MLA In-Text Citations

In MLA format, when referring to another person's work, either through paraphrasing or a direct quotation, you must use a brief parenthetical in-text citation that points your reader to your Works Cited list. (See WLDC Tip Sheet on *MLA Works Cited List*.)

General Guidelines

Your essay will include only brief parenthetical information that points your reader to your Works Cited list. To do this, you must include the first word of the Works Cited entry in parentheses, followed by any location information, such as a page number. If the introductory phrase to the quote provides the first word of the Works Cited entry, then there is no need to provide it again in the parenthetical citation. Typically, the first word of a Works Cited entry is the last name of an author, but not always. See the examples below, each pointing to the first word of the Works Cited entry.

First Word of Works Cited Entry in the Introductory Phrase

Levine and his co-authors explain that Naturalist writers "frequently drew on social interpretations of Darwinian evolution..." (955).

> Works Cited
>
> Levine, Robert S., et. al. "Realism and Naturalism." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 9th ed., vol. C, W.W. Norton & Company, 2017, pp. 955-956.

First Word of Works Cited Entry in the Parenthetical Citation

According to an anonymously written article in the *Intelligencer*, "In crypto, there is this thing called GM, which stands for 'good morning,' and crypto people always say that as a greeting to one another on Twitter" ("Striking").

> Works Cited
>
> "Striking It Rich in the Meme-Coin Casino." *Intelligencer*, *New York Magazine*, 5 Jan. 2022, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/01/crypto-trader-meme-coin-millionaire.html.

Multiple Authors

For sources that have two authors, you should include both authors' last names within your parenthetical citation or in your introductory phrase. See the examples below:

> Best and Marcus argue that one should read a text for what it says on its surface, rather than looking for some hidden meaning (9).

> The authors claim that surface reading looks at what is "evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts" (Best and Marcus 9).

If your source has three or more authors, list only the first author's last name, and the following authors' names will be replaced by the abbreviation of *et al*. See examples below:

> The authors explain that when teachers introduce metacognitive conversation, they might want to "invite students to surface their initial beliefs about reading" (Shoenbach et al. 91).

> According to Shoenbach et al., "if students are to collaborate in reading and understanding text, then taking time to build classroom relationships is crucial – and pays off academically" (59).

Multiple Works by the Same Author

When citing multiple works by the same author, include a shortened title of the source that is being referenced in the parenthetical citation in order to distinguish it from the author's other sources that are listed on your Works Cited page. See the example below:

> Lightenor has argued that computers are not useful tools for small children ("Too Soon" 38), though he has acknowledged elsewhere that early exposure to computer games does lead to better small motor skill development in a child's second and third year ("Hand-Eye Development" 17)

If the last name of the author is not included in the introductory phrase, include it in the parenthetical citation with the title. See the example below:

> Naturalist writers "frequently drew on social interpretations of Darwinian evolution..." (Levine et al., *"Realism"* 955).

Authors With Same Last Names

If you are citing sources by two different authors who share the same last name, include the authors' first initial in the in-text citation. If they even share the same first initial, then write the authors' first names.

Corporate Author

When citing a source written by a corporation, company, or website, use the name of the corporate author followed by the page number, if any. Shorten the title of the corporate author in the parenthetical citation to the shortest noun phrase. When appropriate, it is also helpful to use abbreviations, such as *Dept* and *Nat'l*. See the examples below:

> Provisions of California's Emergency Services Act have been used to declare a statewide drought emergency for only two droughts: 2007 to 2009 and 2012-2016 (Dept. of Water).

> Works Cited
>
> Department of Water Resources. "Drought." 16 Mar. 2022,
>
> https://water.ca.gov/Water-Basics/Drought.

> One study found, "Less than half of the adult American population now reads literature" (Nat'l. Endowment ix).

> Works Cited
>
> National Endowment for the Arts. *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*. Research Division Report 46, June 2004,
>
> www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/ReadingAtRisk.pdf.

