



# MLA Style: Citing Sources and Formatting

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Not only does a good research paper include thorough research and thoughtful analysis, it follows specific rules for citing sources and formatting. This brief guide will illustrate how to correctly reference your sources and set up your paper.

Connections Education® students should use Modern Language Association (MLA) style for citing sources and formatting. MLA style is commonly used in many middle and high schools as well as in colleges and universities across the country.

The MLA publishes the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. This is a very useful book, as it goes into great depth explaining the steps for writing a paper. The book is available at most bookstores, and your local library likely has copies. If you run into an issue, such as citing a source that is not covered in this guide, it is best to find the proper way of citing your source by consulting the *MLA Handbook* or by asking your teacher.

This guide covers the basics for formatting and citing sources. However, always follow the specific guidelines presented by your teacher. For instance, if you want to incorporate pictures or other images into your paper, ask your teacher about the best way to do this. Depending on your teacher's preference, images could be included within the body of the paper or in an appendix.

## Formatting Your Paper<sup>1</sup>

Here are some basic steps for setting up your paper.

1. *Paper Size and Margins* – Your paper should be set to 8.5 inches by 11 inches. This is standard letter format. Your page margins should be set at 1 inch on all sides.

**To set your margins:** Select the Page Layout tab, and then select the Margins drop-down menu. Set the top, bottom, left, and right margins at 1 inch.

**To set your paper size:** Select Page Layout tab, and then select the Size drop-down menu. Set the paper size to **Letter**. (This should be the default setting, so this step may not be necessary.)

2. *Fonts and Font Size* – Choose a font and size that is easy to read—Times New Roman and Courier are preferred. Use a 12 point font size. The text color should always be black when writing research papers and formal essays.

Courier 12

Times New Roman 12

3. *Punctuation and Spacing* – Use only one space after periods and punctuation marks, and double-space the lines in your paper. This makes it easier to read and allows your teacher to easily add notes, comments, and feedback. When you review your drafts, you can also use this extra space to write notes for revisions and edits. Your text, with the exception of the title of your paper, should be aligned to the left. Also make sure to indent the first line of all paragraphs by one-half inch. You can do this by pressing the Tab key.

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<sup>1</sup> All formatting instructions provided are for use with Microsoft® Word 2007.

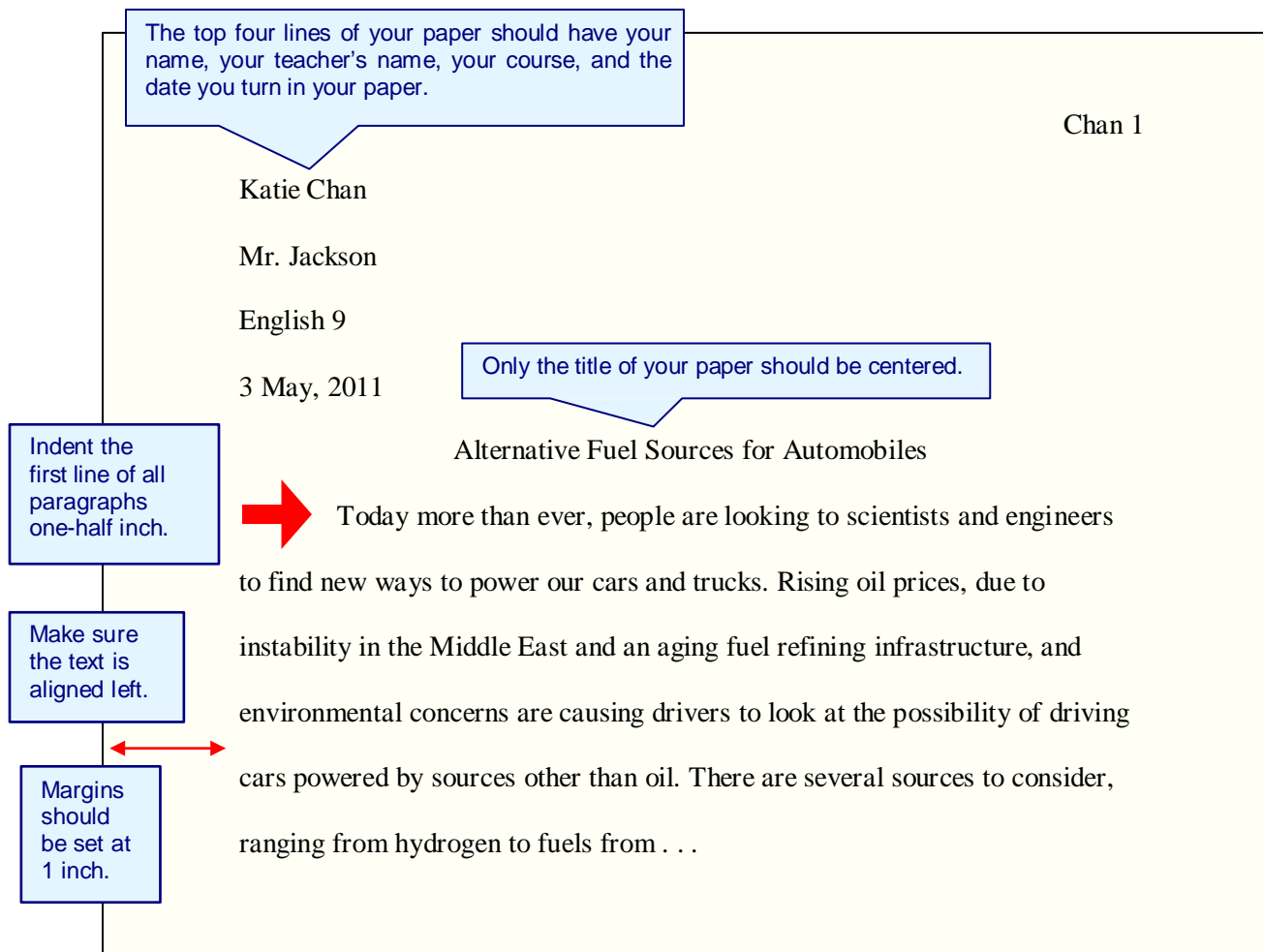
**To set your paper for double-spacing:** Select Paragraph from the Home tab. In the spacing section, select Double from the Line spacing drop-down menu. If you have already written parts of your paper, you will need to select all text before changing the spacing. You can select all text by pressing Ctrl+A.

