



Department of English Style Guide

(Based on the MLA Style Guide)

www.sfu.ca/english/styleguide

The SFU Department of English (like English departments at most universities in North America) requires all work to follow formatting guidelines developed by the **Modern Language Association**, or **MLA** for short. Some departments at SFU use other formatting guidelines, such as “APA style” or “Chicago style.”

At first, MLA style formatting may seem complicated. However, as you practice following the guidelines and gain familiarity with them, you will notice that your essays take on a scholarly appearance. Professional presentation creates favourable first impressions. Whatever attention you pay to formatting will bring immediate satisfaction and probably help your grade.

This guide will introduce you to MLA formatting. If you continue in English studies, you will want to purchase a writer’s handbook and study MLA style in greater detail.

General Formatting Principles

1. **Materials:** Papers should be printed on unlined 8 1/2” x 11” white paper. Use one side of the paper only.
2. **Identification:** Every written assignment you hand in should identify
 - a. you (name and student number)
 - b. the course number and instructor
 - c. the assignment, including due date

This information can be typed in the upper left corner of the first page, above the title. Or it can be below the title on a separate title page. Usually, title pages are for longer assignments, but ask whether your instructor has a preference.

3. **Title:** Your title should communicate the central idea of your paper, rather than merely refer to an assignment or tutorial number. It should be centred atop the opening page of your paper, written in capitals and lower case letters and should also appear on the title page if you use one. Do not underline or italicize or put quotation marks around your own title. However, italicize the title of a book or play that appears in your title and place double quotation marks around the title of an essay or short story that appears in your title.

Questioning Authority in Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage*

Death Imagery in “Ode to a Nightingale”

4. **Page numbering:** Do not number or count the title page, if you use one. The first page of text will be page 1. It may be numbered at the bottom centre, in the upper right corner, or left unnumbered. Subsequent pages should be numbered consecutively at the bottom centre or in the upper right corner of each page. Alternatively, you may include the page number at the end of a header (usually a short version of your title).
5. **Margins:** Top, bottom, and side margins should be one inch (2.4 cm).
6. **Spacing:** Double-space all papers. Traditionally, this spacing has included quotations, notes, and works cited. However, some instructors now save trees by asking students to 1.5 or double-space the main body of their essays and single-space footnotes and works cited. Find out your instructor's preference. Do not use extra spaces between paragraphs.
7. **Paragraphs:** The beginning of each paragraph should be indented one-half inch (1.2 cm) from the left margin (i.e., one tab stop, with the tabs set to one-half inch). It is preferable to use the paragraph formatting option on your computer.

Structure and Mechanics

1. **Openings:** Your opening focuses your reader's attention. After reading your opening paragraph (or at most, two paragraphs), your reader should know what your paper is about. You should indicate clearly your subject (e.g., author and title of the literary work you are discussing) so that your reader can anticipate the line of development the paper will follow.
2. **Headings:** MLA style permits headings and subheadings that indicate major sections of a paper. Major headings may be centred. Less important headings should occupy a line by themselves and be aligned left. Place lesser subheadings on the same line as the section they head (as with "Headings" at the beginning of this paragraph). Headings and subheadings are not numbered in MLA style.
3. **Endings:** Your ending should recall the most important concerns in your paper. Typically, endings confirm points made, include your main claims in their final form, and/or suggest implications. If you choose to summarize, check to see that your summary matches the line of development stated or implied in your opening — and that both match what actually happens in the body of your paper.
4. **Quotations:** When you quote, follow the exact wording, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling of the original. If you change anything within a quotation, even capitalization, place the changed part in square brackets to signal that it has been changed. If there is an error in the original quotation, do not correct it, but write *sic* (meaning "thus") in square brackets after the error. Likewise, place any other explanatory remark that you add to a quotation inside square brackets to show that it does not appear in the original. If you omit something from the middle of a quotation, use three spaced periods (. . .) to indicate the ellipsis. Square brackets around the spaced periods are optional [. . .]. If

the ellipsis occurs at the end of a sentence in the quoted material, or at the end of your own sentence, add a fourth period to end the sentence. Use single quotation marks to indicate a quotation within the larger quotation that you have placed inside double quotation marks; this is the only instance in which MLA uses single quotation marks. To repeat, MLA uses double quotation marks at all other times.

- a. Include within double quotation marks any prose quotation of fewer than forty words and any poetry quotation of two or fewer lines. When quoting two lines of poetry, indicate the division between the two lines with a slash (/) and retain all original capitalization.
- b. Indent any long quotation (over forty words of prose or more than two lines of poetry) instead of placing it in quotation marks. Indent the passage one inch (2.4 cm) from the left margin. When you indent a long passage, quotation marks become redundant; you should use them only if there is a quotation within the passage (in which case, use double quotation marks).

