria is cause for a husband to feel injured for the shame his reputation will suffer. In the story, Dèsirée, who was orphaned as a toddler and raised by Madame Valmondè, marries and gives birth to a son. Dèsirée's husband, Armand, "is the proudest father in the parish," and as a result of his happiness with the baby treats his slaves more humanitarily (Chopin 16).**

- You only need a new citation if you present information from a different source or a different page:

**When the baby boy is about three months old, Dèsirée notices "a strange, an awful change in her husband's manner, which she dared not ask him to explain" (Chopin 18).**

- Long quotations are any quotations that run to four or more typed lines. These are dropped down one line from your writing, indented ten spaces, and do not have quotation marks around them:

**Armand places all of the blame for his inter-racial son and his subsequent shame on his wife:**

**He thought Almighty God had dealt cruelly and unjustly with him; and felt, somehow, that he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife's soul. Moreover he no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name. (Chopin 37)**

- Note that in long quotations, the period is placed before the citation.

## Works Cited Page

- The works cited page comes at the end of the paper and includes all bibliographic information for each source that you use. Make sure that you title it correctly:

### Works Cited

It is not a Bibliography, a References Page, or a Works Consulted. Do not label it Works Sited, Works Sighted, or Works Cited. This will not impress your professor.

- The works cited page is double spaced and uses hanging indents. The first line of each entry goes to the left margin and each subsequent line of that entry is indented five spaces:

**Chopin, Kate. "Dèsirée's Baby." *An Introduction to Literature*. Ed. Sylvan Barnet, et.al. New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004. 76-80. Print.**

- **Note that new MLA guidelines suggest that the medium the source is in be placed at the end of the citation (Print, Web).**
- All entries are listed alphabetically by either the author's last name or the first main word of the title. Never put numbers next to works cited entries.
- Each source mentioned in the paper should have a corresponding works cited entry. The source's name or the title in the in-text citation should match up with the first main word of the works cited entry.
- Only include in the Works Cited sources that you have documented within the paper. If you have read sources, but have not used them directly they do not belong in the Works Cited.
- End each citation with a period.
- Follow the correct guidelines for what to include in a works cited entry. Do not just "wing" this. Correct bibliographic citations are a hallmark of a good college education. Take the time to do them right.

## Sample Works Cited Entries

This is by no means a comprehensive list. See these web sites for more detailed works cited entries:

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_mla.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html)

<http://webster.commnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>

<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>

or use a recent grammar handbook (Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* is very good) that includes MLA documentation.

### Books:

For books you must include the author's full name, the full title, any editors or translators, place of publication (only the first city listed) and the publisher (you may shorten publisher's names: Norton for W.W. Norton and Co.; Oxford UP for Oxford University Press.) Note: If you are using an anthology, a collection of works by different authors and put together by an editor, your source is the author of the work you used, not the editor unless you use information from the editor's preface, foreword, or comments. This is the only book entry that requires page numbers in the works cited entry. See sample below. **NOTE: These examples are in bold for clarity in this document. In a formal paper, works cited entries should be in normal typeface.**

1. A book with one author:

**Murstein, Bernard, I. *Love, Sex and Marriage Through the Ages*. New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1974. Print.**

2. A book with two authors:

**Ruland, Richard, and Malcolm Bradbury. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature*. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1991. Print.**

If your book has no author, begin with the title. If there is a corporate or government author, indicate that (National Institute of Health; American Automobile Association). If you use two or more sources from the same author, you do not need to repeat the author's name. Use three dashes and a period:

**Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979. Print.**  
**---. *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Writings*. New York: Bantam, 1989. Print.**



3. Book with an editor. Use this model when you are citing the author, not the editor.

**Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Portable Poe*. Ed. Philip Van Doren Stern. New York: Penguin, 1977. Print.**

4. Editor. Use this model when you are citing information from the editor.

**Stern, Philip Van Doren, ed. *The Portable Poe*. New York: Penguin, 1977. Print.**

5. A work in an anthology. This is the model you would use for your literature textbook. Use this model for any collection of stories or articles by different authors.

