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MLA Formatting and Style Guide

Summary:

MLA (Modern Language Association) style is most commonly used to write papers and cite sources within the liberal arts and humanities. This resource, updated to reflect the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th ed.) and the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (3rd ed.), offers examples for the general format of MLA research papers, in-text citations, endnotes/footnotes, and the Works Cited page.

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Last Edited: 2012-05-09 07:17:57

Please use the example at the bottom of this page to cite the Purdue OWL in MLA.

To see a side-by-side comparison of the three most widely used citation styles, including a chart of all MLA citation guidelines, see the **Citation Style Chart**.

You can also watch our **MLA vidcast series** on the **Purdue OWL YouTube Channel**.

General Format

MLA style specifies guidelines for formatting manuscripts and using the English language in writing. MLA style also provides writers with a system for referencing their sources through parenthetical citation in their essays and Works Cited pages.

Writers who properly use MLA also build their credibility by demonstrating accountability to their source material. Most importantly, the use of MLA style can protect writers from accusations of plagiarism, which is the purposeful or accidental uncredited use of source material by other writers.

If you are asked to use MLA format, be sure to consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition). Publishing scholars and graduate students should also consult the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (3rd edition). The *MLA Handbook* is available in most writing centers and reference libraries; it is also widely available in bookstores, libraries, and at the MLA web site. See the Additional Resources section of this handout for a list of helpful books and sites about using MLA style.

Paper Format

The preparation of papers and manuscripts in MLA style is covered in chapter four of the MLA Handbook, and chapter four

