

Your Name

Instructor Name

Course Number

Day Month Year (assignment due date)

MLA Essays Aren't That Bad

The following paper acts as a sample for MLA essay formatting. You may look back and forth between your own draft and this sample to see whether you're following paper formatting expectations. This sample also includes details about the typical content organization of a college MLA paper, details on using in-text citations, and instructions for creating a works cited page. Some of the content has been borrowed or adapted from Purdue University's OWL (online writing lab).

Typical Essay Outline

The first sentence of your essay can be used to draw the reader in and make them want to read the rest of your essay. Always check the paper's prompt for specific directions from your instructor; some professors will ask you to avoid using clichés as openings. The introduction commonly begins by discussing your topic in a broad way and then narrowing down to the specific topic of the essay. To learn more about the "triangle" strategy for moving from broad to specific, see our "Introductions and Conclusions" handout. The final sentence of your paragraph is the thesis statement, which consists of one sentence that encapsulates the main point that you are arguing about the topic of your paper and the major supporting points you'll use to back up your argument. Remember that your thesis statement should be arguable/debatable.

Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence summarizing a main supporting point, which should directly connect to the argument in your thesis statement. Every sentence following

your topic sentence provides details that supports the point of the paragraph in addition to explaining *how* those details are evidence for your main point.

Many essays will require more than three body paragraphs to fully make your argument. For more complex papers, you may want to use section headings to visually organize content, as demonstrated in this sample. We invite you to visit the writing center to plan and organize your paper! Writing tutors can also help you interpret the writing assignment and ask questions to best understand the instructor's expectations and how you will be graded. For example, some professors ask students to avoid using contractions and to write in present tense for papers in MLA.

When you are ready to conclude your paper, the first sentence of the conclusion should restate the thesis, thereby bringing the reader back to the main point of your essay. The conclusion then recounts the specific details of your topic and moves into a bigger picture discussion of the topic. Why is this topic important? Why is your argument important? You may want to leave your readers thinking about the real-world application of the topic you have discussed, or about a bigger-picture significance of your topic.

MLA Paper Formatting

Take note of the elements on the first page of this sample. To include your last name and the page number in the top right-hand corner of the page, navigate to Insert in the Word or GoogleDoc tool ribbon. Select the Header and Page Number options to apply these features.

MLA asks for double spacing without extra spaces between paragraphs. To avoid an extra space between paragraphs in Word, highlight the whole paper and right click it, choose "Paragraph," then in the window that pops up make sure that the number is zero for "Spacing" before and after the paragraph. On GoogleDocs, click Format, then select Line & Paragraph

Spacing, and then choose Custom Spacing. In addition, each paragraph uses a paragraph indent. To indent a paragraph, simply tap the Tab button on your keyboard while your cursor is at the beginning of the paragraph.

In-Text Citations

To cite your sources in the text of your paper, you will use a parentheses at the end of the sentence with the author and the page number (Harris 26). This is true whether you're using a direct quote or paraphrasing in your own words. The source you're citing may not have a specific person as the author, but you can include a group author instead, which can be corporations, government agencies, organizations, dictionaries, and more (Department of Education 130-145). However, you can also choose to use the title of an article when there are no named authors. For example, if a magazine article doesn't have an author, you can use the title of the article instead of the author; you may shorten the title of the article if necessary ("Impact of Global Warming").

When there are two authors, name both by their last names in the signal phrase or in parentheses. Best and Marcus suggest that surface reading is more than skimming. Surface reading is not the same as skimming (Best and Marcus). For three or more authors, list only the first author's last name followed by "et al." (McGonigal et al.). McGonigal et al. suggest that MLA gets easier to use over time.

Page numbers should be included in the in-text citation when possible; while page numbers are listed in the parentheses in numerical form, in the prose of your paper, MLA format asks for spelling out numbers if they can be written in one or two words, such as thirteen or twenty-two. If your source does not include page numbers, you can cite it within your essay with only the author's last name, the organizational author, or the name of the article (Berstein).

Alternatively, you can indicate the location of the information you're citing through another identifying element: a paragraph, a chapter number, a section number, or something else that makes sense for the source (Lundman, par. 4).

Works Cited Page

The Works Cited page starts on a new page. The sources you cite, the “entries” in the list, are organized alphabetically by the first element of each entry whether it's a last name or article title. If the first element of an entry is a number, place it before the alphabetical entries and organize the numerical entries from lowest to highest. Each entry will use a “hanging indent,” a type of indentation that is the opposite of a paragraph indent. To apply a hanging indent on Microsoft Word, select the Works Cited entry and right click it, choose “Paragraph” from the drop-down menu, and in the new window that opens, choose “Hanging” from the Special Indentions options. In Google Docs, select the entry, click the “Format” option, select “Indentation Options,” and then “Hanging” from the “Special Indent” section.

MLA has a basic format for all sources to make it easier for you to plug in any information you have about the source:

Author. "Title of Text/Source." Title of Container (Self Contained if Book), Other Contributors (translators or editors), Version (edition), Number (vol. and/or no.), Publisher, Publication Date, Location (pages, paragraphs and/or URL, DOI or permalink). Date of Access (if applicable).

For more information about MLA citations, speak with a writing tutor or librarian, visit Valencia's library website, or check out Purdue OWL (online writing lab).

Works Cited

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- @PurdueWLab. “Spring break is around the corner, and all our locations will be open next week.” *Twitter*, 5 Mar. 2012, 12:58 p.m.,
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