5. Other conventions: Use your writer's handbook to check punctuation, capitalization, usage, and grammar.

- a. **Titles:** The title of a book should be copied from the title page, using upper and lower case letters. Follow the original capitalization. Italicize the titles of books, plays, long poems, and periodicals. Place in double quotation marks titles of articles, essays, short stories, and individual poems published in collections. Similarly italicize or place within quotation marks any titles that appear within your title (or other headings).
- b. **Words as words:** Words being discussed are normally placed in double quotation marks, although, alternatively, you may italicize them. For example, "The word *ambiguity* is itself ambiguous because" You may also use double quotation marks (often called "scare quotes") to draw special attention to a word.
- c. **Names of people:** Omit formal titles, such as Dr., Professor, Ms. or Mr. when referring to authors, critics, or characters. Use first and surname when you introduce someone and the surname alone thereafter.
- d. **Numerals:** Spell out all numbers under one hundred and all larger numbers that appear as the first word in a sentence. You may want to spell out round numbers, e.g., six billion. Dates and page numbers are not spelled out.

6. Word processing: SFU provides excellent computer and printer facilities. You should locate some of these facilities, so that if you have problems with your home computer you can complete your work on campus, on time.

- a. Left align your work rather than using right justification, which makes reading more difficult; the resulting right hand margin should be jagged (as on this page),

not straight.

- b. Always use a Canadian spelling checker (but remember, it does *not* replace proofreading or a good dictionary).
- c. If possible, print your manuscript on a laser printer. If you use an older printer, be sure to print “letter quality” using a fresh ribbon.
- d. Collate (arrange) and staple or clip pages before submitting.
- e. Frequently back up your files onto a floppy disk.

References

When writing, scholars and students of literature support their ideas with direct references to a text – to the primary source in the form of summary, paraphrase, or quotations; or to a secondary source, with whom the writer is in agreement or disagreement; or, to other evidence. Your readers may wish to consult the original source to verify your accuracy or to evaluate the information in its original context. References give credit where credit is due and help direct other researchers to the original sources. You *must* inform your readers about your sources, and MLA style formatting provides clear, helpful ways to reference sources.

1. **What to reference:** You should reference any quotation, paraphrase, or information that is not common knowledge. You do not need to reference a familiar proverb (“You can’t judge a book by its cover”), a well-known quotation (“two solitudes”), or a generally known fact (Canada is a parliamentary democracy). But you do need to reference a paraphrased opinion. And you need to reference a fact if it is not part of your readers’ common knowledge or if it may be disputed.
2. **What to include in each reference:** References should give readers the information they need to locate your sources easily. Essentially that means
 - a. author
 - b. title
 - c. publication details

For each citation, you must indicate the page or pages on which the particular information or quotation can be located.

The publication details for a book include the place of publication, the name of the publisher, and the date. You should also indicate which edition you used (if other than the first) and the names of any translators or editors.

The publication details for an article include

- a. the name of the periodical, italicized
- b. the volume number and date
- c. the page numbers on which the article appears

If you cite a course handout or lecture, identify it as such if there is no formal title. Specify the course, location, and date as follows:

Morris, Janice. "Stephen Leacock: Friend or Foe?" *English 354: Canadian Literature to 1920*. Simon Fraser U, Burnaby, BC. 13 Feb. 2003.

Gerson, Carole. Lecture. *English 354: Canadian Literature to 1920*. Simon Fraser U, Burnaby, BC. 6 Feb. 2004.

- 3. Works Cited:** MLA style streamlines the information about your sources, placing only enough of this information in the main body of your essay to refer your readers to your list of "Works Cited," which appears at the end of your paper. The ideal arrangement identifies the author (and possibly the title of the work) in the flow of your sentence and then cites the appropriate page number or numbers in parentheses at the end of your sentence. For example:

In *Against Amnesia*, Nancy Peterson argues that "only literature in our culture is allowed the narrative flexibility and the willing suspension of disbelief that are crucial to the telling of histories" (7).

Note that there is no punctuation and no "p." prior to the page number or numbers. The goal is to keep the parenthetical references *as short as possible*. While you continue to discuss Peterson's work, you need cite only the page number or numbers.

If your list of "Works Cited" includes two or more works by the same author, you need to add a short title before the page number, so your readers will know which work you are citing. For example, if your sources include two works by Paul Budra:

Budra, Paul. "The Cilantro Cannot Hold: Postmodern Cuisine Beyond the Golden Arches." *Postmodern Times: A Critical Guide to the Contemporary*. Eds. Thomas Carmichael, Alison Lee, and Charles Jencks. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2000. 231-44.

—. *A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000.

and you have cited a passage on page 24 of *A Mirror for Magistrates*, your parenthetical reference would look like this (note the comma between author and title):

(Budra, *Mirror* 24).

