



## DOCUMENTING SOURCES, MLA STYLE, 8<sup>TH</sup> EDITION

Writers in the humanities are often required to support claims using sources that are integrated and cited according to Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines. In fact, using an academic style for your citations is one of the hallmarks that distinguishes academic writing from other types of writing. Like a list of procedures in a lab report, citations allow other scholars to follow your process and the steps that you took that led to your current argument or insight (Fitzpatrick).

While citations are meant to provide an informational trail for your readers to follow, they also protect students from charges of plagiarism. The Council of Writing Program Administration defines plagiarism as what happens “when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source” (“Defining”). By acknowledging sources through in-text citations and a Works Cited page that follow MLA guidelines, students can avoid the negative consequences that accompany deliberate plagiarism, which are detailed under the description of Academic Honesty on Cabrini’s website.

The goal of this document is to make the documentation process a little easier.

Note that the texts cited above and those used in the samples below are all included in the sample Works Cited page on p. 6.

### IN-TEXT CITATIONS

When you paraphrase or quote from another work within the text of your paper, you must briefly document the source within the text itself. This is called an **in-text citation**.

- Remember, whatever is used in the parenthetical citation should be the first thing listed in the source’s entry on the Works Cited page.
- In contrast to APA style, which usually tracks the author and date in the in-text citation, MLA style usually tracks the author and location (i.e. page number, if available) in the in-text citation.

Example:

One framework for understanding the African American literary tradition is through the blues as a cultural “matrix” (Baker 3).

Alternatively, consider framing your quotation by introducing the author and/or the source prior to your quotation. This is called using a **signal phrase**. When you identify the author in your signal phrase, the parenthetical citation need only include the page number of the quoted text.

Example:

In her essay on the Black Arts Movement, Margo Natalie Crawford underscores how African American poets created a new aesthetic of “chant,” “an in-between space between song and word” that deconstructed formal constraints and emphasized musical sound in order to negotiate between the “inner” world of subjectivity and the “outer” world of public action (95).

*Remember, even when you paraphrase material, you still need to use an in-text citation!*

Example:

The Black Arts Movement draws our attention to cultural movements as processes, which involve social acts of collaboration and improvisation not reducible to mere texts (Crawford 106).

### ***Citing works with two authors***

Example:

The preface to *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* points out that the colonial laws that prohibited slaves from learning to write and from using the drum actually prohibited literacy on two fronts: the literacy “of English letters and of the black vernacular” (Gates and McKay xxix-xxx).

### ***Citing works with three or more authors***

Use the first author’s name, followed by the abbreviation “et al.”

Example: (Brett, et al. 46)

### ***Multiple citations of the same work in one paragraph***

If you are citing the same work a couple of times within the same paragraph, and no other source interrupts these borrowings, you can simply cite the text after the last quotation (MLA 124).

### ***Long quotations***

If, when you type out your quotation, it is longer than four lines, format it as a block quote (MLA 76). Here's an example:

Borrowing terminology from Ralph Ellison, Craig Werner centers black music within his modern history of music in America by focusing on three impulses:

The blues, jazz, and gospel impulses highlight black music's refusal to simplify or devalue emotion. Even when they force you to accept uncomfortable truths, the blues never explain away how things feel. [...] Testifying to the power of love, gospel gives us the courage to keep on pushing for a redemption that is at once spiritual and political. [...] Jazz is innovation; it refuses to accept the way things are, envisions ways of reaching a higher ground we're only beginning to be able to imagine. (xv-xvi)

Together, Werner argues, these impulses reveal the ways that musical styles since the mid-twentieth century have expressed complex human realities that include the emotional, spiritual, and political.

### ***Indirect sources***

Sometimes, you may come across information in a source that is quoted from another source – a source within a source, if you will. This is called an *indirect* source.

It is best practice to cite material from the original source and to avoid citing indirect sources (MLA 124). However, if you need to cite an indirect source, you can follow this pattern, which identifies the original speaker and the source in which it was quoted:

In lines that reveal the blues' reaffirmation of self, blues artist Willie Dixon declares, "I'm *here*, everybody knows I'm *here*" (qtd. in Werner 71).

### ***Online source with authors***

Cite online sources with authors with the author's name in parentheses, and include relevant location information as available.

- For instance, if the online source is a PDF with numbered pages, you could use the relevant page number.

- If the online source is an article divided into labeled sections or numbered paragraphs, you could cite those, using the abbreviations ch. or para.
- However, if there are no page, section, or paragraph numbers given, you do not need to count them manually. In that case, cite only the author parenthetically.

*Example:*

One of the key principles of the Black Arts Movement was the importance of the artist's integration into their community (Neal 1).

