

## An overview of research methodology: MLA handbook (7th edition)

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### *Abstract*

The most important and essential part of any work of research is the bibliography. It not only authenticates the work of the author, but also helps the future researchers of similar interests to go to the works cited and thereby widen their knowledge. There are different styles or formats which are used in citing the works referred. While the APA is the most preferred style of the researchers in the field of science, the MLA is the preference of those researching in the human sciences department. This paper is an overview of the MLA Handbook which has assisted millions of researchers across the globe in preparing the bibliography of their research work. The significance of this paper lies in the simplification of the data that is required by the scholar to cite references. Many a times, it becomes tedious and time consuming to go through the entire book for assistance in a particular type of reference. This paper comes in handy for those who would like to get the required help quickly. It discusses and gives the most often used citations in a simple method. It also highlights on those citations which have been updated from the sixth edition of the same book.

**Keywords:** references; MLA style; research methodology; bibliography

## **An overview of research methodology: MLA handbook (7th edition)**

### **1. Introduction**

Re-searching and establishing new concepts or re-interpreting the existing concepts would be 'Research'. The two types of research are – primary research and secondary research. Primary research is establishing original ideas through experiments carried out in a laboratory, an analysis of a literary text, etc. Secondary research is redefining and reinterpreting the findings of earlier researchers. Most of the academic research depends at least partly on 'secondary research' as it becomes imperative on the part of any researcher to have a good knowledge of the latest developments in his field of investigation and whatever his hypothesis is, he has to examine and prove it against the existing data.

### **2. Trekking the path of Research**

The journey of research is like trekking an unfamiliar and challenging terrain which needs a thorough groundwork. Right from choosing the topic to collecting resources every single step has to be systematic and planned so that the journey is smooth. This also fortifies the scholar against the thorny and rough patches he/she may be encountering during the expedition of research. A research scholar generally has the liberty to choose an area of his/her interest and once this has been decided, the researcher narrows it down to a specific topic. For example, a research in 'Emotional Intelligence', can be narrowed down to a topic of say, "Emotional Intelligence and working women" after a lot of discussion with the research supervisor, and after a thorough analysis of the research that has already been carried out in this area,. The topic can be further narrowed down to women working in a particular sector. Before finalizing on a topic the researcher has to ensure that sufficient work has been done on the subject.

Once the topic has been decided, the researcher can begin with the libraries which are an excellent and time tested source of information – be it print or electronic. The online central information system in any reputed academic library will guide the researcher through the library's catalog – a list of books, periodicals, journals, audio-visual materials etc. – and electronic sources – a list of journals and full text databases which the library subscribes to. Apart from this, indexes and bibliographies furnish a list of publications generally classified by subject. For example, 'The New York Times Index' covers all the articles published in the paper and the 'Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature' indexes the contents of widely circulated periodicals. In addition, the researcher can go through the collection of abstracts which briefs him on what the journal articles contain. Skimming through the abstracts helps the researcher to choose the articles which will be relevant for his research and look for those articles alone. Besides these, many libraries have a separate section for audio and video recordings, multimedia materials etc. which generally have to be used only in the libraries. The researcher can also make use of the interlibrary facility which most libraries offer. The librarian can help the scholars access resources from other libraries through this facility.

Apart from the library the other major source of information which literally brings the entire world before us with a single click is the World Wide Web or simply put, the Internet. The websites created by different professional organizations, government agencies and also individual scholars offer an unimaginable wealth of resources on any given topic. Of course, searching for resources and surfing the internet requires some practice and also guidance. The research supervisor or the librarian will be able to guide the scholars in such times. They can direct the research scholar to 'metapage' or 'gateway' which in turn provides links to other sites. For example, the 'Voice of Shuttle' provides numerous links to sites on anthropology, humanities, architecture, philosophy etc. Google, Windows Live and Yahoo are some of the popular search engines that provide any type of information on any topic. While looking for information through these search engines, it is advisable to be as specific as possible in order to avoid a long list of irrelevant sites. Also, as the web pages are constantly updated,

it is better to note down the address or the URL which has the relevant material and the date on which it is accessed. This enables the scholar to go back to the pages whenever needed. The date is important when he prepares the working bibliography and the list of works cited.

### *2.1 Preparing a working bibliography*

Keeping track of the sources that might be useful for the research is very important and such a record is called a 'working bibliography'. A preliminary reading gives a list of articles and papers which in turn will lead to other resources. Thus, a working bibliography keeps changing from time to time as the research scholar adds new titles and removes certain other titles which he might find as not so relevant as the research progresses. It would be better if the scholar opens a word document and records the bibliography as it becomes easy to make the necessary changes of adding, deleting, or arranging them in any desired order – order of date of publication, order of relevance to the topic etc.