MLA avoids Latin abbreviations like *ibid.* and *op.cit.* in parenthetical references. MLA abbreviates some words in the list of works cited, especially “UP” (for University Press), “Ed.” (for editor and edited by), “Eds.” (for editors and edited by), “Trans.” (for translated by), “Rpt.” (for reprinted in).

The following passage illustrates some common variations of parenthetical references. Note that the reference to Epps includes no page number (because the work cited is only one page). The reference to *Samson Agonistes* gives line numbers, not page numbers. The reference to Aristotle gives page numbers, but does not repeat Aristotle’s name (because it is already clear in the sentence):

Is *Samson Agonistes* a Tragedy?

John Milton consciously imitated Classical Greek tragedy when he composed *Samson Agonistes*. Even without Milton’s explicit introductory essay, *Samson Agonistes* “agrees with classical theory and practice” in its plot and structure, in its use of the chorus, in the ways it limits the scope of the action and confines itself to a single place and day, and in making *hubris* (excessive pride) “the ultimate cause of the tragedy” (Epps). Equally apparent is the intent of Milton’s closing lines,

His servants he with new aquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismiss
And calm of mind, all passion spent (ll. 1755-58)

to conform to Aristotle’s definition of the purpose of tragedy as “through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions” (34). The parallels with Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocle’s *Oedipus at Colonus* are clear, and the indebtedness to other Classical tragedies can be argued (Brewer 913, Baum 363, Bowra 114 ff., and Timberlake). Since 16 July 1751, however, when Samuel Johnson charged in *The Rambler* that *Samson Agonistes* “must be allowed to want a middle since nothing passes between the first act and the last that either hastens or delays the death of Samson,” there has been considerable debate about whether *Samson Agonistes* is essentially tragic (see Krouse 3-21 for a review of the relevant criticism).

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. S. H. Butcher. Rpt. *The Great Critics*. 3rd ed. Ed. J.H. Smith and E.W. Parks. New York: Norton, 1951. 25-61.
- Baum, Paul F. "Samson Agonistes Again." *PMLA* 36 (1921): 201-16. Brewer, William. "Two Athenian Models for *Samson Agonistes*." *PMLA* 42 (1927): 151-64.
- Bowra, C. M. *Inspiration and Poetry*. Folcroft, PA: Folcroft, 1955. Epps, P. H. "Two Notes on English Classicism." *Studies in Philology* 13 (1916): 196.
- Krouse, Michael F. *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1949.
- Timberlake, P. W. "Milton and Euripides." *The Parrot Presentation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1935.

Note that the list of "Works Cited" is arranged in alphabetical order. The three major components of each entry (author's name, title, details of publication) are each followed by a period. This bibliographic list gives your readers the information they need to find the sources you cited in your parenthetical references. Although the bibliography is sometimes omitted when traditional footnote or endnote references are used, it is mandatory with the parenthetical reference system.¹ For further examples of the ways to list references in your "Works Cited," see the following pages. For more complete information about manuscript format and the MLA referencing system, see the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

A bit of advice: MLA places each work cited in a paragraph formatted in "hanging indent" style. Your word processor (MS Word or Word Perfect) will format paragraphs to hanging indent style. You will save time by learning and using this feature, rather than using tab stops to arrange the paragraphs.

An article in a scholarly journal:

Djwa, Sandra. "'Canadian Angles of Vision': Northrop Frye and the *Literary History of Canada*." *English Studies in Canada* 19.2 (1993): 133-49.

A review:

McCall, Sophie. "Auto/Bio/Ethno/Graphe?" Review of *Riska: Memories of a Dayak Girlhood*. *Canadian Literature* 172 (2002): 188-89.

An article in an edited collection:

Sturrock, June. "The Literary Woman of the 1850s and Charlotte Mary Yonge's *Dynevor Terrace*." *Victorian Novelists and the "Woman Question"*. Ed. Nicola Diane Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 116-34.

¹ In MLA style, references are placed in parentheses (usually at the end of the sentence) rather than in footnotes or endnotes. However, footnotes or endnotes are used for discursive purposes (e.g., to present tangential or background information some of your readers may desire).

Trowse, Nadeane. "The Exclusionary Potential of Genre: Margery Kempe's Transgressive Search for a Deniable Pulpit." *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change*. Ed. Rick Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2002. 341-353.

An article in a newspaper or magazine:

Bawlf, Samuel. "Secret Voyage to B.C." *Vancouver Sun* (5 August 2000): B1-B6.
O'Hara, Jane. "Trade Secrets." *Maclean's* 112.42 (18 October 1999): 20-29.

A book (or pamphlet) by a single author:

Gerson, Carole. *A Purer Taste: The Writing and Reading of Fiction in English in Nineteenth-Century Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1989.

Gillies, Mary Ann. *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1996.

