

## A Quick Guide to Citing Sources in the MLA Format for Literature Papers

In a literature essay, you are always analyzing a piece of literature, which means that your essay always refers to at least one source. The goal in academic writing is to clearly separate your voice from the voice of your source. So you need to make sure that when you quote from and paraphrase the literature you are analyzing that you do it correctly. The same goes for critical essays or historical research that you are using in your paper. In literature courses, the rules for how you correctly quote and paraphrase are set by the Modern Language Association (MLA). The MLA format has two parts. The first part is how you deal with sources in the body of your essay; this is referred to as *in-text citation*. The second part is how you list the bibliographic information of those sources; this is referred to as the *works cited page*.

### Terms to know

*Citation*: n. a reference to an outside source of information and the name of that source

*Citing*: v. giving information from another source and naming the source

*Paraphrase*: v. or n. a complete rewording of another person's statement

*Quotation*: n. exact words from another source in your paper

*Quote*: v. to put exact words from a source into your paper

*Signal phrase*: n. a series of words that explicitly names the author of a source

*Source*: n. a person or thing that provides you with information or is the thing you are analyzing, usually a book, a short story, a play, a poem, an essay, or a website.

### Part 1: In-Text Citation

In MLA in-text citation, you must provide two things: an author and a page number. If you name the author of the source in the body of your paper (a signal phrase) before the quotation or paraphrase, then simply put the page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence, before the end punctuation. The first time you mention an author, use his or her full name. After that, only use his or her last name.

*John Updike mentions that Kafka thought that "a concrete image of the insect would be too distracting and shut off sympathy" (644).*

The same is true even if you paraphrase a source.

*John Updike says that Kafka insisted that a picture of Gregor as the insect should not to be put on the cover of the book (644).*

The above rule is true for most essays, short stories, plays and novels.

*In William Faulkner's "A Rose For Emily," the townspeople find on the pillow next to rotted corpse "a long strand of iron-gray hair" (151).*

If the story, play, or novel is divided into parts, chapters, or acts, put the section number after the page number.

*In Death of a Salesman, Willy believes his death will make Biff happy and even says, "he'll worship me for it!" (1537; act 2).*

For poems, provide the line numbers instead of the page numbers. For the first reference, use the word "lines." After that, use just the numbers. Show line breaks with a slash.

*The first few lines of Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" emphasize human connection: "I'm Nobody! Who are you? / Are you-Nobody-Too? / Then there's a pair of us!" (lines 1-3).*

When there is no signal phrase and you haven't mentioned the author of the source yet (this is usually only true of secondary sources: critical essays, author biographies, etc.), the last name of the author goes before the page number in the parentheses. This is true for both a quotation and a paraphrase.

*Kafka insisted that a picture of Gregor as the insect should not to be put on the cover of the book (Updike 644).*

### Basic rules for quotations

Only use a quotation when the exact words an author uses are important. Each time you use a quotation, you disrupt the flow of your own writing. Properly introducing a quotation can minimize the disruption. Using short quotations also helps and keeps you from being accused of trying to pad your paper.

Lines of prose of four lines or less, and lines of poetry of three lines or less should be put in quotation marks. Make sure that you put the author's exact words within the quotation marks. Misquoting is actually a form of plagiarism. To indicate line breaks when you quote from a poem, put a slash mark ( / ) at each break. You can put an ellipsis mark ( ... ) to indicate words that you have removed from the source. The remaining sentence must still be grammatically correct. Do not use ellipsis marks at the beginning or end of a quotation. If you need to change words in a quotation, put the changes in brackets( [ ] ). Do this when you want to replace a pronoun with its antecedent or to make the verb tense match the rest of your paper. Lastly, put the page number of the source in parentheses *after* the quotation marks, but *before* the end punctuation of your sentence.

For longer quotations, set off the quoted material by beginning a new line and indenting an inch from the left margin (see pages 1786-7 of *Literature and Its Writers*). No quotation marks are required for an indented quotation. Put the page number in parentheses at the end, outside of the end punctuation.

### Basic rules for paraphrases

A paraphrase repeats specific information from a source, such as a specific argument or example in an essay, or a specific plot point in a short story. Paraphrases need to be *complete* rewordings of the source material. To use the language of the source, even just a few words, and not to put that language in quotation marks is to claim that the language is your own. And it isn't. So this is a form of plagiarism. To avoid this type of plagiarism, don't look at the source as you type your paraphrase. Only refer to it later to make sure your paraphrase is correct and to get the page number for the citation.

In general, paraphrase more than you quote. A paraphrase keeps the writing style of the essay consistent, since it is your own words. Yet keep in mind that paraphrases must be cited, just as quotations are. Forgetting to cite a paraphrase is also a form of plagiarism.

## Part 2: Works Cited Page

So in the in-text citation, you name the author and the page number, but what book does the page number belong to? That's where the works cited page comes in. On the works cited page, you list the bibliographic information of all your sources. This list comes at the end of your paper and is entitled "works cited." It contains all the sources you mentioned or referred to in your paper. Similar to a bibliography, sources are organized alphabetically by the author's last name (when the name is known). See pages 1791-1793 of *Literature and Its Writers* for more.

Kafka, Franz. "The Metamorphosis." Literature and Its Writers: A Compact Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Ann Charters and Samuel Charters. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007. 241-274.

Updike, John. "Kafka and 'The Metamorphosis' ." Literature and Its Writers: A Compact Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Ann Charters and Samuel Charters. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007. 642-645.