

## MLA citation – research paper

A successful research paper successfully manages its sources. Unfortunately, the first time you write a research paper, managing your sources can be one of the greatest challenges. Let me give you a metaphor. A research paper is like a tapestry. Each source is a different color of thread. It's your job to weave those threads together to make a complete work, but each thread must still be visible. Clearly naming your sources with in-text citation and a works cited page is how you keep your various threads visible.

### Signal phrases

In a research paper, you are juggling the voices of different authors: opinions, statistics, insights, etc. In order to make it clear to the reader who is speaking and also clear to yourself when someone else's idea ends and your own begins, you should use *signal phrases*. A signal phrase introduces the person you are about to quote or paraphrase in your paper.

Quoting W.J. Harvey, Bernard Paris writes: "the authors of great realistic novels 'display an appetite and passion for life which threatens to overwhelm the formal nature of their art'" (227).

### No signal phrase

Sometimes, especially if the information you are using from an outside source is mostly factual, a signal phrase may not be necessary and may, in fact, be distracting. In this case, simply put the last name of the author in the parentheses before the page number. If you quote from the same author twice, just put their name in the first citation. It's assumed that the second citation is from the same source.

Thelonius Monk had become such a gifted piano player that in his late teens he was debarred from participating in amateur music contests at the Apollo because he always won (Fitterling 23). Charlie Parker was playing at nightclubs at the tender age of fourteen (Woideck 6). So it isn't so impossible that Sonny, himself a young man, would be such a hit at the jazz club he frequented.

### Multiple works by the same author

Sometimes in a research paper you will be dealing with two or more sources by the same author. In these cases, you need to make it clear which source you are referring to. This means that you need to state the title of the work as part of your citation.

In a signal phrase...

In "On *Death of a Salesman* as an American Tragedy," Arthur Miller claims that the ancient Greeks believed that a common person could not be a tragic hero (1592).

In the parentheses...

Arthur Miller claims that the ancient Greeks believed that a common person could not be a tragic hero ("On *Death of a Salesman* as an American Tragedy" 1592).

Or...

The ancient Greeks believed that a common person could not be a tragic hero (Miller, "On *Death of a Salesman* as an American Tragedy" 1592).

### **Web sources: in-text citation**

The web makes research easier, but also presents many problems. The biggest problem is that often websites don't mention an author. Do some hunting before you assume no author is named. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and look at the small print. The other tactic is to go to the main page of the site. The author may be listed there.

If there is no author, but if the web page is sponsored by an organization, governmental agency, or corporation, then name that entity as the author. "*According to the American Psychological Association...*"

If there is no author and no corporate sponsor, then use the complete title of the source in a signal phrase or use a short form of the title in parentheses.

Several critics of the concept of the transparent society ask if a large society would be able to handle the complete loss of privacy ("Surveillance Society" 115).

Lastly, most websites don't have set page numbers or the page numbers vary from computer to computer, from web browser to web browser. Consider websites unpaginated. Only web sources that are in .pdf format (such as most on-line journals) can be considered to have consistent page numbers. So only cite the page number when the web source is a .pdf. Otherwise, omit the page number in the parentheses. Just use the author's name (if there is no author, go back to the top of this section and look at what to do).

*Abraham Lincoln's birthplace was designated as a National Historical Site in 1959 (National Park Service).*

### **Web sources: works cited**

Remember that the in-text citation and the works cited page work hand-in-hand. The works cited entry starts with whatever you used for your in-text citation. If you used an author's last name in the in-text citation, then start your works cited entry with that. If you cited a corporate sponsor, then start with that. If you could find neither of these, then start with the title.

1. Name author, editor, or corporate author. If none is provided, such as with an article from an on-line encyclopedia, then start with step 2.
2. Title of the work, italicized if work is independent, or in quotation marks if work is part of a larger work.
3. Title of website the source appears on, italicized (if different than in step 2).
4. Version of edition (if applicable).
5. Publisher or sponsor of the site; if none given, put *N.p.*
6. Date of publication; if none given, put *n.d.*
7. Medium of publication: *web*
8. Date of when you viewed site (day, month, and year)

Devor, A.H. "How Many Sexes? How Many Genders? When Two Are Not Enough." *University of Victoria*. Univ. Victoria, 29 June 2007. Web. 7 May 2009.

"Transexualism." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 13 June 2009. Web. 15 June 2009.

### **Sources from subscription service or database**

For a journal article from a database accessed on-line (usually through a university library), start the works cited entry as if you were citing an article in a print journal. After the original print information, provide the italicized name of the database, its publication information, the medium of publication (*Web*), and the date you accessed it. See page 1691 of *Literature and Its Writers* for more.