MLA Format

Overview: MLA Format

The Modern Language Association (MLA) has specific guidelines for formatting a paper. Although MLA is only one of several formatting styles, it is the type of formatting most commonly used in English Language Arts classes. When formatting a paper in MLA format, it is important to apply all of the rules.

General Formatting Rules

General Setup

When formatting a paper in MLA format, it is important to begin by setting the font and spacing correctly. In MLA format, you should use size 12 Times New Roman font, unless otherwise specified by your teacher. The paper should be double spaced. All margins should be set at one inch. Before you begin to type, make sure to change the settings on your word processing program to meet these specifications.

The Header

The header of your paper is typed in the header setting of your word processing program, and it contains your last name and the page number. The header should be aligned to the right. The header should appear on each page of your paper.

The Heading

The heading goes on the first page of your paper and contains pertinent information about the writer and class. Begin typing your heading in the upper left-hand corner of your paper; this should not be done using the header setting of the word processing program. Your heading should include the following information typed in this order: your name, your teacher's name, the title of the class, and the date.

When writing the date, use the month, day, and year format.

The Title

The title of your paper comes after the heading. It should be centered on the first page of the paper. The first word and all of the nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives in the title should be capitalized. Like the rest of your paper, the title should be typed in size 12 Times New Roman font. Do not use boldface type, underlining, or italics for the title.

The Body

The body of the paper comes after the title. The first line of each paragraph in the paper should be indented exactly half an inch, which can be accomplished by using the tab button on your

computer. The body of the paper should be aligned to the left. Additionally, there should be no extra spacing between paragraphs.

Direct Quotation Formatting Rules

To incorporate textual evidence into your paper, you often need to use direct quotations from the text. You should format these quotations by following the MLA formatting rules.

Short Quotations

Short quotations are quotations that are fewer than four lines of prose or three lines of verse. To format these quotations, you should do the following:

1. Enclose the quotation in double quotation marks.
2. Provide the author and specific page number (prose) or line numbers (verse) in the text.
3. Place punctuation marks such as periods, commas, and semicolons *after* the parenthetical citation. Place punctuation marks such as question marks and exclamation points within the quotation marks if they are part of the quoted passage, but after the parenthetical citation if they are not part of the quoted passage.

It is also important to introduce each quotation. Don't begin the sentence with the quoted material. Instead, lead into it to give the reader context.

Here are some examples of correctly formatted short quotations.

Example	Explanation
Immediately after finding the shell, Piggy suggests to Ralph that "We can use [the conch] to call the others. Have a meeting" (Golding 20).	The sentence begins by introducing the context of the quote: Immediately after finding the shell, Piggy suggest to Ralph that …
	Next comes the direct quotation from the text, enclosed inside quotation marks: "We can use [the conch] to call the others. Have a meeting"
	Finally, the quotation is followed by the citation (in parentheses) and the ending punctuation: (Golding 20).
Piggy begs Ralph to blow the conch shell and restore order, but Ralph says, "'If I blow the conch and they don't come back; then we've had it. We shan't keep the fire going. We'll be like animals. We'll never be rescued'"	The sentence begins by introducing the context of the quote: Piggy begs Ralph to blow the conch shell and restore order, but Ralph says …
	Next comes the direct quotation from the text,

(Golding 130).	enclosed inside quotation marks: "'If I blow the conch and they don't come back; then we've had it. We shan't keep the fire going. We'll be like animals. We'll never be rescued'" Finally, the quotation is followed by the citation (in parentheses) and the ending punctuation: (Golding 130). Special note: Because this example includes a quotation that is a line of dialogue from the book, the double quotation marks are followed by a single quotation mark to indicate that the character is speaking.
It is only once the conch shell is destroyed that civilization truly ceases to exist on the island, something Jack instantly recognizes: "'See? See? That's what you'll get! I meant that! There isn't a tribe for you any more! The conch is gone … I'm chief!'" (Golding 260-61).	The sentence begins by introducing the context of the quote: It is only once the conch shell is destroyed that civilization truly ceases to exist on the island, something Jack instantly recognizes: Next comes the direct quotation from the text, enclosed in quotation marks: "'See? See? That's what you'll get! I meant that! There isn't a tribe for you any more! The conch is gone … I'm chief!'" Finally, the quotation is followed by the citation (in parentheses) and the ending punctuation: (Golding 260-61). Special notes: Again, notice the use of single quotation marks to indicate that a character is speaking. The ellipsis (…) is added to indicate that part of the quotation was omitted. This quotation spans two pages in the novel, which is indicated in the citation.