The sources can also be divided into groups – those already consulted those yet to be consulted, and such. Care should also be taken that the entire publication detail is recorded and saved. Apart from this, in case the researcher needs to go back to any particular reference, it is easy if he records other additional information like the URL or the library call number. This ensures easy access and helps avoid confusion. At the same time, enough care should be taken in evaluating the reliability of the material. Sometimes the material can be based on some incorrect information and or the author's knowledge might be limited. The author's views may be biased. All these have to be weighed against the researcher's own knowledge and intelligence before incorporating the ideas in his research. Focus should be on the 'authority', 'accuracy' and 'currency' of the sources. Articles taken from a peer reviewed journal ensures good quality as these journals go in for expert comments on the papers before publishing them. Thus, the researcher can be confident on the accuracy and authority of such papers. The publication date of the article tells the researcher if the author has updated his knowledge with the latest developments in his field. Eventually, the working bibliography thus prepared will become the list of works cited by removing the additional information (like the library call number) and arranging the list in an alphabetical order by the name of the author. A thorough reading of the resources thus collected enables the researcher has a rough outline of the actual research paper.

### *2.2 Preparing an outline*

Preparing an outline is like rehearsing or going for a trial before the actual trekking starts. Outlining helps the researcher put his ideas and views in a coherent manner. It also helps the scholar to be focused, trim away the irrelevant information and thus help him achieve clarity and unity of thought process. It also gives him an overall view of his research and enables him to decide on adding on new ideas or information. As the scholar gets closer to writing the research paper, he begins with framing a thesis statement which is not only the topic but also defines his point of view. The thesis statement enables the scholar to remain focused as he writes his paper. However, this need not be rigid and the scholar should not hesitate to revise the thesis statement as he gains experience and more insight into the topic once he begins writing the paper. When framing the thesis statement, two things that have to be kept in mind are – purpose and audience. This again prevents the scholar from deviating or going off the track. Once the thesis statement is finalized, the working outline is transformed into a final outline. Here, the scholar critically analyses the working outline and removes any information that is irrelevant or might weaken his arguments. Easier said, than done because it is very difficult to ignore or eliminate information which the scholar has so diligently gathered and the temptation to impress the reader with the knowledge that he has acquired on that subject is also very strong. Nevertheless, the scholar needs to be strict with him and discard any unnecessary information if he needs to effectively communicate his research to his audience. Slowly, the paper takes shape as the research scholar identifies logical patterns in the information. This helps him organize his paper by any one of the organizing principles:

- a) Chronology: helpful when dealing with historical information.

- b) Cause and effect: when discussing any scientific discovery.
- c) Process: when discussing the process of any incident.
- d) Deductive logic: when moving from general to specific.
- e) Inductive logic: when moving from specific to general.

From the final outline the scholar moves on to write his first draft which again is spruced and preened into a final draft. A word processor is godsend as it makes this task of writing and rewriting simpler compared to that of the olden days when people had to work laboriously as it had to be handwritten. When writing the final draft utmost care should be taken with the type of language the scholar uses. Again, the purpose, the audience and also the mechanics of writing – punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure – have to be kept in mind and be given paramount importance. For example, the spellings used by the research scholar should be consistent throughout his paper whether he uses the British or the American way of spelling. When quoting material from a foreign language, all the accents and other marks should be reproduced exactly the same way as it is in the original. When referring to the names of the authors in general, they are written without any formal titles. Nobody writes Mr. Churchill or Prof. Einstein. It is simply *Churchill* or *Einstein*. But, if an author is traditionally known by his/her title like ‘Mrs. Humphrey Ward’, then he/she has to be referred so.

Whenever the title of a published book is cited in the paper, the title should be taken from the title page and not from the cover of the book. Any unusual typographical characteristics like special capitalization or lower casing of all letters are not reproduced. The rules for capitalizing are quite strict. All the principal words are capitalized. Parts of speech like nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and subordinating conjunctions are capitalized whereas articles, prepositions and coordinating conjunctions are not capitalized. The names of books, plays and poems should be italicized whereas quotation marks are used for titles of articles, essays and stories. The exception to this rule is that one does not italicize or use quotation marks when referring to scriptural writings like the *Bible*, *Koran*, or *Upanishads*.

Quoting from texts are an effective way of supporting one’s ideas but care should be taken not to over quote as this might sound monotonous to the reader and lead him into thinking that the research scholar lacks original thinking or good writing skills. If any quotation from prose or poetry does not run to more than four lines, it can be incorporated into the text. But if it is more than four lines, then it has to be set off from the text by beginning a new line, indenting one inch from the left margin and double spaced without any quotation marks. A parenthetical reference to the quotation follows the last line of the quotation.

