

MLA In-Text Citations Overview

In-text citations are brief parenthetical references in the body of your work. They should be used whenever you use another author's words, facts, or ideas. All in-text citations will have a complete citation listed alphabetically in the Works Cited page.

The MLA uses an Author-Page Number format for in-text citations. (*Example: Weston 22*). This allows readers to look up the full citation listed in the Works Cited page and find the exact page of the quote or idea used. There are some exceptions to this rule, but for the most part you should always cite both the author and page number of any source materials used in your paper.

Ellipses

Prose

If simply quoting a word or phrase that is grammatically correct within your sentence, it will be obvious that you left out some of the original source:

In the opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen says it is “a truth universally acknowledged” that all single men with money want to find a wife (1).

If your quotation is longer, however, and you leave out pieces of the original source, you must use an ellipsis (three spaced periods with a space on either side) to indicate that your quotation does not completely reproduce the original:

Austen goes on to emphasize the entrenchment of this social norm by observing that, “this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of . . . their daughters” (1).

The same rule applies if the piece you omit is at the end of your sentence:

In discussing *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Manora notes that “during this period, Black women were consigned to a particular place in the social order . . .” (364).

If you omit the end of a sentence and your quotation continues past the omission, however, or if you omit an entire sentence, you must include a fourth period:

Manora goes on to discuss other scholars' take on Angelou's novel: “Sondra O'Neale is one early Angelou scholar whose scholarship centered upon the way race and gender intersect . . . She credits Angelou with . . . combating negative stereotypes that prevail in the cultural imagination” (365).

Poetry

For the most part, the rules for omission and using an ellipsis are the same for prose and poetry. When omitting one or more entire line(s), however, you must use a line of spaced periods approximately the length of a complete line of the quoted poem:

Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" is rich in evocative detail:

In Worcester, Massachusetts,
I went with Aunt Consuelo
to keep her dentist's appointment
.....
It was winter. It got dark
early. (1-3, 6-7)

Direct Quote

Quoted material should be reproduced word-for-word and exactly as it appears in the original source. Unless you indicate a change in brackets or parentheses, changes must not be made in spelling, capitalization, or interior punctuation.

Include the author's last name and page number(s). Only use the page number(s) themselves; **do not** include any abbreviations for 'page' such as 'pg.' or 'p.'

Prose

If the quote is under four lines long, it should be incorporated into the text and enclosed using quotation marks. You may include the author's name within your text or within the in-text citation:

Author Incorporated into Text

Harper Lee writes as the character Atticus Fitch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, giving advice to his young daughter in the famous line, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" (36).

Author After Quotation

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" (Lee 36).

Poetry

If the quote is part of all of a single line of poetry, it can be incorporated into the text and enclosed using quotation marks. You may also include two or three lines in this same way, but you must use a slash mark (/) with a space on each side to separate the lines. You may include the author's name within your text or within the in-text citation:

Author Incorporated into Text

In the poem "Song of Myself," part of the *Leaves of Grass* collection, Walt Whitman writes, "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then.... I contradict myself; / I am large....I contain multitudes" (1315-1318).

Author After Quotation

"Do I contradict myself? / Very well then.... I contradict myself; / I am large....I contain multitudes" (Whitman 1315-1318).

Block Quote

The block quote is used for direct quotations that are longer than four lines of prose, or longer than three lines of poetry. A block quote is always used when quoting dialogue between characters, as in a play.

The block format is a freestanding quote that does not include quotation marks. Introduce the block quote with a colon (unless the context of your quote requires different punctuation) and start it on a new line. Indent the entire quote 1-inch from the left margin and double-space it (even if the rest of your paper is not double-spaced). Include the page number at the end of your block quote outside of the ending period. Also include the author's last name, date of publication, and page number(s)/paragraph number.

Prose

If you quote a single paragraph (or just part of one), do not indent the first line of the block quote more than the rest:

It is not until near the end of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that the hound itself is actually seen:

A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog. (Doyle 82)

If you quote two or more paragraphs, indent the first line of each paragraph an additional ¼ inch. However, if the first sentence quoted does not begin a paragraph in the source, do not indent it the additional amount, only indent the subsequent paragraphs. Here is an example where the first sentence is the beginning of a paragraph:

In the aftermath of the hound sighting, Sherlock Holmes keeps his cool:

Sir Henry lay insensible where he had fallen. We tore away his collar, and Holmes breathed a prayer of gratitude when we saw that there was no sign of a wound and that the rescue had been in time. Already our friend's eyelids shivered and he made a feeble effort to move. Lestrade thrust his brandy-flask between the baronet's teeth, and two frightened eyes were looking up at us.