Unknown or Unidentified Author

If a source has no known or identified author, cite the first element listed in the Works Cited list entry, which is usually the title of the source. You may use a shortened title of the work, excluding articles or unnecessary words in your parenthetical citation. If the title of the source is placed between quotation marks in your Works Cited list, include quotation marks around the title in your parenthetical citation. If it is italicized in your Works Cited list, then italicize it in your parenthetical citation. Include page numbers in the citation if available. See the example below:

> According to an anonymously written article in the *Intelligencer*, "In crypto, there is this thing called GM, which stands for 'good morning,' and crypto people always say that as a greeting to one another on Twitter" ("Striking").

> Works Cited
>
> "Striking It Rich in the Meme-Coin Casino." *Intelligencer*, 5 Jan. 2022,
>
> https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/01/crypto-trader-meme-coin-millionaire.html.

Non-Standard Labeling Systems

If your source explicitly uses a different numbering system than page numbers, then use those numbering systems instead. If the source uses only paragraph numbers, the abbreviation you would use is *par.* or *pars.* If the source utilizes sections, use *sec.* or *secs.* If the source uses chapters, use the abbreviation of *ch.* or *chs.* For sources that are time-based, use the relevant time stamp. See the examples below:

> Austen begins the final chapter of *Mansfield Park* with a dismissive "Let other pens dwell," thereby announcing her decision to avoid dwelling on the professions of love made by Fanny and Edmund (533; vol. 3, ch. 17).

> There is little evidence here for the claim that "Eagleton has belittled the gains of postmodernism" (Chan, par. 41).

> According to the *King James Bible*, God said to man, "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2:17).

> Buffy's promise that "there's not going to be any incidents like at my old school" is obviously not one on which she can follow through ("Buffy" 00:03:16-17).

Citing Prose: Short Quotations

If a prose quotation runs four lines or fewer within the body of your own paragraph, put it in quotation marks and incorporate it into the text of your paragraph. Place the sentence period *after* the parenthetical reference. See the example below:

> Erich Fromm argues, "To love somebody is not just a strong feeling— it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise" (51).

Citing Prose: Long Quotations

If a prose quotation runs more than four lines in the body of your paragraph, set it off as a block quote indented half an inch from the left margin. Typically, this means indenting twice as much as the tab indent at the beginning of a paragraph. Do not use quotation marks that are not in the text itself and place the sentence period *before* the parenthetical reference. See the example below:

> In *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm, a prominent psychoanalytical lecturer, argues that love, much more than a mere emotion, should be defined in terms of will:
>> Love is supposed to be the outcome of a spontaneous, emotional reaction, of suddenly being gripped by an irresistible feeling. In this view, one sees only the peculiarities of the two individuals involved— and not the fact that all men are part of Adam, and all women part of Eve. One neglects to see an important factor in erotic love, that of will. To love somebody is not just a strong feeling— it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever. (51)

Citing Poetry: Three Lines or Fewer

Quote two or three lines of a poem by using a forward slash with a space on each side (/) to indicate where the line breaks fall. With poetry do not include page numbers, but line numbers within the parenthetical reference. If citing a poem that has only lines (no cantos, book, or parts), use the word *line* or *lines* in your first citation and then, having established that the numbers designate lines, give the number or numbers alone thereafter. See the example below:

> On his deathbed, Beowulf expresses that "my going will be easier / for having seen the treasure, a less troubled letting-go / of the life and lordship I have long maintained" (lines 2749-2751).