For example,

Elizabeth Bishop’s “In the Waiting Room” is rich in evocative detail:

*It was winter. It got dark  
early. The waiting room  
was full of grown-up people,  
arctics and overcoats,  
lamps and magazines. (6-10)*

The same rule applies when a dialogue between two or more characters is quoted. The quotation is set off from the text and each part of the dialogue begins with the name of the character indented one inch from the left margin and written in all capital letters.

Whenever a need to omit a word, a phrase or a sentence from a quoted passage arises, care should be taken to maintain the grammatical integrity of the writing. The omission should not cause any confusion to the reader. Neither should it be unfair to the author quoted. To indicate that the quotation is not entirely reproduced, ellipses or three spaced periods are used. There should be a single space before each period and after the last one as well

(...).

*In surveying various responses to plagues in the Middle Ages, Barbara W. Tuchman writes, "Medical thinking, trapped in the theory of astral influences, stressed air as the communicator of disease . . ." (101-02)*

### 2.3 Format of the research paper

Appearances may be deceptive but one cannot discount the effect a well presented paper has on the readers. However good a paper is, if it is not organized or presented in a neat way, it will not impress the reader. Thus the format of the paper becomes extremely important. Except for page numbers, margins of one inch should be left on the top and the bottom and on both sides of the text. An easily readable typeface like 'Times New Roman' can be chosen set to a standard size (12 points). All the pages should be numbered consecutively at the upper right hand corner half an inch from the top and flush to the right margin. The research scholar's last name should be typed before the page numbers to avoid misplacement of the pages. Any tables or illustrations should be placed as close to the parts of the text to which they relate. The source of the table or any notes should be given immediately below the table as a caption. Finally, the paper should be thoroughly read and re-read to avoid any mistakes however small they might be. When submitting paper in the print format, good quality white paper should be used. The size of the paper should preferably be 8 ½ -by-11 inches. If the scholar goes for electronic submission, though there are no commonly accepted standards at present, the scholar may take the guidance and preference of his/her supervisor and follow them.

### 3. The Research Paper as a form of communication

Communication is effective only when it is clear and interesting. A research paper is interesting when it kindles the curiosity of the reader and makes him think which in turn paves way for further research in that area. Clarity is achieved when the ideas and facts are properly documented. The documentation should help in supporting the statements of the researcher, and should not distract the reader away from the actual facts discussed in the paper. Nevertheless, utmost care should be taken in acknowledging and documenting the sources cited as this helps the reader to refer the sources and also guards the research scholar against plagiarism. Plagiarism is committing a 'literary theft' by using other person's ideas and passing them off as one's own. When proper acknowledgement is not given to information and expressions taken from others' works, it accounts to plagiarism. For example, if a person takes the phrase 'Languaculture' invented by Michael Agar and uses it in his work without citing the original work from which it is taken, it is plagiarism. Though no legal action can be taken against those who indulge in plagiarism, it is a moral and ethical offence and the research scholars lose their credibility when detected. The damage done to their reputation is almost permanent. Professionals who resort to plagiarism lose their prestige and their jobs as well. Thus documentation becomes extremely important.

Scholars of different disciplines – chemistry, mathematics, physics etc. use symbols and special terms to convey their information and knowledge. Similarly, scholars in the field of language and linguistics follow the MLA style which is widely accepted and reputed as a simple and lucid style of documentation. When the research scholar writes a paper in the MLA style, he/she places in parentheses brief references to sources used in the paper and at the end places an alphabetical list of all the works cited.

*The aesthetic and ideological orientation of jazz underwent considerable scrutiny in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Anderson 7).*

The citation "(Anderson 7)" tells the reader that the information in the sentence was taken from page 7 of a work of the author Anderson. More information on the name of the work and publication details can be traced by the reader in the works cited list at the end of the paper.

When citing non periodical print publications like books and pamphlets, the details should be sequenced in

the prescribed format. The name of the author, editor, or compiler is followed by the title of the work in italics. This is followed by the edition used, number(s) of the volume(s) used, city of publication, name of the publisher and the year of publication. Then comes the medium of publication consulted (print) and finally any supplementary bibliographic information. The author's name is reversed for alphabetizing and a comma added after the last name. A period comes after the complete name. No abbreviation of the author's name is allowed. The title of the book should be in italicized (including any punctuation marks that are a part of the title) and should be reproduced as it is in the title page of the book. A period is placed after the title. Then comes the publication details like the city of publication, the publisher's name, the year of publication and the medium of publication. A colon comes after the city of publication, a comma after the name of the publisher and a period after the date. The medium of publication is again followed by a period. Let us look at a few examples.

a) Citing a book by a single author: the author's name (last name first) is followed by the title of the work and publication details.

