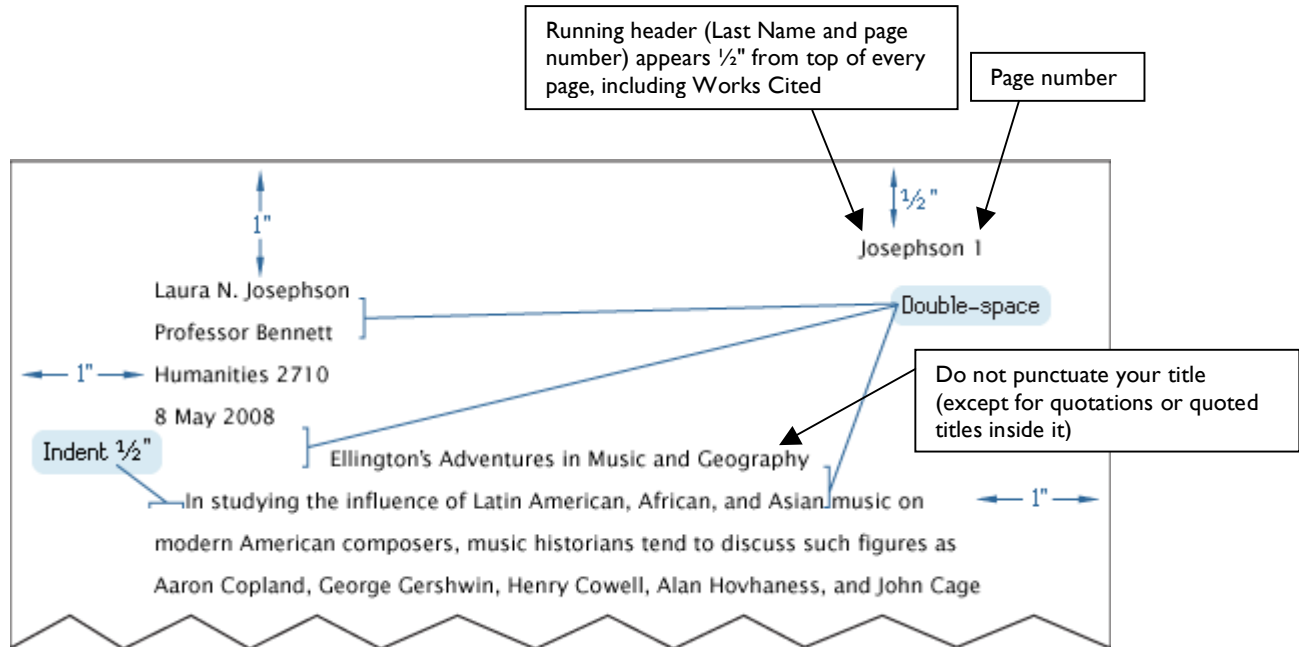


# Basics of MLA Formatting (09-5a)

**Format the page correctly.** Use the diagram below as a guideline. Use a standard font (e.g., Arial, Times), 11- or 12-point, in black ink on white or off-white paper, with a 1" margin all around. Double-space the entire essay (although you may adjust the margins and spacing slightly to avoid wasting paper).



**Create an original title for your paper.** Do not call it "William Shakespeare" (or whatever your subject is). Ideally, your title should at least give a hint as to what your main idea is. And do not underline it, italicize it, or put quotation marks around it (unless it contains a quotation or another title within it).

**Use appropriate sources.** This is a research assignment, not a "cut-and-paste-off-the-Internet" assignment. You should rely *at least* as much on printed sources as on online-only sources. Avoid amateur sites, promotional and/or commercial sites, "idiot's guide" sites like Sparknotes, and open-source sites like Wikipedia. Above all, do NOT use so-called "essay bank" sites which claim to do the research for you.

**Include source references in your text.** It is better to refer to your source openly in your text, rather than hide it away in a parenthesis. Include a *signal phrase* indicating the source of the reference (author, title, and type of document). Put the end punctuation *after* the parenthetical source reference.

- GOOD:** President Reagan cut the housing budget from \$30 billion in 1981 to \$7.3 billion in 1987 (Matthews 58).
- BETTER:** In his book *No Need for Hunger*, Robert Matthews reports that President Reagan cut the housing budget from \$30 billion in 1981 to \$7.3 billion in 1987 (58).
- Labels: end punctuation, signal phrase, end punctuation

**Only quote material that is worth quoting:** Quote directly if the information is unique to that source, or the phrasing is especially articulate, vivid, or interesting. Otherwise, paraphrase the information in your own words – but be sure to cite the source either way!

**Weave in quotations.** When you quote, rather than paraphrase, a source of information, make sure the quotation fits grammatically into your own sentence. If you don't know how to *integrate*, or "weave in," quotations, learn now. (All three examples below integrate the quotations correctly.)