Miki, Roy. *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998.

An edition other than the first:

Aaron, Jane E. and Murray McArthur. *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. 2nd Canadian ed. Toronto: Longman, 2001.

Williams, Joseph. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. 4th ed. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1994.

A book by more than one author:

Holland, Patrick and Graham Huggan. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998.

An edited collection or edition:

Budra, Paul, and Betty A. Schellenberg, eds. *Part Two: Reflection on the Sequel*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998.

Delany, Paul, ed. *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1994.

A translation:

Divin, Vasili. *The Great Russian Navigator, A.I. Chirikov*. 1951. Trans. Raymond H. Fisher. Fairbanks: U of Alaska P, 1993.

Two or more works by the same author:

Dickinson, Peter. "'Go-Go Dancing on the Brink of the Apocalypse': Representing AIDS: An Essay in Seven Epigraphs." *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*. Ed. Richard Dellamora. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995. 219-40.

—. *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999.

—. “‘Orality in Literacy’: Listening to Indigenous Writing.” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 14.2 (1994): 319-40.

Articles in an encyclopedia (or other reference book):

Entry in a well-known reference work:

“Blepharospasm.” *American Heritage Dictionary*. New College ed. 1978.

Entry with an acknowledged author, in a well-known reference work:

St. Pierre, Paul Matthew. “William Henry Drummond.” *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 92. *Canadian Writers, 1890-1920*. 1990.

Entry in a relatively unknown reference work:

“Thomas, Audrey (1935-).” *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Literature in English*. Ed. Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly. 2 vols. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Entry with an acknowledged author, in a relatively unknown reference work:

Dyer, Klay. “De Mille, James.” *The Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*. Ed. William H. New. Toronto: U. of Toronto P, 2002.

An introduction, preface, foreword or afterword:

Stouck, Mary-Ann. Introduction. *Medieval Saints: A Reader*. Mary-Ann Stouck, ed. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1999. xv-xiii.

An unpublished dissertation or thesis:

Lowry, Glen Albert. “Looking for Traces of the Unknown Body: Three Readings of Language in *Ana Historic* and ‘*Sophie*.” MA thesis. Simon Fraser U, 1991.

Koh, Karlyn Y-Mae. “Reflections on the Coming of History: Revisiting the Makings of a ‘Chinese Canadian’ Identity and Community.” Diss. Simon Fraser U, 1999.

Electronic sources:

Electronic sources are not of equal value in reliability of information. While you should evaluate *all* sources, you should be especially careful with electronic. A university site has greater credibility, for example, than a site kept by a fan.

For changeable electronic sources, use this format:

Author’s name (reverse order). “Article title.” *Website title*. Website host (company, organization, or university). Date of last update (or copyright). Date of access <URL>.

Here is an example:

Ford, Andrew. "The Electronic *Beowulf*: From Early Anglo-Saxon Text to Hypertext." *Electronic Proceedings of "The Second International WWW-Conference '94: Mosaic and the Web*. National Center for Supercomputing Applications. 17 Sept. 1994. 17 May 2004 <<http://archive.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/IT94/Proceedings/Arts/ford/beowulf-paper.html>>

For electronic sources that are exact duplications of printed material, include the printed information as if referencing the print source. Append the web host (or database such as EBSCO or JSTOR), the date of access, and the URL, as in changeable example above. Here is an example:

Dean, Misao. "Researching Sara Jeanette Duncan in the papers of A. P. Watt and Company." *Canadian Literature* 178 (2003): 181-6. ProQuest. 17 May 2004 [http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/pqdweb?index= &did= 000000 508014 091&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=3&Vinst=PROD&Vtype=PQD&RQT=309&Vn ame=PQD&TS=1084822644&clientID=3667#fulltext](http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/pqdweb?index=&did=000000508014091&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=3&Vinst=PROD&Vtype=PQD&RQT=309&Vname=PQD&TS=1084822644&clientID=3667#fulltext)

Some points to remember:

- For exceptionally long URLs, you can list the (usually shorter) URL for the search page, as long as your reader can use the page to reach the article using the other information you provide.
- There is no period between the date of access and the URL.
- You can split the URL at any point following a backslash, in order to have more attractive line breaks.
- Standard MLA rules regarding abbreviations and name/title formats apply equally to electronic source citations.
- It is recognised that not all information will be available for all websites. List as much as possible.
- Your reader must be able to follow your information to access the correct website. If you cannot list enough information for this to be possible, do not use the reference.

CD-ROMs and other portable sources:

For unchangeable electronic sources, the citation in the "Works Cited" list includes the author, title, editor, and date information just as for print documents. Also include the format of the material, and the edition or release date if available.

Kiernan, Kevin, Ed. *The Electronic Beowulf*. CD-ROM. British Library Publications and U of Michigan P, 2000.