*Online source with corporate authors (group or organization as author)*

Sometimes a group is responsible for a text, rather than an individual author. A corporate author is defined as “an institution, an association, a government agency, or another kind of organization” (MLA 25) that co-authors a text. Cite the corporate author in your in-text citations, only when that author is different than the publisher or sponsor of the text.

*Online source with corporate author that is the same as the publisher*

When a corporate author is the same as the organization that published the material, you only list the organization once in your Works Cited entry – as the publisher. In these cases, the Works Cited entry begins with the title of the source, and thus you should also cite the title of the source in your in-text parenthetical citation. When titles are longer than a simple phrase, you can shorten them in your in-text citation.

*Example:*

According to the Poetry Foundation, the Black Arts Movement has had a lasting impact on Black artists, especially rap, hip-hop, and slam poetry artists (“Introduction”).

*Plays*

When citing a modern play written in prose (rather than in verse poetry), cite the page number as well as any other useful identifying location information, such as section or act.

*Example:*

In “A Raisin in the Sun,” the matriarch of the family wonders what has come between her and her children: “there’s something come down between me and them that don’t let us understand each other and I don’t know what it is” (Hansberry 1743; act I, scene 1).

## Poems

When citing a poem that has the lines numbered (which may be more typical of poems appearing in large anthologies or for very long poems), drop the page number and cite the line numbers only. You can establish that the number refers to the line rather than the page, by using the word “line” or “lines” with the first citation.

### *Example:*

In her poem, “For Sandra,” Nikki Giovanni satirizes the idea of using conventional poetic images from nature when there are matters of political urgency to address. Prompted by her neighbor’s request, she sets out to write “a beautiful green tree poem” (line 11) and then “a big blue sky poem” (19), but she realizes that her moment calls for something else.

When citing a poem that does not have individual lines numbered, cite the page on which it appears. As you can see below, show line breaks by using a backslash.

### *Example:*

By echoing Whitman in “Return of the Native,” Baraka affirms Harlem as a center of Black culture and calls upon his audience to affirm themselves: “Can you sing / yourself, your life, your place / on the warm planet earth” (140).

## WORKS CITED PAGE

After the conclusion of your essay, add a new page called Works Cited. Organize each entry in alphabetical order and use a hanging indent to draw attention to the beginning of each entry.

See next page for a sample.

Works Cited

Baker, Jr., Houston A. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. U of Chicago P, 1984.

Book

Baraka, Amiri. *Transbluesency: Selected Poems, 1961-1995*. Edited by Paul Vangelisti, Marsilio Publishers, 1995.

Essay in an anthology

Crawford, Margo Natalie. "The Poetics of Chant and Inner/Outer Space: The Black Arts." *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945*, edited by Jennifer Ashton, Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 94-108.

"Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices." *Council of Writing Program Administrators*, 30 Dec. 2019,

Specific page of an online source

[http://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sd/news\\_article/272555/PARENT/layout\\_details/tails/false](http://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sd/news_article/272555/PARENT/layout_details/tails/false).

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. "The Future of Academic Style: Why Citations Still Matter in the Age of Google." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 29 March 2016,

Online source with author

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-future-of-academic-style-why-citations-still-matter-in-the-age-of-google/>.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis and Nellie Y. McKay. "Preface: Talking Books." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, Norton, 1997, pp. xxvii-xli.

Giovanni, Nikki. "For Sandra." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, Norton, 1997, pp. 1983-84.

Hansberry, Lorraine. "A Raisin in the Sun." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, Norton, 1997, pp. 1728-1789.

"An Introduction to the Black Arts Movement." *Poetry Foundation*,  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/148936/an-introduction-to-the-black-arts-movement>.

*MLA Handbook*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed., MLA, 2016.

Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *Drama Review*, vol. 12, Summer 1968.  
 Reprinted in *The Making of African American Identity, Vol. III, 1917-1968*,  
 National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 2007,  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/community/text8/blackartsmovement.pdf>.

Thorsson, Courtney. "Foodways in Contemporary African American Poetry:  
 Harryette Mullen and Evie Shockley." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 57, no.  
 2, 2016, pp. 184-215. *Academic Search Complete*, doi: 10.3368/cl.57.2.184.

Journal  
 Article  
 with DOI  
 from a  
 database

Werner, Craig. *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America*.  
 Revised & updated ed., U of Michigan P, 2006.

**For more information, visit:**

- The MLA website: <https://style.mla.org/works-cited/citations-by-format/>
- Holy Spirit Library's Guide:  
<https://cabrini.libguides.com/c.php?g=692132&p=4932642>