4. *Headers and Page Numbers* – On the top right of your paper, you should have a header (text at the top of the page) that includes your last name and the page number. You can use the Header and Footer function to automatically place this on all your pages.

**To set your header:** Select Page Number from the Header & Footer section of the Insert tab. Choose Top of Page from the drop-down menu, and select the option that aligns the page number on the right. Then type your last name, and add a space before the number. Close the header and footer view. Your header will now carry throughout the document as you type. If you need to edit this information later, choose Header from the Header & Footer section.

5. *Italics and Underlining* – Titles of books, plays, magazines, newspapers, and many other works should be italicized or underlined. Note that italicizing is more common today than underlining, as underlining was easier to do in the days when typewriters were used.

6. *Formatting the First Page* –



The top four lines of your paper should have your name, your teacher's name, your course, and the date you turn in your paper.

Chan 1

Katie Chan

Mr. Jackson

English 9

3 May, 2011

Only the title of your paper should be centered.

Alternative Fuel Sources for Automobiles

Indent the first line of all paragraphs one-half inch.

Make sure the text is aligned left.

Margins should be set at 1 inch.

Today more than ever, people are looking to scientists and engineers to find new ways to power our cars and trucks. Rising oil prices, due to instability in the Middle East and an aging fuel refining infrastructure, and environmental concerns are causing drivers to look at the possibility of driving cars powered by sources other than oil. There are several sources to consider, ranging from hydrogen to fuels from . . .

## Citing Sources: What Is the Purpose?

It is extremely important that you cite, or identify, the sources you used to write your paper. If you do not cite your sources, it could be considered plagiarism. In general, plagiarism occurs when someone uses another person's words, products, or ideas without properly acknowledging the original work and with the intention of passing it off as his or her own. The simplest form of plagiarism is copying someone else's words and passing them off as your own. Another form is using another person's ideas and claiming them as your own. By properly citing your sources, you will avoid plagiarism.

This document provides an introduction to formatting and citing sources. Click on the link below to access the Purdue Online Writing Lab website to review MLA style in more depth, including how to cite source types not covered in this document.

[Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)

## Citing Sources in Your Paper

There are two important steps to correctly cite sources for your paper. The first step is citing the source *within* your paper. For this, MLA recommends using parenthetical citation.