These are the basics of formatting short quotations. If you follow these rules, you should be well on your way to quoting the text correctly.

Long Quotations

Long quotations are quotations that are more than four lines of prose or three lines of verse. To format these quotations, you should do the following:

1. Omit quotation marks.

2. Start the quotation on a new line.

3. Indent the entire quotation half an inch.

4. Maintain double spacing.

5. Place your citation after the closing punctuation mark.

6. Continue your paragraph after quoting the text.

Additionally, just like a short quotation, you should always introduce the quotation. Here is an example of a correctly formatted long quotation:

The reader can see how the conch shell is linked to Ralph's authority through the description of the littluns:

> They obeyed the summons of the conch, partly because Ralph blew it, and he was big enough to be a link with the adult world of authority; and partly because they enjoyed the entertainment of the assemblies. But otherwise they seldom bothered with the biguns and their passionately emotional and corporate life was their own. (Golding 83).

In this passage, Golding directly links Ralph and the conch shell. He also demonstrates how Ralph represents the authority and order of the boys' previous life to the littluns.

In this example, you can see each of the elements of the long quotation. The quotation begins with an introduction: The reader can see how the conch shell is linked to Ralph's authority through the description of the littluns.

Next comes the long quotation: They obeyed the summons of the conch, partly because Ralph blew it, and he was big enough to be a link with the adult world of authority; and partly because they enjoyed the entertainment of the assemblies. But otherwise they seldom bothered with the biguns and their passionately emotional and corporate life was their own.

The entire quotation is indented half an inch. Because it is a long quotation, there are no quotation marks, and the punctuation comes before the citation.

The quotation ends with the citation in parentheses: (Golding 83)

Finally, the paragraph continues after the quotation: In this passage, Golding directly links Ralph and the conch shell. He also demonstrates how Ralph represents the authority and order of the boys' previous life to the littluns.

Following these rules will help you to create a perfectly formatted long quotation.

Works Cited

Regardless of whether you use short quotations, long quotations, or both, it is important to include a works cited page at the end of your paper in order to properly cite your sources. A works cited page should follow these formatting rules.

- Begin your works cited page on the first blank page after the end of your paper.
- Label the page Works Cited. This label should be centered at the top of the page.
- List all citations in alphabetical order.
- Double-space all citations.
- Indent the second and subsequent lines of any citation by half an inch to create a hanging indent.
- Include the DOI (digital object identifier) or URL (omitting http://) for all electronic citations.
- End all citations with a period.
- Format the date using the day, month, year format. Abbreviate all months except May, June, and July.

Following is an example of a correctly formatted works cited page:

Works Cited

"By the Numbers: World-Wide Deaths." *The National WWII Museum.*

www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/ww2-by-the-

numbers/world-widedeaths.html. 13 Dec. 2016.

Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies.* Global Village Contemporary Classics, 1954,

colleronline.weebly.com/uploads/2/8/2/0/2820270/lotf_text.pdf, 13 Dec. 2016.

There are additional rules depending on the type of source you are citing. Here you will review books and electronic sources, which are two of the most commonly used sources for a literary analysis.

For a book, you need to include the following information in this order and using this punctuation:

Author's Last Name, Author's First Name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, Publication Date. Location (if electronic book), Date of Access (if electronic book).

Here is an example of a citation for an electronic book of *Lord of the Flies*.

Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies.* Global Village Contemporary Classics, 1954,

colleronline.weebly.com/uploads/2/8/2/0/2820270/lotf_text.pdf, 13 Dec. 2016.

For an electronic source, you need to include the following information in this order and using this punctuation:

Author's Last Name, Author's First Name. Title of Article / Page. *Name of Site*. Version number, Sponsor or Publisher, Date of Resource Creation, Location. Date of Access.

Here is an example of a citation of an article on a website.

"By the Numbers: World-Wide Deaths." *The National WWII Museum.*

www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/ww2-by-the-

numbers/world-widedeaths.html. 13 Dec. 2016.

For all citations, if you are missing a piece of the required information, you should skip that piece and move to the next piece of required information. For example, for this electronic source, there is no author. Therefore, the citation begins with the title of the article.

Summary

When formatting a paper in MLA format, it is important to apply all of the rules. For additional information about citing sources, visit the OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab.

Concept Reinforcement

1. Which font should you use in MLA format?
2. How far should the first line of each paragraph be indented in MLA format?
3. What information belongs in the heading of a paper in MLA format?
4. What are the spacing requirements for a paper in MLA format?
5. What determines if you should format a quotation as a short quotation or a long quotation?