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Professor Vector

ART 1234

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Formatting a Paper in MLA Style

The format of your paper is important because it tells your instructor that you are intelligent, organized and that you care enough to make your work look good. All you have to do is follow the instructions in countless guides on how to format an MLA paper. This guide gives written directions and shows how a well formatted paper should look. Follow these guidelines for all MLA papers unless your instructor tells you otherwise.

Your papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins on the top, bottom, left and right. Use 10, 11 or 12 point font in Times New Roman or another easy to read font. The first line of each paragraph should be indented five spaces with no extra spaces between paragraphs. There should be one space after every period. Every page of your paper should have a header on the top right-hand corner of the page. The header should appear half an inch from the top of the sheet and should include your last name and the page number. A heading with your name, instructor, course and date should be on the top left-hand corner of the first page. Ask your instructor to confirm what information is needed in the heading. If your instructor wants a cover page, ask whether you still need the heading. The title of the paper follows the heading. There should be double-spaced between the last line of the heading and the title and double-spaced between the title and the first line of the text of your paper.

After you have formatted the paper, you should always be concerned with content. Read the directions for your assignment carefully and make sure you have met all the requirements.

Check for grammar and spelling and make sure that you have complete sentences and no run-ons. When you've finished, have at least one other person proofread it.

Ensure that all of the information you have cited from other sources is properly documented. Take good notes that include the name and page number for the source you used. Remember, ideas can be plagiarized so even those things that you paraphrase from outside sources must be cited with a parenthetical reference as shown here (Dumbledore 76). If you use the author's name in a sentence, you need add only the page number in parentheses as illustrated by Dumbledore (78). If you are citing an unsigned article or book use one or two words from the title of the article to identify it in the parenthetical reference; place the word or words in quotation marks for an article or underline it for a book ("Magic" 34). If you use a direct quote, make sure you put it in quotation marks. If you are simply quoting a few words from an outside source just "work it into your sentence and add the parenthetical reference at the end" ("Magic" 35). If you use more than four lines for a direct quote these must be indented ten spaces; this is called a "block quote". See the example below.

This is how a direct quote should look in the format of your paper. Make sure you use them sparingly since your instructor does not want to read the words of another writer. He/she wants to know what you think. Too many quotes could indicate that you have not thought your topic through. Make sure you choose your quotes carefully. Make sure to cite the author of the quote in parentheses at the end of it (McGonagal, Transfiguring 45).

Your parenthetical references are directly tied to your works cited page. Make sure that all the references in your paper are listed in your works cited and that you do not put anything in your works cited that does not have a parenthetical reference in the body of your paper.

Strict MLA Style says that your works cited page should be double spaced just like the rest of your paper. Make sure to ask your instructor what he/she prefers since some instructors prefer that you single-space each citation but double-space between citations (McGonagal, MLA Style 55). Your works cited page should have the same header as the rest of your paper and have the title “Works Cited” centered on the first line. Each citation begins at the left margin with subsequent lines indented five spaces. This is called a “hanging indent.” All citations should be arranged alphabetically by their first word, usually the first author’s last name. Citations should never be numbered unless your instructor tells you to do so. Do not attempt to memorize the elements in a citation. Refer to library handouts, writing handbooks or the *MLA Handbook* to ensure that your citation is complete.

When you are compiling your research paper, it is generally easier if you complete your works cited first. Then, you are able to use the works cited to complete your parenthetical references in the body of the paper. Using the guidelines explained by this paper, you should produce an MLA formatted paper. Of course, always verify that your instructor will accept this format. For detailed explanations on grammar, paraphrasing, and content consult with your instructor. Librarians at any of the campuses can help you with parenthetical references and with constructing specific citations. The MLA Citation handout, located at any of the campus libraries or on the website at <<http://www.lsc.edu/library/guides/mlacite.pdf>>, will give you specific examples for many of the different types of sources you will use in your papers. Also, consult MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6th edition by Joseph Gibaldi for more information (“MLA Citation” 1).

Works Cited

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“The Magic of Parenthetical References.” Witch Weekly 20 Nov. 2003: 34-35.

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Flourish and Blotts Books, 2000.

“MLA Citation.” Research Guides. Lake-Sumter Community College Libraries. 22 Jan. 2004

<<http://www.lsc.edu/library/guides/mlacite.pdf>>.

Sample paper courtesy of Lake Sumter Community College Library
<<http://www.lsc.edu/library/guides/samplemla.pdf>>.Rev. 4/7/08