Below is a passage from a book about running cars on vegetable oil by Michele Anthony.

Does the car in front of yours smell like a deep fryer? It's probably a diesel that has been converted to run on vegetable oil. Many people are buying old diesel cars at a bargain and then converting them. Not only does making the switch reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, it allows drivers to run their vehicles virtually for free—assuming they recycle used oil from restaurants. But read closely. It takes a moderate amount of patience and know-how to convert your car smoothly and safely.

From this passage, the following sentence for the research paper is derived.

Converting a diesel engine reduces CO<sub>2</sub> and allows drivers to run their vehicles for free (Anthony 12). It takes . . .

Anthony is the author. The passage is on p. 12 of her book.

At the end of the paper's sentence, which is a summary of Anthony's passage, the author's last name and the page number the passage was found on is placed in parentheses.

There are some additional styles of parenthetical citation which are considered correct. If you used the author's name in the sentence, you can cite just the page number.

While Anthony highlights the benefits, she notes that the conversion "requires a moderate amount of patience and know-how" (12).

Since the author's name is mentioned, just the page reference is necessary.

Sometimes, it may be unclear how to appropriately cite a work in your paper, such as when an article does not have an author listed. Below are some examples for more complex citations.

**Citing Works When You Don't Know the Author** – Use the title of the work. You can shorten the title if it's very long. Suppose you cite an editorial on page A8 in a newspaper titled “Why Light Rail Is Good For Everyone.” The editorial does not include the author's name.

The benefits of public transportation—including the proposed light rail system—reach not just to those who cannot afford cars, but even to those at the highest income levels in the community (“Why Light Rail” A8).

No author is listed, so the article title is used. The title of the article has been shortened.

**Using More Than One Book from the Same Author** – You can also use the title of the work when you are citing more than one source from a specific author. If you are citing both Anthony's article “Free Ride” and her book *Greening Your Life*, use the names in your parenthetical citations.

**Citing Two Authors with the Same Last Name** – Use the author's first initial with the last name.

Some scientists believe that we are at a significant crossroads in the development of new fuel sources (A. Peterson 98). Some say creating new sources could cause a “disastrous rise” in the cost of living (Q. Peterson 24).

**Citing Websites** – Since websites don't use page numbers, just use the name of the webpage or web article title in the parenthetical notation. The following example uses a source from Grolier™ Online. In this instance, no author is cited, so the name of the article is used. Always use the author's name if it is listed.

According to experts, by the end of the 21st century, energy trends will shift away from fossil fuels toward alternative sources. Coal, currently the most abundant fuel, will likely run out in 250 years (“Energy”).

As with a print source, if you use the wording of the source, surround those words with quotation marks.

According to the author, Earth is “slowly running out of gas as it speeds down the road” (“Energy”).

Sometimes you may want to include a long quotation. Note that quotations four lines or longer will require special formatting.

The argument for continuing to develop initiatives for offshore wind power is clear:

Wind is a clean and renewable energy source that can have a tremendous impact on energy use nationwide. The economical effects are clear and immediate: adoption of wind power will stabilize prices for consumers and reduce the overwhelming but often hidden cost of gas emissions (Weingarten 22).

Since the quotation is specially formatted, quotation marks are not needed.

The quotation is indented one inch from the left margin.

## Citing Sources in a Works Cited Page

You've learned that citing sources within your paper is very important. It is just as important to create a Works Cited page (sometimes known as a bibliography). The Works Cited page provides detailed information about the sources you used in your paper. Here you will list a complete citation for all of the books, magazines, encyclopedias, and websites you used.

A citation often contains the following information: the author, the work's title, city of publication, date of publication, and medium of publication. Various types of publications (both print and online) have slightly different formats. Specific information about publishing, such as the city of publication and the name of the publisher, can usually be found on the first few pages of a book or magazine.

A guide to some of the most common types of citations is listed below.

### Book Citations

#### Book by One Author

Anthony, Michele. *Greening Your Life*. New York: Faraway Press, 2006. Print.

author's last and first names followed by a period

book title followed by a period

city of publication followed by a colon, name of publishing company followed by a comma, year published followed by a comma, and format followed by a period

### Book by More Than One Author

Vinson, Juanita, and Mary Robertson. *Texas and the Great Depression*. Houston: Texas Press, 2004. Print.

Use the order in which the authors appear on the book title; only the first author should be written with last name first.

