Student Name

Instructor Name

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Title of Paper

The purpose of this paper is twofold:

1) to inform students of MLA Style’s formatting and citation guidelines, and 2) to offer students an easy-to-use template to format their own papers. To use this document as a template, simply click “Save As,” retitle, and plug in the actual content of your paper (don’t forget all the little details like the header and heading). Keep the original file for reference—it’s a helpful resource! When writing within your new document, be careful not to erase the template’s pre-set formatting.

MLA Style refers to two major aspects of your paper:

1) *formatting* and

2) *citations*. *Formatting*refers to how your paper looks: specific rules for margins, spacing, font style, headers, order of information, punctuation—that kind of stuff. *Citation*refers to the ways you share information about your research in the paper itself. Let’s first overview formatting guidelines—that’s easy—and then move onto the juicer topic of citation.

Every MLA paper contains a header, a heading, a paper title, and the text itself. The header includes the writer’s last name and the page number. When you put that information in the header, it automatically populates above every other page. To make Word automatically paginate your paper, click into the Header and then, from the menu bar, select Insert🡪Page Number🡪Current Position. Also notice that the first page of the paper features a heading, a little different from a header, which lists the writer’s full name, the course professor’s full name, the course title, and the date. The date should be in the day month year format with no added commas. After the heading, we have the paper’s title, centered in the middle of the page. The main words of the title are capitalized. And finally, following the title, we have the content of the paper itself.

One important thing to notice is that *all* the text mentioned so far is *double-spaced*. That’s right: *everything* in an MLA paper is double-spaced—even the heading, and even the citations in the Works Cited page. There are no extra spaces between the title of the paper and the paper itself, or between citations. Everything is also set in one standard, easy-to-read font: Times New Roman, size 12.

Ok, enough with formatting for now. Let’s dig into citation style a bit. There are two ways you cite information in your paper: *in-text citations*, and the *Works Cited* page. You need both—they correspond to each other. But since we’re looking at the paper itself now, we’re going to focus first on the *in-text citations*.

*In-text citations* are brief tags woven into the structure of your paper that quickly show your reader where you found the information you are using, whether you are quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing. In MLA format, those tags are called “parenthetical” citations (that means the info goes into parentheses, like this one). Parenthetical citations include either

1) the author’s last name and the page number or, if you’ve already mentioned the author’s name,

2) just the page number. Take a look at the following example, which is a sentence that includes quoted material and a parenthetical citation. According to Bullock and Weinberg, “brief documentation in your text makes it clear to your reader what you took from a source and where in the source you found the information” (96). Because we’ve mentioned the author(s) names in the text itself, we don’t need to include it in the parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence. But if we structured our sentence differently, like in the following example, both the author’s name and page number might end up in the parenthetical citation: “brief documentation in your text makes it clear to your reader what you took from a source and where in the source you found the information” (Bullock and Weinberg 96). Notice how in both examples the period goes *after* the parenthesis. Another note: only use the author or author’s last names, not their first names. Are you citing from a source that doesn’t list an author? Use a shortened version of the article or chapter title instead.

To reiterate the above point and, at the same time, to show an example of how to format a quote longer than four lines, take a look at this tip from Bullock and Weinberg’s *The Little Seagull Handbook:*

As you cite each source, you will need to decide whether or not to

name the author in a signal phrase— “as Toni Morrison writes”—or in parentheses— “(Morrison 24).” …Whether you use a signal phrase and parentheses or parentheses only, try to put the parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence or as close as possible to the material you’ve cited without awkwardly interrupting the sentence. (97)

Notice how the long quote was set off by an extra one-inch margin rather than quotations marks, and in this case only, the period goes *before* the parenthetical citation.

We’ve covered in-text citations; now, let’s move onto the Works Cited page. Every in-text citation is a tag for the source’s full citation, listed at the end of the paper in the *Works Cited* page. The *Works Cited* log stands alone on its own page and has very specific formatting guidelines. Take a look at the example page following this paragraph to get a feel for how it should look. Notice that all citations are double-spaced, and any citation that runs longer than one line has what is called a “hanging indent.” If you don’t know how to create a hanging indent, use Microsoft Word’s Help function—it’s easy to do once you get the hang (!) of it.

It’s important to remember that different kinds of sources have different citation formats. That means that a citation for a book chapter will look a little different from a website, different from a podcast or film, different from an interview, and different from a journal article found through a database. The sample *Works Cited* page lists a few examples from common types of sources to get you started, and common web sources are highlighted in red. For a more comprehensive list, view OWL Purdue’s website: here’s a link that lists [types of books](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/06/), another that lists [electronic sources,](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/08/) and here’s an additional one that lists [common sources](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/09/).

To conclude, please remember that this is a basic guide—a primer on MLA Style—and does not cover *all* the fine details of formatting and citation. You may have additional questions. For example: what if you need to omit irrelevant phrases in a long quotation? (Hint: check [here](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/03/).) Maybe you just want to double-check your work? If you seek additional information or feedback, visit the [OWL Purdue website](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/), meet with a Wentworth Reference Librarian, and make an appointment with a Learning Center writing tutor. If you seek help from *all three* of these resources, you’ll be well on your way to becoming a master of MLA Style!

**Works Cited**

Bullock, Richard, and Weinberg, Francine. *The Little Seagull Handbook.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2011. Print.

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