MLA Style

Who Uses MLA Style?

MLA Style is used predominantly by professionals and students in the fields of English and foreign languages.

Basic Characteristics of MLA Style

The old endnote or footnote styles were based on sequential numbering. MLA is a parenthetical-note style. Instead of using endnotes or footnotes with superscript numbers, you use parentheses.

The following sentence has been written by Nancy Ellis, one of my sources:

*Bugs Bunny may appear to be a cuddly wiseacre who means no harm, but the fact is that he is a hostile, destructive force.*

If I were using one of the old endnote or footnote styles, I would do this:

According to Nancy Ellis, "Bugs Bunny may appear to be a cuddly wiseacre who means no harm, but the fact is that he is a hostile, destructive force." ¹

The superscript ¹ at the end of the quotation means that this is the first time I am borrowing information in my paper. The next time I borrow from a source, I will need to use a superscript ². The third time, I will have to use a ³, and so on. I have to keep up with the order of borrowing.

Furthermore, each time I borrow using this old system, I have to use a corresponding endnote or footnote. An endnote is a numbered reference that I would place in a page that follows the body of my essay, usually titled "Notes." If I use footnotes, I would not have a Notes page but would place the numbered reference at the bottom of the page in my essay's body on which I have cited the source. In a complete research project, I would append a Bibliography as the very last page in my essay.

Whether I use an endnote in a Notes page or a footnote at the bottom of my text, I need to give my audience certain publication information:


The newer parenthetical-note systems do not use sequential numbering. They simplify matters by putting all reference information in a single page at the back of the essay, which contains bibliographical information arranged alphabetically by authors' last names. In MLA, this page would be titled Works Cited. Parenthetical-note styles do away with superscript numbers and substitute parentheses containing essential information, such as a date (as in the case of APA) or the page number on which the borrowed material can be found in the original source (as in the case of MLA).

In MLA Style, I would write the Nancy Ellis quote like this:
According to Nancy Ellis, "Bugs Bunny may appear to be a cuddly wiseacre who means no harm, but the fact is that he is a hostile, destructive force" (409).

In my Works Cited page, I would have a single entry for the Nancy Ellis article, and it would look like this:


Notice the differences:

1. Unlike an endnote or footnote, an MLA Works Cited entry uses hanging indentation. This means that the first line of each source entry begins at the left margin. All other lines in the entry are indented one-half inch. Think of how a regular paragraph looks (first line is indented one-half inch; rest is flush with left margin) and simply reverse the look.

2. Each element of the entry is ended with a period until I come to the publication information. Since Cartoon Studies Quarterly is a periodical, I do not use a period after the underlined title. Since it is published less often than once a month, I use the volume number in which Ellis's article appears, the year of publication in parentheses, a colon, and then the inclusive page numbers (where Ellis's article starts and where it ends).

If you want to get a better idea of how to format the first page and the Works Cited sheet of an MLA Style paper, take a look at this image. Note that everything is double-spaced, with no extra spacing after any of the paragraph breaks.

Common MLA Samples: Books

When You Have a Single Author of a Book

Citation Example:

One historian argues that Bugs Bunny created "a new attitude about rabbits" (Brody 117).

or

John Brody points out that Bugs Bunny created "a new attitude about rabbits" (117).

How the source would look in a Works Cited sheet:
When You Have Two or More Books by Same Author

Citation Examples (notice that you have to add a short version of the title so the audience will know which source you're using, but if you use the title in your sentence, you don't put a shortened version in the parenthetical note):

During World War II, Bugs was credited with disrupting the Nazi war machine (Tusson, Finding 221).

Tusson argues in The Total Rabbit that society will never fully understand Bugs until carrots become a form of currency (26).

How the sources would look in a Works Cited sheet (in MLA Style, don't rewrite the author's name; instead, use three hyphens):


When You Have a Book Written by Two or More Authors (can use et al. for more than three authors)

Citation Examples:

Boileau and Standish interpret the saying "What's up, doc?" as an ironic comment on the existential nothingness of modern society (58).

Another group of theorists dismisses the existential approach and suggest that Bugs is rebelling against the sterility of modern urban dwelling (Binton, Lawrence, and Groves 22-23).

Still others view Bugs as a gifted comedian, tormented by his disastrous private life and yet selflessly driven to make the world laugh (Naughly et al. 124).

How the sources would look in a Works Cited sheet:

**When You Have a Multivolume Work**

**Citation and Works Cited Examples:**

**If using several volumes from the same multivolume work:**

Bugs' decision to decline the Stokely Prize for Rabbit Advancement set off alarm bells in the executive offices of every major studio (Blotsky 2: 1287).

**Works Cited entry would look like this:**


**If using only one volume from a multivolume work:**

Bugs' decision to decline the Stokely Prize for Rabbit Advancement set off alarm bells in the executive offices of every major studio (Blotsky 1287).

**Works Cited entry would look like this:**


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**When You Have an Essay that Appears in and Edited Collection**

**Citation Example:**

James Humphreys insists that Bugs "has essentially the same capacity for serious drama as Al Pacino" (45).

**Works Cited entry would look like this:**

### Works Cited


### Common MLA Samples: Periodicals
If you have a popular magazine (normally published once a month or more often), use months and/or
days, but not volumes or issues:

Citation Examples:

Recently, Jan Marks has defended the Windows XP operating system: “WinXP is not merely Windows 2000 with clown makeup. Microsoft’s OS will do everything its former NT-based system can—and more” (32).

Other PC critics are not so kind to Microsoft. They point to such problems as its host of bugs and a new “activation” requirement that strikes one reviewer as “draconian and unnecessary at best. At worst, it builds the groundwork for code that might allow corporations to abuse the rights of private citizens” (Singleton 17).

Works Cited entries would look like this:


The use of the plus sign indicates that the article is interrupted by advertisements and other material (this happens when you see "continued on page 17" and so on).

If you have an academic journal (usually published less often than once a month), use volumes and/or issues, but not months or days:

Citation Examples:

Reed argues that realism in cat movies reached its height in the 1960s (478-80).

It may be true, as Morrison argues, that “cat art has more charisma than dog art ever thought of having . . .” (136).

Works Cited entries would look like this:

The Reed entry contains only the journal volume number (the 3). The Morrison entry contains both a volume number (the 5) and an issue number (the 2). Here's why: The pages in the Journal of Film Realism do not start over at page 1 each time an issue appears. Instead, the pagination is continued until the next volume begins. In the Review of Cats Arts Studies, however, all issues begin at page 1. Therefore, it is necessary to include the issue number along with the volume number. Notice that a period separates the two numbers.

Common MLA Samples: Web Sources

The official site for MLA does a good job of walking writers through citing web sources. Here is a link to their page on this subject:

Documenting Web Sources with MLA Style

Related Websites

Northwest Missouri State University: MLA Citation Style Examples

Purdue University Online Writing Lab: Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Format

Long Island University: MLA Citation Style

Sample Essays

If you would like to see good sample MLA papers, visit the site for Diana Hacker's A Writer's Reference and click on the "Model Papers" link. Note: to view the papers, you will need to use the Adobe Acrobat Reader. You can download a free copy here. If you prefer a more lightweight .pdf reader, you may wish to use the Foxit Reader, which you can find here.