MLA Style: Citing References in Text

The MLA citation style, used in English literature, uses parenthetical references in the text of essays and papers to document sources. Citations go in the sentence where the information is being used. Sources are briefly identified by the author’s last name and the page number of the specific material that is used. At the end of your paper, include a detailed list of all the sources cited (called a Works Cited list). References in your paper must point clearly to the corresponding entries in your Works Cited list.

The following examples illustrate how to cite sources in-text using MLA style. For further clarification and examples, please consult the *MLA Handbook Eighth Edition*. The Patrick Power Library has copies of the Handbook in the Reference Collection (LB 2369 G53 2016 SMREF).

Examples of citing references in text

**One author**

Give the author and page number in parentheses when citing a source. If your sentence explains who the author is and it is clear which work you are referring to, then you only need to give the page number in parentheses. For example:

Our own personal response to literature is not sufficient for critical understanding (DiYanni 10).

As Robert DiYanni explains, a subjective, emotional response to literature is not the same thing as a critical understanding of it that comes from literary analysis (10).

**Two authors**

Include both authors’ last names joined by *and*. For example:

Shakespeare is typically taught differently in high school compared to how his works are studied in university courses (Desmet and Bailey 122).

**Three or more authors**

If there are three or more authors, the in-text citation begins with the first author’s last name followed by *et al.* For example:

Late 18th century English culture was thriving, thanks in part to John Boydell’s Shakespeare gallery (Jung et al. 76).
No author

For a source with no author, such as an anonymous work, the Works Cited entry begins with the full title, and in-text citations should cite by an abbreviated version of the title. Use quotation marks for articles (parts) and italics for books (wholes). For example:

A focal point of the tour is a viewing of Shakespeare’s wife’s bedroom (“Creativity curated” 60).

Two or more sources in one citation

List all of the sources, separated by a semi-colon. For example:

In his early life, Chaucer was a noblewoman’s page and later he worked for the king (Skeat xi-xii; Rossignol xvii).

Citing a source without page numbers

If the source has no numbering of any kind (e.g., no page, paragraph, or section numbers), cite the entire source. Some electronic publications and non-print sources such as films, performances, and works of art fall into this category. You may cite according to paragraphs (with “par.” or “pars.”) or sections (with “sec.”) if these are numbered as such in the original document. Do not create your own page numbers, paragraph numbers, section numbers, or scene numbers, etc.

Example of a source without page or paragraph numbers:

The director demonstrates Romeo’s immediate remorse by blending images of a slain Tybalt with Rio de Janeiro’s statue of Christ the Redeemer, now an unfinished monument in Shakespeare’s Verona (Luhrmann).

Example of a source without page numbers, but with paragraph numbers:

The period’s literature reveals that the concept of England as an island nation is also “implicated in histories of invasion and of translation” (Griffiths, par. 12).

Citing indirect sources

While it is always best to take material from the original source, sometimes you may need to use indirect sources. If you quote or paraphrase from a quotation in your source, use qtd. in (“quoted in”) before citing the source you have used. Then list your source in your Works Cited. In the following example, Matz is the author of the source used:
William Minto believes that Shakespeare’s sonnets to the young man are “in every way more powerful and mature” (qtd. in Matz 491) when compared to the sonnets to the woman.

Examples of quotations in text

See Section 1.3 of the MLA Handbook for more instructions on how to incorporate quotations into your essay.

Short quotation (no more than 4 lines in your essay)

If a quotation is brief (usually less than four lines of prose or three of poetry), put it in quotation marks with a citation at the end:

Rene-Dozier states “there is no authoritative narrator in Wuthering Heights; the novel is not simply incoherent, but rather refuses to cohere” (757).

Block Quotations (more than 4 lines in your essay)

Longer quotations must be set off from your text as a block. Indent half an inch from the left margin (if you are double-spacing, continue to do so). Block quotations do not require quotation marks around the text. Place the citation outside the final punctuation of the quoted passage. Use an ellipsis to indicate where you have omitted words, phrases, or sentences within a quotation. Add a fourth period if the omission includes the end of a sentence in the original text. Example:

Matz describes the biological bond in Shakespeare’s sonnet 18:

> The “eternal lines” that will preserve the young man past death are those of Shakespeare’s sonnets. They recall – only to replace – the family line, the inheritance from father to son that Shakespeare has been celebrating in most of the previous sonnets. By making reproduction a matter of poetry rather than sex, Shakespeare takes the place of two members of the young man’s future family: the son who will reproduce the young man and the wife who will be responsible for that reproduction. (480)

Poetry

If you quote part or all of a line of verse, put it in quotation marks within your text. If your quotation includes one or more line breaks, use a forward slash (/) to indicate where each line break falls. Quote the text exactly.

Poetry quotations may require citing line and/or other division numbers as well as page numbers. In the following example, the numbers refer to the lines of the poem being quoted:
Marlowe uses gifts in order to persuade his love to stay with him, promising her “A gown made of the finest wool / Which from our pretty lambs we pull” (13-14).

Always be clear. If this is the first time the poem was quoted in your essay, for example, you could also include the page number: (254, lines 13-14).

**Drama**

If you are quoting dialogue in a block, begin each part with the character’s name, indented half an inch from the left margin and written in all capital letters. Follow the name with a period and then start the quotation. Indent all subsequent lines in that character’s speech. When a new character speaks, start a new indented line. Maintain this pattern throughout the quotation. In the following example, the in-text citation gives the act, scene and line numbers of the quoted passage:

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* begins with Kent and Gloucester discussing division of the kingdom, and which of the dukes the King most favors:

KENT. I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.
GLOUCESTER. It did always seem so to us. But now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most, for qualities are so weighted that curiosity in neither can make choice of either’s moiety. (1.1.1-6)