

Student Name

Instructor

Class

2 Aug. 2009

Formatting a Paper in MLA Style with Footnotes

The format of your paper shows your instructor that you are intelligent, organized and that you care enough to make your work look good. All you have to do is follow the instructions in countless guides on how to format an MLA paper. Traditional MLA style calls for parenthetical references; however, some instructors prefer footnotes. Luckily, most word processing programs make adding footnotes easy. This guide gives written directions and shows how a well formatted paper with footnotes should look. Follow these guidelines for your footnoted paper in MLA style unless your instructor tells you otherwise.

Your papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins on the top, bottom, left and right. Use 10, 11 or 12 point font in Times New Roman or another easy to read font. The first line of each paragraph should be indented five spaces with no extra spaces between paragraphs. There should be one space after every period. Every page of your paper should have a header on the top right-hand corner of the page. The header should appear half an inch from the top of the sheet and should include your last name and the page number. A heading with your name, instructor, course and date should be on the top left-hand corner of the first page. Ask your instructor to confirm what information is needed in the heading. If your instructor wants a cover page, ask whether you also need the heading. The title of the paper follows the heading. There should be a double-space between the last line of the heading and the title and a double-space between the title and the first line of the text of your paper.

Ensure that all of the information you have cited from other sources is properly documented. Take good notes that include the name and page number for the source you used.¹ Remember, ideas can be plagiarized so even those things that you paraphrase from outside sources must be cited with a footnote as shown here.² Remember, footnotes are an alternative to parenthetical references. A footnote tells your reader that the information indicated has been paraphrased or quoted from an outside source. The number indicates which note you are referring to (see the bottom of this page). Number the footnotes consecutively starting with 1 using a superscript number. Most word processing programs will automatically insert footnotes and format them correctly.³ As you can see from the footnotes shown here, the information from the citation in the works cited is simply rearranged and repeated to create the footnote. Even though the information is the same, a footnote does not replace the Works Cited page at the end of your paper unless your instructor so indicates. For additional examples from a number of different types of sources consult Appendix B in the *MLA Handbook*.

The first note for any given source contains all of the information from the works cited entry. The second and subsequent notes from the same source need only include the author's name and the appropriate page number.⁴ If you have two sources by the same author the second and subsequent notes should include the author's name, a shortened version of the title as well as the page number.⁵ All notes for unsigned books or articles start with the underlined (for a book) or quoted (for an article) title of the work.⁶ The second and subsequent notes for unsigned

¹ Minerva McGonagal, *Transfiguring a Badly Formatted Paper into a Work of Art: MLA Style* (Diagon Alley, UK: Flourish and Blotts Books, 2002) 45.

² Albus Dumbledore, *Teaching Hogwarts Students Proper Citation Methods* (Hogsmeade: Magic Wand, 2003) 76.

³ Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th ed., (New York: MLA, 2003) 298.

⁴ Dumbledore 78.

⁵ McGonagal, *Transfiguring*, 76.

⁶ "The Magic of Parenthetical References." *Witch Weekly* 20 Nov. 2003: 34.

articles should include one or two keywords from the title and the page number.⁷

Sometimes as you are writing you discover passages that are difficult to paraphrase. In these cases you would use all of the author's words as a direct quote and enclose them in quotation marks. If you are simply quoting a few words from an outside source just "work it into your sentence and add the footnote at the end".⁸ If you use more than four lines for a direct quote these must be indented ten spaces; this is called a "block quote". See the example below.

This is how a direct quote should look in the format of your paper. Make sure you use them sparingly since your instructor does not want to read the words of another writer. He/she wants to know what you think. Too many quotes could indicate that you have not thought your topic through. Make sure you choose your quotes carefully. Make sure to cite the author of the quote in your footnote.⁹

Your footnotes are alphabetically tied to your works cited page. Make sure that all the references in your paper are listed in both your works cited and in the footnotes. Also you should not put any references in your works cited that have not been footnoted in the body of your paper.

Strict MLA Style says that your works cited page should be double spaced just like the rest of your paper. Make sure to ask your instructor what he/she prefers since some instructors prefer that you single-space each citation but double-space between citations.¹⁰ Your works cited page should have the same header as the rest of your paper and have the title "Works Cited" centered on the first line. Each citation begins at the left margin with subsequent lines indented five spaces. This is called a "hanging indent." All citations should be arranged alphabetically by

⁷ "Magic" 35.

⁸ Minerva McGonagle, *MLA Style: It's Not Just for Muggles Anymore* (Diagon Alley, UK: Flourish and Blotts Books, 2000) 55.

⁹ McGonagal, *Transfiguring*, 45.

¹⁰ McGonagle, *MLA Style*, 56.

their first word, usually the first author's last name.¹¹ Citations should never be numbered unless your instructor tells you to do so. Do not attempt to memorize the elements in a citation. Refer to library handouts, a grammar book or the *MLA Handbook* to ensure that your citation is complete.

When you are compiling your research paper, it is generally easier if you complete your works cited first. Then, you are able to use the works cited to complete your footnotes in the body of the paper. Once you have perfected the format of your paper and your citations, be sure to verify your content. Read the directions for your assignment carefully and make sure you have met all the requirements. Check for grammar and spelling and make sure that you have complete sentences and no run-ons. When you've finished, have at least one other person proofread it.

Using the guidelines explained by this essay, you should produce an MLA formatted paper. Of course, always verify that your instructor will accept this format. For detailed explanations on grammar, paraphrasing, and content consult with your instructor. Librarians at any of the campuses can help you with footnotes and with constructing specific citations. The MLA Citation handout, located at any of the campus libraries or on the website at <<http://www.lsc.edu/library/guides/mlacite.pdf>>, will give you specific examples for many of the different types of sources you will use in your papers. Also, consult *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 8th edition by Joseph Gibaldi for more information ("MLA Citation").¹²

¹¹ Filius Flitwick, "Charming Your Works Cited Page," *The Daily Prophet* 30 June 2005: 10, *Academic Search Complete*, Web, 24 July 2006.

¹² "MLA Citation," Research Guides. Lake-Sumter Community College Libraries, Web, 24 July 2006.

Works Cited

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