### Book by More Than Three Authors

If there are more than three authors, list the first author followed by the term *et al.*

McCartney, Jessie, et al. *Oil Addicts*. London: Split Atom Press, 2008. Print.

The term *et al.* is an abbreviation for a Latin term meaning "and others."

### Book by a Corporation, Committee, or Group (No Author Specified)

West Virginia Heritage Association. *Coal and Its History*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002. Print.

## Encyclopedia Citations

### Encyclopedia Article with an Author

Model, Adam. "Carbon." *Encyclopedia Exemplica*. 21st ed. 1999. Print.

article title followed by period and in quotation marks

For reference works, note the edition. If no edition is given, use the year of publication as the edition (e.g., 2005 ed.).

### Encyclopedia Article without an Author

"Carbon." *Encyclopedia Exemplica*. 21st ed. 1999. Print.

If you reference a definition from a dictionary, use the citation for an encyclopedia article with no author.

## Magazine and Newspaper Citations

### Newspaper Article

Acosta, Lydia. "New Fuels Come to Springfield." *Springfield Telegram* 16 Aug. 2006: A4-A5. Print.

If more than one author, follow the style for books with more than one author.

### Newspaper Editorial

"Why Light Rail Is Good For Everyone." Editorial. *Springfield Telegram* 12 Dec. 2005: A8. Print.

For editorials, add the word *Editorial* followed by a period. If you reference a letter to the editor, add the word *letter* followed by a period.

### Magazine Article

Anthony, Michele. "Free Ride." *Outside the Lines* Mar. 2010: 12-16. Print.

## Website Citations

### Basic Website Citation

name of the organization that sponsors the website and date of electronic publication

name of the website (italicized)

"Alternative Energy Sources." *The New Book of Popular Science*.  
Grolier Online, 2011. Web. 11 April 2011. <Website URL goes here>.

MLA no longer requires the URL in Works Cited page entries. However, if your instructor would like the URL included, MLA suggests placing it in carats after the access date. If you must break the URL over a line, do so only after a slash mark.

date the site was viewed

If no author is given, start with the name of the article. Always list an author if one is given.

### Helpful Hints for Web Citations

- It is extremely important that you note the day you accessed the website as websites can change from day to day.
- MLA no longer requires URLs in Works Cited page entries. However, ask your teacher if you should include this information. If you do include the URL, add it in angle brackets after the access date.
- Use *n.p.* if no publisher is provided. Use *n.d.* if no publication date is provided. Use *n.pag.* if an entry requires a page number, but none is available in the source (e.g., online journal).

### Other Citations

#### Personal Interview

Bashir, Jules. Personal Interview. 8 Feb. 2007.

Include the name of the person interviewed, followed by a period. Then add the words "Personal Interview" followed by a period. End with the date the interview occurred.

#### Scholarly Journal

Author(s). "Article Title." *Journal Title*. Volume. Issue (Year):  
pages. Medium.

For illustrative purposes, the components of the journal citation are listed above instead of an example. Always include the issue number if available. Consult with your teacher if you have questions about how to use or cite scholarly journals.

#### Works of Art

Maya, Jamille. *The Beginning of the End*. 1972. *Museum of Paris*,  
Paris.

Name the artist, followed by the title of the artwork in italics. Add the date if available, and use *n.d.* if unknown. Last, include the name and location where artwork is kept.

#### TV or Radio Program

"Day at the Garbage Dump." *Fuel Hunter*. WTH. WALT, Kansas City.  
15 April 2011. Television.

Name the episode in quotation marks. Then add the program name in italics. Include the network name, station call letters, city, and broadcast date. Finally, add the medium (television or radio).



## Formatting Your Works Cited Page

The Works Cited page follows the last page of your research paper. The margins, double-spacing, and header are the same for your paper as for the Works Cited page, so you will not have to reformat this page. The page's title, "Works Cited," should be centered on the top line of your page. You do not need to put extra line spaces between your sources. However, you will need to indent the *second* (and any additional) lines of your source.

**Note:** Three hyphens may be used in a Works Cited list when an entry begins with the same author name in the *same order* as the previous entry.

The following Works Cited page is based on the sources referenced in the various passages and examples noted in this guide.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the *Grolier Online*™ article, the sources in this document are fictional. For illustrative purposes, the author of the *Grolier Online* article was omitted. The author is William J. Cromie.

## Works Cited

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