Franke, Damon. *Modernist Heresies: British Literary History, 1883-1924*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008. Print.

b) A book by two or more authors: the names are given exactly in the same order as given in the title page of the book and only the name of the first author is reversed. Followed by a comma the rest of the names are given in the normal form. If the persons listed are editors, compilers or translators, then place a comma after the final name and add appropriate abbreviations like eds., or comps., or trans. to represent editors, compilers or translators.

MacLaury, Robert E., Galina V. Paramei, and Don Dedrick, eds. *Anthropology of color: Interdisciplinary Multilevel Modeling*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007. Print.

If a book is published by two or more publishers, then all the names should be included in the order given in the title page, divided by a semicolon. When a book does not indicate the publisher, the place or the date of the publication or pagination, it has to be duly identified in the citation as follows:

No Place: N.p.: U of Gotham P, 2008.

No Publisher: New York: n.p., 2008.

No Date: New York: U of Gotham P, n.d.

No Pagination: New York: U of Gotham P, 2008. N. pag.

c) A commission, an association a committee or a publisher can be corporate authors and their names should be cited as they are in the title page omitting the articles. For e.g. 'The American Philosophical Association' will simply be cited as 'American Philosophical Association'.

Urban Land Institute. *Cities Post-9/11*. Washington: Urban Land Inst., 2002. Print.

d) To cite a book in translation: If the reference is from the original work itself, then the author's name comes first followed by the text. Then comes the translator's name preceded by 'Trans.' (translated by). If the reference is from the translator's comments or choice of wording, then the citation begins with the translator's name followed by a comma and the abbreviation 'trans.' and then comes the author's name.

When the author is cited it is as,

Mankell, Henning. *Firewall*. Trans. Ebba Segerberg. New York: Vintage-random, 2003. Print.

When the translator is cited it is as,

Segeberg, Ebba, trans. *Firewall*. By Henning Mankell. New York: Vintage-Random, 2003. Print.

e) A book published in second or subsequent editions should be identified by the number (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.,) by the name (Rev. ed., for 'Revised Edition'; Abr. Ed., for 'Abridged Edition'.)

Baker, Nancy L., and Nancy Huling. *A Research Guide for Undergraduate Students: English and American Literature*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: MLA, 2006. Print.

If two or more books of a multivolume book is cited, then the total number of volumes ("5 vols.") comes after the identification of the edition.

f) Citing an unpublished and a published dissertation: The title of an unpublished dissertation is enclosed in quotation marks, not italicized; whereas, the title of a published dissertation is treated as a book and is cited in italics.

g) Citing an article from a journal: The same information as citing a book is applied; the author's name, title of the article (in quotation marks, not italics) and publication information. In the publication information, the journal title in italics is given followed by the volume number, a period, the issue number, the year of publication (in parentheses), a colon, the page numbers consulted, a period, the medium of publication and a period.

Piper, Andrew. "Rethinking the Print Object: Goethe and the Book of Everything." *PMLA* 121.1 (2006): 124-38. Print.

Some journals use only issue numbers and in that case, it is necessary to cite the issue numbers such journals alone.

h) To cite from a news paper article, the name of the news paper should be given dropping any articles ('New York Times', not 'The New York Times'). But, if the name is non-English, then the articles are retained (*Le Monde*). For nationally published newspapers, the city of publication need not be mentioned. If an edition is named on the masthead, then it has to be specified after the date of issue. Some articles in a newspaper do not appear in consecutive pages rather begin in page 1 and then continue from page 6. When citing such articles, only the first page number where the article begins is given with a plus sign leaving no intervening space ('6+', '12+').

Haughney, Christine. "Women Unafraid of Condo Commitment." *New York Times* 10 Dec. 2006, late ed., sec. 11: 1+. Print.

i) To cite an article from a magazine published weekly or fortnightly, the complete date (day, month and year) should be given followed by a colon, the inclusive page numbers and the medium of publication. If the magazine is published monthly, the month and the year alone are mentioned.

Wood, Jason. "Spellbound." *Sight and Sound* Dec. 2005: 28-30. Print.

j) To cite a review, the reviewer's name followed by 'Rev. of' is given before the title of the work reviewed. This is followed by a comma and the author's name. If the review is titled but unsigned, then the entry begins with the title of the review (alphabetized by title). If the review is neither titled nor signed, then the entry begins with 'Rev. of' and alphabetized under the title of the work reviewed.