**Do not use a URL (Internet address) as the name of your source reference.**

- WRONG:** Alice Walker preserved "her sense of rootedness in the South" (<http://voices.cla.umn.edu>).
- BETTER:** Alice Walker preserved "her sense of rootedness in the South" (McNaron).
- BEST:** Toni McNaron, on the website *Voices from the Gap: Women Writers of Color*, notes Alice Walker's ability to preserve "her sense of rootedness in the South."
- Label: signal phrase

**Punctuate quotations correctly.** In the U.S., we use double quotation marks (“ ”) for the first level of quoted material (even if the quotation consists of a single word). To indicate “nested” quotations (quotations within quotations), alternate pairs of double and single quotation marks:

According to Steven Ledbetter in his essay “Songs of Love and Death,” music students in the Renaissance had to “produce a book of madrigals as a ‘graduation piece’ to demonstrate their mastery” (8).

**Use “block indentation.”** If a quotation runs to more than three lines in your paper, set it off from your text by beginning a new line, indenting one inch from the left margin. Do NOT put quotation marks around a block-indented quotation. (You may single-space the quotation if you wish.) A colon usually introduces a block-indented quotation. If quoting a passage including dialogue or lines of poetry, preserve the original text’s paragraph breaks (for dialogue) or line breaks (of poetry).

**Punctuate titles correctly.** Titles of longer or major works are either underlined or *italicized* (just be consistent throughout your essay); titles of shorter works are indicated with “quotation marks.” Novels, multi-act plays, book-length poems, movies, television series, music albums, and paintings are major works; stories, essays, songs, and chapters are shorter works.

Bob Dylan’s song “Like a Rolling Stone,” from the album Highway 61 Revisited, was rumored to be about the debutante and Warhol hanger-on Edie Sedgwick.

Picasso created his anti-war painting Guernica to arouse resistance to the Spanish Fascist forces.

**Format your Works Cited page correctly.** If you do not include a Works Cited page, you will not receive a grade for the assignment. If your Works Cited page includes any works which you have *not* actually cited by *author* or *title in the text of your essay*, they will be crossed off your Works Cited page. In order to receive a passing grade, your essay must have a *minimum* number (set by your teacher) of different, legitimate sources.

- Center the title - Works Cited - one inch from the top. Double space before the first entry.
- Use a hanging indent for each entry (i.e., begin each entry at the left margin, and indent additional lines 1/2-inch).
- Double-space each entry; also double-space between entries.
- List each entry **alphabetically** by the author’s last name. If there is no author, use the first word of the title (disregarding *A, An, The*).
- Identify the medium of the work: Print (at the end of the entry for printed works); Web (just before the date of access and the URL for online sources); or other applicable term (DVD, Radio broadcast, Interview, etc.) at the end of the entry.
- Do **not** number Works Cited entries.

**FORMAT TO USE FOR BOOKS:** Author’s last name, author’s first name. Title of book. City of publication, State (if necessary): Publisher’s name, year of publication. Print.

Gilson, Edith, and Susan Kane. Unnecessary Choices: The Hidden Life of the Executive Woman. New York: Morrow, 1987. Print.

**FORMAT TO USE FOR PERIODICAL ARTICLES:** Author’s last name, author’s first name. “Title of article.” Name of Periodical date of publication (in DD MMM YYYY format): page numbers of article. Print

Updike, John. “Poet On the Fault Line.” Review of Robert Frost: A Life, by Jay Parini. The New Yorker 15 Mar. 1999: 84-91. Print.

**FORMAT TO USE FOR INTERNET SITES:** Author’s last name, author’s first name (if given). “Title of Web Page or Article” (if part of a larger website). Title of Website. Parent site, institutional affiliation, etc. (if available). Date created (if given); date last modified or revised (if given). Web. Date visited <url> (website address).

McNaron, Toni. “Alice Walker: Biography – Criticism.” Voices from the Gap: Women Artists and Writers of Color. University of Minnesota. 08 July 1996; revised 20 Sep. 2004. Web. 20 Mar. 2005 <[http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/walker\\_alice.html#bio](http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/walker_alice.html#bio)>.

**Note:** If a website contains a database version of a printed source, include all the information for a traditional print-media source as well as Internet site information (parent site or institution; date created, date modified, date visited; url; etc.)

Wilford, John Noble. “Fossils Found in Spain Seen as Last Link to Great Apes.” New York Times 19 Nov. 2004. Web. 20 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/19/science/19ape.html>>.

For accepted format of other forms of publication (newspaper articles, works with multiple authors: unsigned works; CD-ROMs; etc.), see *Writers, Inc.*; the *MLA Handbook*; *The Chicago Manual of Style*; any one of dozens of websites which include guides to MLA bibliography format (several are listed on the Research Writing Guide); or talk to a librarian or your English teacher.