



1853

Baker University

School of Professional & Graduate Studies

MLA Style Guide

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Getting Started

Introduction

- Grab his or her attention in the first paragraph.

Thesis

- Your paper “proves” a thesis, a one or two sentence statement of your central idea. The thesis is usually placed at the end of the first paragraph, immediately after you introduce the topic.
- Although the thesis appears early in the paper, it is usually written late in the writing process, after you form your ideas and gather your supporting evidence.

Body

- The body of your paper contains the evidence (specific examples and application) to support your thesis.
- State viewpoints that oppose yours as effectively as you state your own. Remember HEAP--Honest Evaluation of Alternate Positions.

Conclusion

- The conclusion is the last chance the writer has to connect with the reader. A conclusion summarizes the paper’s main points with a sense of closure and completeness.
- Summarize and/or conclude your paper in a way that helps the reader evaluate whether or not you did what you said you would do.
- **Do not introduce any new material.** Include a “killer” statement in the conclusion that leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind that you prove your thesis. Summarize the main ideas of the specific thesis and apply the main ideas of the body to the “bigger picture.”
- Help the reader by demonstrating to her or him that you have done what you said you would do in your purpose statement.
- Make it memorable.
- Ask yourself “So what?” and then make sure you have answered the question!

Revision

- Good writing entails several drafts and numerous revisions
- “Three before me.” When you are satisfied with your paper, run spell and grammar checks, check the formatting and MLA Style, then give it to at least three other persons to read and edit.
- Joe Average should understand your paper. On the one hand, do not insult his intelligence. On the other hand, do not lead him to doubt your intelligence.
- Always write with respect for the reader.

The Basics

How should your paper look?

- All papers need a title. Include the title centered at the top of the first page, right below the header.
- Type or print on one side of standard 8.5 x 11 inch paper.
- Double-space ALL lines of the paper, including the heading and the title.
- Use either a ten or twelve point font size.
- Do not include a title page unless specifically requested by the instructor.
- Use a heading located on the left side of your first page.
- Use a header that includes your last name and the page number in the upper right-hand corner of each page.
- The right-hand margin should not be justified.
- Set ALL margins to 1 inch.
- Indent the first word of each paragraph one half-inch.

Paragraph Length

- A paragraph should have at least two sentences.
- When a paragraph exceeds five or six sentences, think about subdividing it.
- Paragraphs in the body of the paper should be approximately the same length.

The Basics

Sample Paper

pudding 1

Albert J. Pudding

Professor Bluegum

SOS 4552 (course number--not title)

1 September 2004 (day month year)

Your Title should be Centered

My first paragraph starts now. Note the indentation. The first thing I will do is capture my reader's attention. Then I will introduce the topic. The last thing in this first paragraph is the thesis statement. I want the reader to know my point!

Abbreviations

- Use abbreviations in the list of works cited and in tables; do not abbreviate within the text of a research paper except within parentheses.
- When abbreviating, keep these guidelines in mind:
 - Do not begin a sentence with a lower case abbreviation.
 - Common abbreviations such as etc., e.g., and i.e. may be used only in parenthesis. Example: In the text, write and so forth (etc.); that is (i.e.); for example (e.g.)
 - In the text, spell out the names of countries, states, counties, provinces, territories, bodies of water, mountains.
 - When writing initials add a single space after each letter. Example: J. S. Bach, Charles L. Grant.

Acronyms

- Do not use periods after letters and spaces between letters.
- If an acronym is commonly used as a word, it does not require explanation (IQ, LSD, FBI, ESP).
- A term must be fully written the first time it is used, with the acronym in parentheses behind it; for any subsequent references, the acronym is acceptable. Example: International Brotherhood of Magicians (IBM).
- Write the plural form of an acronym without an apostrophe. Example: Their DVDs cost too much.

Capitalization

- Heading caps: Capitalize the first words, last words, principal words in titles, and subtitles.

Italics

- Italicize titles of independently published sources (books, periodicals, DVDs, etc...).

Tense

- Write about literature in the present tense.
- Generally, present tense is preferred.
- Be careful not to switch between tenses.
- Use present tense when the condition is ongoing.

Style

Verb tenses within a paragraph

- Generally, keep verb tenses within a paragraph consistent.
- Switching verb tenses often signals communication of a new idea.
- Such communication will often be facilitated by beginning a new paragraph.

Subject and Verb Agreement

The number of the subject determines the number of the verb.

Her list of Piaget's stages of development, including the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages, were incomplete. (Wrong)

Her list of Piaget's stages of development, including the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages, was incomplete. (Right)

Break down the sentence to understand which verb is correct:

Her list ... were incomplete. (Wrong)

Her list ... was incomplete. (Right)

The demonstrative pronoun "This" typically requires a noun.

