

Student Name

Teacher Name

Class Name

Day Month Year

### Formatting Your Paper the MLA Way

For me as a teacher, the day I collect research papers is kind of like Christmas. Not only because I am really excited to open these “presents,” but also because I have no idea what I am going to get. Papers vary greatly in topic and quality, as you might expect. In fact, I wouldn’t want it any other way. However, they also vary too much in terms of how they look. Crazy font-faces, weird margins, title pages, pictures, single-spacing, huge text, no titles; sometimes you don’t even get a name! You should always format your assignments according to guidelines published by the Modern Language Association (MLA). These guidelines will ensure a professional looking paper that focuses attention on the quality of your writing.

Let’s begin with the looks of the essay itself. First, the margins should be one inch all the way around, which should not be difficult, as that is the usual default anyway. One basic rule that everyone should know is that the text should be double-spaced, 12-point font. Sometimes it is required that you use only Times New Roman, but at the very least you should stay away from strange looking fonts, like Comic Sans MS. The creativity should be in your writing, not in how it looks!

There are requirements to what you say, as well, however. It is imperative that every piece of information that you did not create is credited within your paper. The easiest way is to place the author of the source of your info, and the page number it came

from, directly after the information (Zipf 56). You can also follow the advice of Mr. Nelson, who likes to name the source in the writing, and only have the page number afterwards (393). If you want to quote your source directly, do what Mrs. Shake says: “Mention the author in the writing, and then match the words exactly inside the quotes. Follow with the page number outside the quotes, and then the period” (51). But that’s not all:

For shorter quotes, the above advice is fine. Sometimes you want to quote a longer passage, however, and this needs something different. End the text with a colon (:), skip a line, and indent the entire passage by ten spaces (or by hitting tab twice). You don’t need to put quotes around it, although you should still follow with the citation. Usually the cut-off for a longer quote is four lines, and remember to keep it double-spaced (Shake 53).

Finally, make sure that a quote doesn’t finish a paragraph. The last thing you say should be your own thought.

Having citations throughout your paper isn’t quite enough, though. Don’t forget to put a Works Cited page at the end. Follow the methods on page 224 in your book to list each source. Then, alphabetize them by the author (or title of source if there is no author listed). This listing should be single-spaced, and when you get to the end of the page, remember to indent the next line.

Finally, the finishing touches. I have never understood why a student would spend so long working on a paper, and then forget their name. Shouldn’t you be proud of what you have done? Begin the paper with your name at the top, then your teacher’s name,

then the name of the class, then the date, skipping a line between each part. The title should come next, centered on the page, but no bigger, bolder or more colorful than the text of the essay. And don't pick a lame title like "Research Paper." Tell me what it is about. Furthermore, not only does your name go at the top, but it should be a Header for each page except the first, with the page number.

Following this format will ensure that any grade you get will solely depend on your writing, and not because of distractions. Some of you may feel like your creativity is being stifled, but remember, this isn't art class. Here, only your writing matters. And, if all this is confusing, you can use this paper as an example.

Notice how the title is the same size, and does not say bibliography

Works Cited

Author, Joe. Make Sure You Underline Your Book Titles. Maplewood, MN: Bigtime

Publishing, 2004.

Dates go day month year

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2004: 34-6.

Morethanone, Ann and Mike Multiple. People Who Don't Write Books Alone are Lazy.

New York: Little Booksellers, 1975.

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May 1999. University of Wisconsin-Madison. 5 April 2005.

<<http://www.onlineinformationforlazystudents.com/content/thispagedoesnotexist.htm>>

Be sure to keep a hanging indent, and double space everything

When there is no author, begin with the title

For more help, go to page 224 in your book.