"My God!" he whispered. "What was it? What, in heaven's name, was it?"

"It's dead, whatever it is," said Holmes. (Doyle 82)

Poetry

Just as for prose, poetry block quotations (3+ lines) should begin on a new line. Unless the quotation involves unusual spacing, format it as you would prose: indent each line one-inch from margin and double-space the lines. Do not add any quotation marks that do not appear in the source:

Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "To John Oliver Killens in 1975" addresses another African American writer of the day:

John,

look at our mercy, the massiveness that it is not.

look at our “unity,” look at our

“black solidarity.”

Dim, dull, and dainty. (1-5)

A line of poetry in a block quote that is too long to fit within the right margin of the page should be continued on the next line and indented an additional ¼ inch:

Allen Ginsberg’s famous poem “Howl” begins:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo
in the machinery of night, (9)

Drama

When quoting dialogue from a play, begin each part with the appropriate character’s name indented 1-inch from the left margin and written in all capital letters followed by a period. Then, start the quotation and indent all subsequent lines an additional ¼ inch. In the parenthetical reference at the end of the quote, include the act, scene, and line(s) of your quote, instead of the page number(s):

At the beginning of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, chaos erupts on a ship at sea before the cast of characters ends up on Prospero’s island:

MARINERS. All lost! to prayers, to prayers! all lost!

BOATSWAIN. What, must our mouths be cold?

GONZALO. The king and prince at prayers! let’s assist them,

For our case is as theirs.

SEBASTIAN. I’m out of patience.

ANTONIO. We are merely cheated of our lives by drunkards:

If you do use an indirect source in your paper, name the original source in your text and include the indirect source in your parenthetical citation. If what you quote or paraphrase from the indirect source is itself a quotation, put the abbreviation 'qtd. in' ("quoted in") before the indirect source in the parenthetical citation.

In the following example, Jane Austen is the original source, and Segal is the indirect source, given in the reference page:

In her article, Segal discusses how Jane Austen introduces many of her characters in terms of their financial situation. For instance, in the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility* Austen introduces us to the Dashwoods by saying, "The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large..." (qtd. in Segal 252).

Multiple Authors

See examples below to learn about how multiple authors for one work are handled in MLA parenthetical citations.

1 Author

Include author's last name and the page number (no comma in between the two components) in parentheses:

(Author 75)

2 Authors

Include last name of both authors, separated by a comma and the word 'and', and the page number (no comma in between the second name and the page number) in parentheses.

(Author1, and Author2 75)

3+ Authors

Follow the form in the library catalog or other database where you found the work: either give the first author's last name followed by 'et al.' and the page number, without any punctuation in between, or give the last name of each author, separate by a comma and the word 'and' preceding the last author name, and the page number.

(Author1 et al. 75)

(Author1, Author2, and Author3 75)

No Author

If no author is given or a work is anonymous, cite the work by its title. Use the full title if it is brief or a shortened version if it is longer. When abbreviating a title, begin with the word by which it is alphabetized:

A Glossary of Literary Terms Used in Nineteenth Century Literary Criticism becomes *Glossary of Literary Terms*

If the title of the work is already used in your text, simply include the page number in your parenthetical citation.

In-text Exceptions

There are few exceptions to the Author-Page Number format for in-text citations that are worthy of note:

Authors With the Same Name

If your paper uses sources that include more than one author with the same last name, you must add the first initial to your in-text citations, or, if the initial is shared too, you must add the full first name.

When to Omit the Page Number

You may omit the page number in an in-text citation when you are citing the complete work, or if you are citing a quote from a one-page work.

If you are citing a work that does not have page numbers (e.g. films, television broadcasts, electronic sources with no pagination), include paragraph numbers if applicable, or simply cite the whole work.

Common Works

When citing a common work of literature – one that is commonly studied and is available in various editions and versions – it is helpful to give information other than, or in addition to, the page number. This additional information, such as a book, chapter, verse, part, etc. will help your readers find your source in any edition of the work they happen to have. Examples of common works include Homer's *Iliad*, any of Shakespeare's plays, the Bible, etc.