Citing Poetry: Four Lines or More

When your citation of poetry is more than three lines, use block format. Set the citation apart from the text and indent the quote half an inch from the left margin. Typically, this means indenting twice as much as the tab indent at the beginning of a paragraph. Do not use quotations that are not in the text itself. See the example below:

> Beowulf was considered the strongest and best of his time:
>> Nowhere, they said, north or south
>>
>> between the two seas or under the tall sky
>>
>> on the broad earth was there anyone better
>>
>> to raise a shield or to rule a kingdom. (lines 857-860)

If the layout of the lines in the original poem, including indentation and spacing within and between them, is unusual, then reproduce it as accurately as possible. See the example below:

> Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit priest in 1877, celebrates the variety of creation in his poem "Pied Beauty":
>> Glory be to God for dappled things—
>>> For skies of couple-color as a brinded cow;
>>>> For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
>> Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings. (lines 1-4)

Citing Poetry with Parts

When citing longer poetry that is divided into parts, include in the parenthetical citation the book, part, or canto number, separated from the line numbers by a period. See the example below:

> In Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallot," the heroine dares not leave her domestic fortress for fear of an unknown curse from the dangerous outside world:
>> She knows not what the curse may be;
>>
>> And so she weaveth steadily,
>>
>> And little other car hath she,
>>> The Lady of Shalott. (2.6-9)

Citing Verse Plays

As with poetry, when citing two or three lines of a verse play, use a forward slash with a space on each side (/) to indicate where the line breaks fall. Likewise, when citing more than three lines of a verse play, use block format, reproducing the lines as they appear in the original—just as you would with poetry. Do not cite page numbers when quoting verse plays. The parenthetical citation should include the act, scene, and line numbers, in Arabic, not Roman numerals. See the examples below:

Three Lines or Fewer

Macbeth has given up on life when he claims, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" (5.5.24-25).

Four Lines or More

In *Macbeth*, the anti-hero examines the futility of life through analogy:

> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing (5.5.24-28).

Citing Prose Plays

In the parenthetical citation, provide the page number followed by a semicolon and the act and scene number, if any. As when citing any prose, if the quotation runs more than four lines in the body of your paragraph, set it off as a block quote indented half an inch from the left margin. Include any stage directions as you would normally quoted text, but you may use an ellipsis if you wish to exclude the stage directions. See the examples below:

Short Quotation

In Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora asserts her individuality for the first time: "I believe before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are—or, at all events, that I must try and become one" (1329; act 3).

Long Quotation

In Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora asserts her individuality for the first time:

> I believe before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are—or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them. (1329; act 3)

Citing Dramatic Dialogues

When quoting dialogue between two or more characters, set off the text in block format, beginning each part of the dialogue with the character's name in all capital letters. Follow the name with a period and then start the quotation. Indent all subsequent lines in that character's speech an additional amount. As in poetry, verse plays require the same format as found in the original. See the examples of dramatic dialogue in verse and prose plays below:

Verse Play Dialogue

In Gertrude's bedchamber, Hamlet accuses his mother, not Claudius, of killing his father, and it is significant that Gertrude does not deny it.

> QUEEN. O what a rash and bloody deed is this!
> HAMLET. A bloody deed—almost as bad, good Mother,
>   As kill a King, and marry with his brother.
> QUEEN. As kill a King!
> HAMLET.   Ay, lady, it was my word. (3.4.28-32)

Prose Play Dialogue

From the beginning of the play, Nora lies to her husband, even about something as minor as sweets:

> HELMER. Not been nibbling sweets?
> NORA. No, certainly not.
> HELMER. Not even taken a bite at a macaroon or two?
> NORA. No, Torvald, I assure you really— (974; act 1)

Indirect Sources

Whenever you can, take material from the original source, not a secondhand one. Sometimes, however, only an indirect source is available. If what you quote or paraphrase is itself a quotation from another source, put the abbreviation *qtd. in* ("quoted in") before the source in which you found the quote and which you list on your Works Cited page. Remember, you must always point your reader to your Works Cited page. See the example below:

> According to Claude Lévi-Straus, "It is this avid and ambitious desire to take possession of the object for the benefit of the owner or even of the spectator which seems to constitute one of the outstandingly original features of the art of Western civilization" (qtd. in Berger 84).

Works Cited

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. BBC and Penguin Books, 1972.

It is clear from the citation above that the writer did not read any original text by Lévi-Straus but found his statement in a book by John Berger, which is what is listed among the Works Cited.