

## BASICS OF MLA FORMATTING

### *Titles of Large Works*

In general, italicize the titles of works published independently. Titles to be underlined include the names of books, plays, long poems published as books, pamphlets, periodicals (newspapers, magazines, and journals), films, radio and television programs, compact discs, audiocassettes, record albums, ballets, operas and other long musical compositions, paintings, works of sculpture, ships, aircraft, and spacecraft.

*The Awakening* (book)  
*The Importance of Being Earnest* (play)  
*The Waste Land* (long poem published as a book)  
*New Jersey Driver Manual* (pamphlet)  
*Wall Street Journal* (newspaper)  
*It's a Wonderful Life* (film)

### *Titles of Shorter Works*

Use quotation marks for the titles of works published within larger works. Such titles include the names of articles, essays, short stories, short poems, chapters of books, individual episodes of television and radio programs, and short musical compositions (e.g., songs). Also use quotation marks for unpublished works, such as lectures and speeches.

“Rise in Aid to Education Is Proposed” (newspaper article)  
“Sources of Energy in the Next Century” (magazine article)  
“Etruscan” (encyclopedia article)  
“The Fiction of Langston Hughes” (essay in a book)  
“The Lottery” (short story)  
“Kubla Khan” (poem)

### *Quoting Sources*

Quotations are effective in research papers when used selectively. Quote only words, phrases, lines, and passages that are particularly interesting, vivid, unusual, or apt, and keep all quotations as brief as possible. Over-quotation can bore your readers and might lead them to conclude that you are neither an original thinker nor a skillful writer. The accuracy of quotations in research writing is extremely important. They must reproduce original sources exactly. Unless indicated in brackets or parentheses, changes must not be made in the spelling, capitalization, or interior punctuation of the source. You must construct a clear, grammatically correct sentence that allows you to introduce or incorporate a quotation with complete accuracy. Alternatively, you may paraphrase the original and quote only fragments, which may be easier to integrate into the text. If you change a quotation in any way, make the alteration clear to the reader, following the rules and recommendations below.

*Short Quotes (4 lines or less)*

If a prose quotation runs no more than four lines and requires no special emphasis, put it in quotation marks and incorporate it into the text.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” wrote Charles Dickens of the eighteenth century.

You need not always reproduce complete sentences. Sometimes you may want to quote just a word or phrase as part of your sentence.

For Charles Dickens the eighteenth century was both “the best of times” and “the worst of times.”

You may put a quotation at the beginning, middle, or end of your sentence or, for the sake of variety or better style, divide it by your own words.

Joseph Conrad writes of the company manager in *Heart of Darkness*, “He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect.”

If a quotation ending a sentence requires a parenthetical reference, place the sentence period after the reference.

For Charles Dickens the eighteenth century was both “the best of times” and “the worst of times” (35).

*Long Quotes (more than four lines)*

If a quotation runs to more than four lines in your paper, set it off from your text by beginning a new line, indenting one inch (or ten spaces if you are using a typewriter) from the left margin, and typing it double-spaced, without adding quotation marks. A colon generally introduces a quotation displayed in this way, though sometimes the context may require a different mark of punctuation or none at all. If you quote only a single paragraph or part of one, do not indent the first line more than the rest. A parenthetical reference to a prose quotation set off from the text follows the last line of the quotation.

At the conclusion of *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph and the other boys realize the horror of their actions:

The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. (186)

*Quoting Poetry*

If you quote part or all of a single line of verse that does not require special emphasis, put it in quotation marks within your text. You may also incorporate two or three lines in this way, using a slash with a space on each side (*I*) to separate them.

Bradstreet frames the poem with a sense of mortality:

“All things within this fading world hath end” (1).

Reflecting on the “incident” in Baltimore, Cullen concludes. “Of all the things that happened there / That’s all that I remember” (11-12).

Verse quotations of more than three lines should begin on a new line. Unless the quotation involves unusual spacing, indent each line one inch (or ten spaces on a typewriter) from the left margin and double-space between lines, adding no quotation marks that do not appear in the original. A parenthetical reference for a verse quotation set off from the text follows the last line of the quotation (as in quotations of prose); a parenthetical reference that will not fit on the line should appear on a new line, flush with the right margin of the page.

Elizabeth Bishop’s “In the Waiting Room” is rich in evocative detail:

*It was winter. It got dark early. The waiting room  
was full of grown-up people, arctics and overcoats.  
lamps and magazines. (6-10)*

*Citing and Attribution*

In MLA documentation style, you acknowledge your sources by keying brief parenthetical citations in your text to an alphabetical list of works that appears at the end of the paper. The parenthetical citation that concludes the following sentence is typical of MLA style.

Ancient writers attributed the invention of the monochord to Pythagoras, who lived in the sixth century BC (Marcuse 197).

The citation “(Marcuse 197)” tells readers that the information in the sentence was derived from page 197 of a work by an author named Marcuse. If readers want more information about this source, they can turn to the works-cited list, where, under the name Marcuse, they would find the following information.

Marcuse, Sibyl. *A Survey of Musical Instruments*. New York: Harper, 1975.

On a separate page, after the text of your paper, on a separate page, center, bold, and put in caps the phrase **WORKS CITED**. Under this list the works mentioned or quoted from in the paper, arranging them alphabetically by author.