**Chopin, Kate. "Dèsirée's Baby." *An Introduction to Literature*. Ed. Sylvan Barnet, et.al. New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004. 76-80. Print.**

6. Reference Work without an author(Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, Atlases)

**"Adolescence." *The New American Webster Handy College Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1995. Print.**

7. Reference work with an author

**Cuddon, J.A. "Gothic Novel." *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1991. Print.**

### **Electronic Sources:**

Listed here are only the most commonly used electronic sources. The bibliographic information for electronic sources is similar to that for print sources. You need the author's name, the title of the work, the title of the site (think of a web site as if it is a book with chapters), the last date of update, the date you accessed the information, and the medium of publication (Web). Only include the URL if you or your instructor think it is necessary.

8. An entire website:

**Ehrlich, Heyward. *A Poe Webliography: Edgar Allan Poe on the Internet*. 2002. Web. 17 August 2004.**

9. A work from a website:

**“Bear guzzles 36 beers, passes out at campground.” *CNN.com*. Cable News Network.**

**19 August 2004. Web. 24 August 2004.**

10. A newspaper article from a website:

**Wise, Mike. “Echoes of the Ancient Olympics.” *The Washington Post*, Washington**

**Post. 19 Aug. 2004. Web. 19 Aug. 2004.**

11. Work from a database accessed through a college:

**Pfizer, Donald. “A note on Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* as naturalistic fiction.”**

***Southern Living Journal*. (Spring 2001): 5-13. *Literature Online*. ProQuest. Web.**

**18 June 2004.**

- If your word processor alters the spacing in a citation, ask your professor if that is okay. Sometimes it is not a good use of time to spend hours trying to fix spacing problems.
- Sometimes you must figure out exactly what your internet source is. For instance, is it a completely electronic source that is not available in print? Is it a print source that happens also to be published on the web? A works cited entry for a newspaper article from the *Washington Post*, for instance, should include not only the original print publication information, but also the electronic information like the date you accessed the material and the URL.
- For many websites, you must search around for an author and for a last update date. Go to the home page for this information.
- Remember that websites that merely provide links to other websites are not generally considered to be good sources.

### **Other Sources:**

12. Periodicals

**James, David. “Bringing Back an Old Technology: Why I Use Music in the**

**Classroom.” *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 31 (2004): 311-315.**

**Print.**

If you access a periodical from the internet that is also in print, just add the internet information: the date of update if provided, the date you accessed the information, and the URL.

13. Personal Interviews:

**Harsh, Michael. Personal interview. 24 August 2009.**

14. Pamphlets or brochures:

**Hagerstown Community College Report to the Community. Hagerstown: HCC, 2004.**  
**Print.**

### **Common Errors and Misconceptions about Citing Sources**

- “As long as I provide proper documentation of a source, I don’t need to use quotation marks around language from a source.”

**Wrong!** If you use exact language from a source, you **MUST** put quotation marks around them **AND** cite the source. If you do not, you have plagiarized.

- “Quotation marks around information from a source are enough.”

**Wrong!** Quotation marks do not tell the reader where the information is from.

- “If I change the wording a little bit and still cite the source, it’s ok.”

**Wrong!** This is the worst kind of plagiarism. This shows that you know you shouldn’t copy the language and pretend it is yours, but you are not willing to take the time and trouble to paraphrase well.

- “If I make a half-hearted attempt at citing sources correctly, that will be enough.”

**Wrong!** A poorly or sloppily documented paper usually indicates a poorly thought out and sloppily researched and written paper.

Take the time to learn proper documentation. The basic principles for all styles (MLA, APA, Turabian) are the same. If you learn to document well in one format, learning the others will not be that difficult.

### Handy Little Things to Know

- Always put commas and periods inside quotation marks.
- Use ellipses [...] to indicate material that you have taken out of a quotation.
- Use brackets [ ] to indicate material you have added to a quotation.
- Use [sic] if a quotation you use from a source has an error in it.
- Put titles of short works (poems, short stories, articles, chapters of books) in quotation marks.
- Italicize titles of longer works (books, epic poems, newspapers, magazines)
- Do not underline, put in bold, or enclose in quotation marks your own title.
- Use quotations sparingly and always tell the reader from whom you are quoting. Don't just drop a quotation into a paper without explaining whom you are quoting.
- Do not use "page" or "pg" in in-text citations or in assignment page numbering.

## Plagiarism

HCC's policy on plagiarism can be found in the student handbook. Hagerstown Community College views plagiarism very seriously. Penalties range from a zero on the assignment to expulsion from the college. The English and Humanities division requires instructors who have discovered blatant academic integrity violations to submit the academic integrity incident form found in the student handbook. It is up to the instructor's discretion to determine the severity of the violation and to take appropriate action.