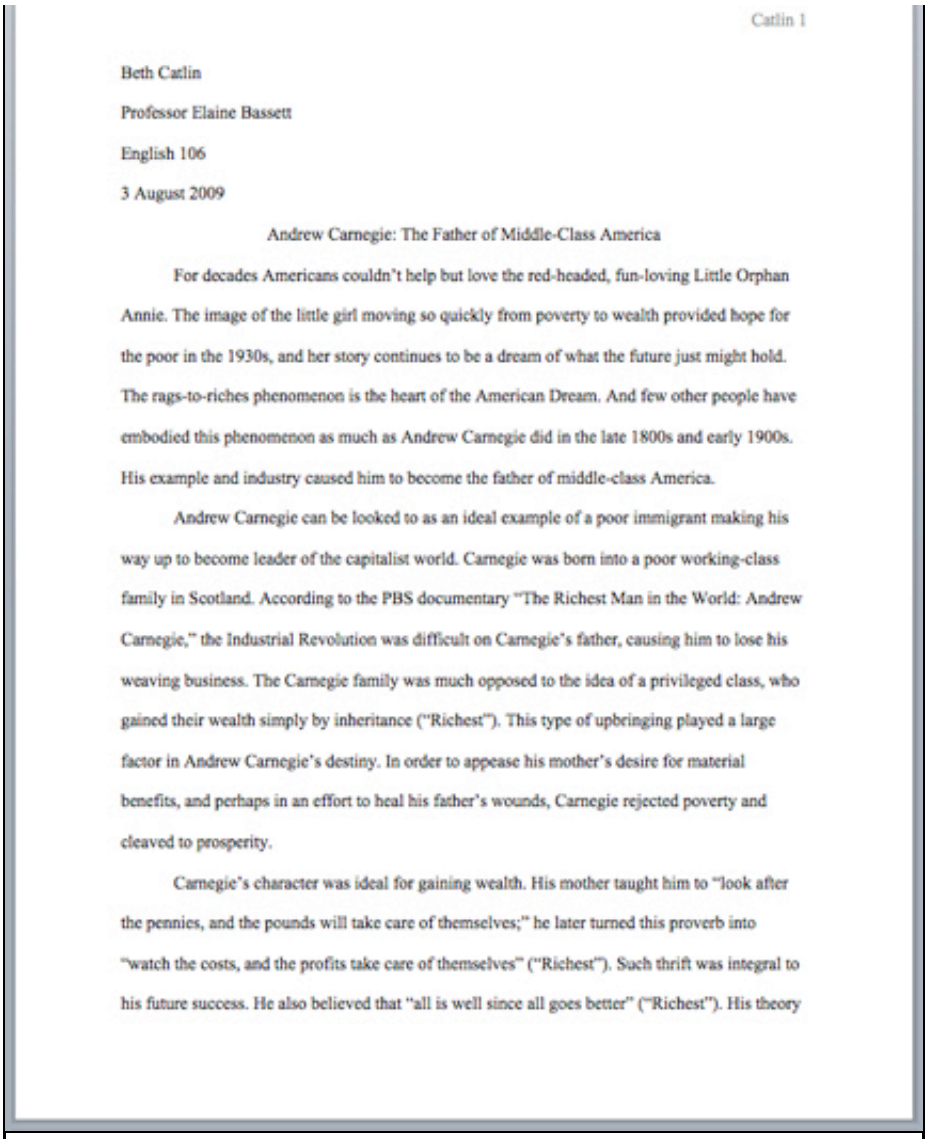
General Guidelines

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper.
- Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font (e.g. Times New Roman). Whatever font you choose, MLA recommends that the regular and italics type styles contrast enough that they are recognizable one from another. The font size should be 12 pt.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks (unless otherwise instructed by your instructor).
- Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides.
- Indent the first line of paragraphs one half-inch from the left margin. MLA recommends that you use the Tab key as opposed to pushing the Space Bar five times.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor may ask that you omit the number on your first page. Always follow your instructor's guidelines.)
- Use italics throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.
- If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Works Cited page. Entitle the section Notes (centered, unformatted).

Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

- Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.
- Double space again and center the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.
- Use quotation marks and/or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as Morality Play; Human Weariness in "After Apple Picking"
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.
- Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number; number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin. (Note: Your instructor or other readers may ask that you omit last name/page number header on your first page. Always follow instructor guidelines.)

Here is a sample of the first page of a paper in MLA style:



Catlin 1

Beth Catlin

Professor Elaine Bassett

English 106

3 August 2009

Andrew Carnegie: The Father of Middle-Class America

For decades Americans couldn't help but love the red-headed, fun-loving Little Orphan Annie. The image of the little girl moving so quickly from poverty to wealth provided hope for the poor in the 1930s, and her story continues to be a dream of what the future just might hold. The rags-to-riches phenomenon is the heart of the American Dream. And few other people have embodied this phenomenon as much as Andrew Carnegie did in the late 1800s and early 1900s. His example and industry caused him to become the father of middle-class America.

Andrew Carnegie can be looked to as an ideal example of a poor immigrant making his way up to become leader of the capitalist world. Carnegie was born into a poor working-class family in Scotland. According to the PBS documentary "The Richest Man in the World: Andrew Carnegie," the Industrial Revolution was difficult on Carnegie's father, causing him to lose his weaving business. The Carnegie family was much opposed to the idea of a privileged class, who gained their wealth simply by inheritance ("Richest"). This type of upbringing played a large factor in Andrew Carnegie's destiny. In order to appease his mother's desire for material benefits, and perhaps in an effort to heal his father's wounds, Carnegie rejected poverty and cleaved to prosperity.

Carnegie's character was ideal for gaining wealth. His mother taught him to "look after the pennies, and the pounds will take care of themselves;" he later turned this proverb into "watch the costs, and the profits take care of themselves" ("Richest"). Such thrift was integral to his future success. He also believed that "all is well since all goes better" ("Richest"). His theory

Image Caption: The First Page of an MLA Paper

Section Headings

Writers sometimes use Section Headings to improve a document's readability. These sections may include individual chapters or other named parts of a book or essay.

Essays

MLA recommends that when you divide an essay into sections that you number those sections with an arabic number and a period followed by a space and the section name.

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1. Early Writings


2. The London Years
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4. Final Years
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Books

MLA does not have a prescribed system of headings for books (for more information on headings, please see page 146 in the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, 3rd edition). If you are only using one level of headings, meaning that all of the sections are distinct and parallel and have no additional sections that fit within them, MLA recommends that these sections resemble one another grammatically. For instance, if your headings are typically short phrases, make all of the headings short phrases (and not, for example, full sentences). Otherwise, the formatting is up to you. It should, however, be consistent throughout the document.

If you employ multiple levels of headings (some of your sections have sections within sections), you may want to provide a key of your chosen level headings and their formatting to your instructor or editor.

Sample Section Headings

The following sample headings are meant to be used only as a reference. You may employ whatever system of formatting that works best for you so long as it remains consistent throughout the document.

Numbered:

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1. Soil Conservation

1.1 Erosion

1.2 Terracing

2. Water Conservation

3. Energy Conservation
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Formatted, unnumbered:

Level 1 Heading: bold, flush left

Level 2 Heading: italics, flush left

Level 3 Heading: centered, bold

Level 4 Heading: centered, italics

<u>Level 5 Heading: underlined, flush left</u>

Entire Website

The Purdue OWL. Purdue U Writing Lab, 2010. Web. Date of access.

Individual Resources

Contributors' names and the last edited date can be found in the orange boxes at the top of every page on the OWL.

Contributors' names. "Title of Resource." *The Purdue OWL*. Purdue U Writing Lab, Last edited date. Web. Date of access.

Russell, Tony, Allen Brizee, and Elizabeth Angeli. "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *The Purdue OWL*. Purdue U Writing Lab, 4 Apr. 2010. Web. 20 July 2010.