Bordewich, Fergus M. Rev. of *Once They Moved like the Wind: Cochise, Geronimo, and the Apache wars*, by David Roberts, and *Brave Are My People: Indian Heroes Not Forgotten*, by Frank waters. *Smithsonian* Mar. 1994: 125-31. Print.

### 3.1 Citing Web Publications

Citations of web publications are similar to that of the print publication, though there are certain traits which

are unique to the electronic texts. For example, electronic texts can be easily updated at irregular intervals and thus it becomes imperative for the research scholar to keep track of the date of access of a particular article, book or a journal paper.

A citation for a non-periodical publication on the web requires the following in the given order:

Antin, David. Interview by Charles Bernstein. *Dalkey Archive Press*. Dalkey Archive  
P, n.d. Web. 21 Aug. 2007.

If the cited work has also appeared in print, the print publication data is also added before the title of the website. The medium of publication still remains as 'Web' because the data was accessed through the website and not from the print material. Citing scholarly journals which exist only in the electronic form follow the same guidelines as citing a print publication, the only difference being the medium of publication given as 'Web'.

### 3.2 Other common sources

Apart from the print material and web sites, the research scholars also refer to radio and television broadcast, advertisements, a film or a video recording or an interview. Let us see how these sources are cited.

a) Radio or television broadcast: The citation includes – the title of the episode or the segment (in quotation marks), title of the program or series (in italics), name of the network (if any), call letters and city of the local station (if any), the broadcast date, medium of reception (radio, television), and any other supplementary information.

"Frederick Douglas." *Civil war Journal*. Narr. Danny Glover. Dir. Craig Haffner.  
Arts and Entertainment Network. 6 Apr. 1993. Television.

Here, 'Narr.' stands for 'narrator' and 'Dir.' stands for 'Director'.

b) An entry for a film generally begins with the title in italics followed by the names of the director, distributor, the year of release, and the medium consulted. The names of the directors or the performers are preceded by 'Dir.' for director or 'Perf.' for a performer.

*It's a Wonderful Life*. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel  
Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell. RKO, 1946. Film.

c) Citing an interview: Entries citing an interview begin with the name of the person interviewed. If the interview was published independently then the title is italicized. If the interview is untitled then, the descriptive label 'Interview' alone is used. The interviewer's name may or may not be added depending upon its importance to the paper.

Blanchett, Cate. "In Character with: Cate Blanchett." *Notes on a Scandal*. Dir.  
Richard Eyre. Fox Searchlight, 2006. DVD.

If the interview is conducted by the research scholar himself, then the name of the person interviewed, the kind of interview (telephonic or personal) and the date are recorded.

Reed, Ishmail. Telephone Interview. 10 Dec. 2007.

d) Citing an advertisement: The entry should state the name of the product, company or the institution, that is, the subject of the advertisement followed by the descriptive label 'Advertisement' which is neither italicized nor enclosed within quotes.

Air Canada. Advertisement. CNN. 15 May 1998. Television.

### 3.3 Arranging the entries

The entries are arranged in an alphabetical order by the name of the author. If the author's name is unknown then the title of the work is alphabetized ignoring any articles in the title (like a, an, or the). When citing two or more works of the same author, only the first entry carries his name. The subsequent entries carry three hyphens in the place of his name followed by a period and then the title of the work. If the person named had edited or compiled or translated, then the three hyphens should be followed by a comma and the appropriate abbreviation (ed., comp., trans.) before the title. But if the single author is also the first author of a work having multiple authors then his name should be given in full and not replaced by three hyphens.

### 3.4 An overview of some changes in the MLA style in the seventh edition

- Italics are used in the place of underlining
- Every entry has to be specified with the medium of publication – whether print, web, radio, television, DVD, etc.
- When citing journals, all the entries must provide with both the issue number and the volume number.
- When citing online resources the MLA no longer requires the URL taking into consideration that any source can be tracked by entering the author's name and the title of the work.
- If any source does not have the information about the publisher or the date of publication or page numbers, these have to be duly recorded by abbreviations – 'N.p.' for 'no publisher', 'n.d.' for 'no date', and 'n.pag.' for 'no page numbers'.

## 4. Conclusion

Thus, the MLA provides extensive guidelines on formulating a topic, formatting the research paper, citing parenthetical texts, and compiling the list of works cited. The simplicity and flexibility of the MLA style has endeared it among the research scholars over the years.

## 5. References:

Gibaldi, J. (2009). *MLA handbook for writers of research papers* (7th ed.). New York: MLA.