This is incorrect.

(Wrong)

These were incorrect.

This statement is incorrect.

(Right)

These items were incorrect.

Pronoun Antecedent Disagreement

Everyone submitted their own paper. (Wrong)

Everyone submitted his or her own paper. (Right)

Everyone is singular; therefore, the modifying pronoun should be singular.

- Other words that are singular include: each, someone, nobody, anybody.
- Companies are singular: Starbucks, Coca Cola, Wal-mart. Refer to these companies as it, or the company.
- The use of “he” to embrace both genders used to be a conventional tool to avoid the awkwardness of using both “he and she,” “his or her.”

Sensitivity to sexist language today precludes the use of such conventions. One way to avoid the awkwardness is to use the plural:

The writer must address his or her readers' concerns.

Writers must address their readers' concerns.

That and which

The book that I want is on the table.

The book, which I want, is on the table.

The use of “which” typically requires a comma. The use of “that” does not typically require a comma.

Style

Active/Passive Voice

- When possible, choose active voice.
- Passive voice is less precise and more confusing.

Mike drove the car. (Active)

The car was driven by Mike. (Passive)

- Avoid passive voice. Avoid using the “to be” verbs – am, is, are, was, were, have, has, had, be, being, been. Restructure sentences to avoid “to be” verbs and “of.”

Word Splurge

- Wordiness impedes clarity.
- Why use ten words when three words will do?
- Treat words like money. Do not spend more than is absolutely necessary.
- Be succinct.

Use of Person in Writing

- Academic writing typically uses the third person, except in direct quotations.
- Use of the first person “I” is traditionally seen as a violation of the quest for objectivity. There are, however, exceptions (e.g., qualitative research reports). In any event, the first person should not be overused.
- Avoid using second person (“you”) in academic writing.
- Use who for people; that for things.

Works Cited

Why works cited? Basically, your paper should be all about ease of reading. Use a Works Cited page to list only those works you actually cite in your paper. In other words, if you write it, cite it!

The Works Cited list appears at the end of the paper.

- Begin the list on a new page.
- Center the words *Works Cited* at the top of the page.
- Double space everything.
- Each entry should be aligned left. If a second line is needed for an entry, the line should be indented one half inch (it's called a hanging indent).

Citing

- List entries alphabetically according to the author's last name. If no author is noted, begin with the title.
- Think of your research paper as a team effort between you and your sources.
- It's very simple: when in doubt, cite. That's an ideal way to avoid plagiarism, which can result in hefty disciplinary action, including administrative withdrawal from the program. Here's the drill:
 - Indicate your source with a signal phrase.
 - Cite the material in quotes, unless the length exceeds 4 lines.
 - Follow the citation with a page number in parentheses.
 - At the end of the paper list the source in your Works Cited page.

In text citations

- Use only the author's last name followed by a page number (Lindsey 16).
- Do not include the date of publication. Do not include a comma. Do not include an abbreviation for page.

Each of these examples is incorrect:

(Lindsey, 16)

(Lindsey, 1918, p 16)

Works Cited

Quotes within quotes

- When using a quotation the author has also quoted, use quotation marks and cite as follows: “The dog ate my paper” (qtd. In Lindsey 35).

Signal Phrase

- Provide a clear signal phrase to alert your reader that a quotation will follow.
For example:

Norman Lindsey, author of the Australian literary classic *The Magic Pudding*, claims “....”

In-text Citation

- Use parenthetical documentation within the paper rather than footnotes at the bottom.
For example:

Norman Lindsey, in his work *The Magic Pudding*, writes that “humor’s humor” (5)

Notice that in this example the author is not in the parenthesis because his name is included in the sentence. If, however, the author’s name does not appear in the sentence, then his name would be added to the documentation as follows:

In *The Magic Pudding*, the author asserts that “humor’s humor” (Lindsey 5).

If more than one work by Norman Lindsey will be discussed, then add the title of the work to the documentation:

Lindsey asserts that “humor’s humor (Lindsey, *The Magic Pudding* 5).

Note in every case that the period is included after the parentheses.

- Indent a quote of four lines or more; do not use quotation marks. Place the period after the quote, not after the parenthesis:

The third disturbance due to Bill’s suspicions occurred while Bunyip Bluegum was in a grocer’s shop. In Bunyip hadn’t been in the shop, as was pointed out afterwards, the trouble wouldn’t have occurred. (Lindsey 92)

Works Cited

Follow this order:

Author(s) Title of Book Title of Article Title of Periodical Volume Place of Publication Publisher Date Other Information Pages Medium	Don't know the author? <i>If you don't know the author of a website article, don't make something up! Start with the TITLE of the actual webpage you are citing.</i>
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Book

2009 update: Book citations remain relatively the same with the exception of italicizing the title and adding the medium of publication at the end:

Bernardin, H. John. *Human Resource Management: An Experiential Approach.* 5th ed.

Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2009. Print.

Scholarly Publication

Scholarly publications include both volume and issue numbers, and the medium of publication at the end:

Wilcox, Rhonda V. "Shifting Roles and Synthetic Women in Star Trek: The Next

Generation." *Studies In Popular Culture* 13.2 (1991): 53-65. Print.

Newspaper or Magazine Article

Di Rado, Alicia. "Trekking through College: Classes Explore Modern Society Using the

World of Star Trek." *Los Angeles Times* 15 Mar. 1995: A3 Print.

**If the article is not printed on consecutive pages, write only the first page number and a plus sign, leaving no intervening space.

Silver, Robert. "Peanut Butter in the New Age." *Discover* Mar. 1995: 180+. Print.

Works Cited

Book Article or Chapter

James, Nancy E. "Two Sides of Paradise: The Eden Myth According to Kirk and Spock." *Spectrum of the Fantastic*. Ed. Donald Palumbo. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988. 219-223. Print.

Encyclopedia Article (well known reference books)

Sturgeon, Theodore. "Science Fiction." *The Encyclopedia Americana*. International ed. 1995. Print.

Encyclopedia Article (less familiar reference books)

Horn, Maurice. "Flash Gordon." *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*. Ed. Maurice Horn. 2 vols. New York: Chelsea, 1976. Print.

Literature Resource Center

Shayon, Robert Lewis. "The Interplanetary Spock." *Saturday Review* 17 June 1967: 46. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Sharon R. Gunton. Vol. 17. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981. 403. *Literature Resource Center*. Gale Group. B. Davis Schwartz Memorial Lib., Brookville, NY. Web. 16 Oct. 2001.

Gale Reference Book (and other books featuring reprinted articles)

Shayon, Robert Lewis. "The Interplanetary Spock." *Saturday Review* 17 June 1967. 46. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Sharon R. Gunton. Vol. 17. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981. 403. Print.

Works Cited

Online Periodical

Include the name of the website in italics and the website publisher. If there is not publisher listed use n.p. Follow the publication date with Web as a medium of publication and then the date accessed.

Lubell, Sam. "Of The Sea and Air and Sky." *New York Times*. New York Times, 26 Nov. 2008. Web. 27 August 2009.

Online Database or Scholarly Journal Article

Cite online journal articles found in a database the same as you would cite print articles. The database name is italicized and library information is no longer required. List the medium of access as Web and follow it with the date accessed.

Berger, James D. and Helmut J. Schmidt. "The Deregulation of DNA Content in the Human Genome." *The Journal of Cell Biology* 53.1 (1978): 116-126. JSTOR. Web. 27 Aug. 2009.

Website

Lynch, Tim. "DSN Trials and Tribble-ations Review." *Psi Phi: Bradley's Science Fiction Club*. 1996. Web. 8 Oct. 1997.

**Include the date the site went online AND the date you accessed the site.

Newspaper or Magazine Article on the Internet

Andreadis, Athena. "The Enterprise Finds Twin Earths Everywhere It Goes, But Future Colonizers of Distant Planets Won't Be So Lucky." *Astronomy* Jan. 1999: 64-. *Academic Universe. Lexis-Nexis*. Web. 7 Feb. 1999.

Works Cited

Online-only Publication

For articles that appear in an online-only format or in a database that omits page numbers, use the abbreviation n. pag. for no pagination. The citation will end with the medium of publication and the date accessed.

Andreadis, Athena. “**The Enterprise Finds Twin Earths Everywhere It Goes, But Future**

Colonizers of Distant Planets Won’t Be So Lucky.” *Science and Society* 5.2

(2009): n. pag. Web. 27 Aug. 2009.

Online Scholarly Project:

Projects appear italicized. If the project is difficult to find you may list in quotation marks the website name and domain in italics. Publication location and the date follow. The medium of publication and date of access are at the end.

Jackson, Samuel, ed. *Geoffrey Chaucer Online: The Electronic Canterbury Tales.*

U. of College of London, 30 Jul. 2007. Web. 27 Aug. 2009.

No author on a Webpage?

Many websites don’t have authors that you can ascertain! Simply cite the title.

Cite the title of the webpage, NOT its URL.

Check out these online resources:

*<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

to help create your Works Cited list:

*<http://www.noodletools.com/>

for an online thesaurus:

*<http://thesaurus.reference.com>

for an online dictionary:

*<http://dictionary.reference.com>

to check your grammar and punctuation:

*<http://www.grammarstation.com>