**A Student’s Guide to *The MLA Handbook*, 8th Edition**

*The MLA Handbook* is a style guide published by its parent organization, the Modern Language Association, a voluntary professional organization open to those who teach a modern language at the university level. The guide exists to simplify your life as a student writer, not to complicate it. It answers your questions about what a paper and its bibliography should look like.

The new edition of *The* *MLA Handbook* has been simplified, and “container” is the new buzzword (not “book” or “journal”). Whatever kind of thing the information for your paper comes from might be the container, whether it be a book, a journal, a website, software, a database, a TV show, a museum, a statue, or a Sonic paper napkin.

If you have questions about any of this, try Dr. Snyder or visit [style.mla.org](http://www.style.mla.org)

**Basic Format**

The print edition of the 8th does not spell out details about what the title page, spacing, or margins look like, so keep to the old style if you already know it. The format is spelled out in detail at style.mla.org.

Here is a summary:

* Use double-spacing throughout, both for the text and for the bibliography.
* Put your name, the professor’s name, the course number and name, and the due date in the upper left corner of the first page (and only on the first page), all double-spaced.
* The title of the paper is then centered below that stuff, with no decoration (no bold, no quotation marks, no italics, no increased font-size, unless there is some other reason for them, like a title or quotation within your title).
* In the upper right of *every* page (even page 1), put your last name and then the page number.
* One-inch margins all around on untitled pages, but do not justify the right margin.
* If there are titled pages besides the first page (the Works Cited page, for instance), that title goes two inches down from the top.
* Use parenthetical citations to cite your sources (see next page); use footnotes for extra information that would be disruptive in your text.

Format is not the main thing, but every deviation that is made from the basic form should have a good reason behind it. The format should always be clear, easy to read, and uniform, and should not be a distraction to the reader.

**The First Main Thing: Cite Your Sources**

MLA format, like all university style guides, is mainly about informing your readers where your researched information is coming from.

In olden days, this was done with footnotes—notes at the bottom of the page that were indicated by a superscript number in the text. In more recent times, footnotes have been replaced with parenthetical citations—parentheses within your sentence that tell the reader enough to be able to find that source in the Works Cited list at the back of the paper. A parenthetical citation is a detour to the Works Cited list that the reader may take or easily skip over. (Footnotes are still used when you want to add a side note of information.)

**Key point: The basic format for parenthetical citations in the 8th is like that in 7th edition.**

In your text, refer to your sources by the first key word that begins their entry in the Works Cited; usually that is the author’s last name. If there is a page number, tell the page number in parentheses. But refer to your sources. Tell your reader as you go whom you are using for your information. Cite them, like this [what follows is nonsense made up for this example]:

Some scholars maintain that almonds are an excellent source of brilliance. Durkey’s

research concluded that brains on almonds glowed five times more brightly than brains lacking

almonds (78). This was corroborated in Dallas in 1998 (Otter 272). However, more recent

work has questioned this finding (Hinson; Berry 107; Renzo 187). Says Berry: “Durkey’s view is

crazy” (108).

In this example, Durkey did not have to be named in the parentheses because he is named in the sentence. No comma occurs between author and page number. Hinson, Berry, and Renzo are cited together because they hold the same view. Hinson is apparently a source that does not have page numbers, probably online.

Abbreviations for “page” are not used in the citations, and the citations are included inside the period that ends the sentence that they are a part of (do not leave citations floating in space between sentences).

Quotation marks go around a source’s actual words, which are introduced by a colon, and the citation comes between the closing quotation marks and the period.

Notice that some of the sources were quoted, some paraphrased, and some summarized, but all of them were cited. Failure to cite (name) the people who gave you your information is plagiarism (literary theft). Always tell who told you what, who gave you your ideas.

The goal in citing is to get the reader to the right source in the list of works cited.

**Quoting from the Bible and Citing the Bible**

The first time you quote from the Bible, name the specific Bible you are using, either in your sentence or in your citation, like this: “..even to the very end of the age” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, Matt. 28.20).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Your works-cited entry for that Bible will include its version as a subtitle, *Zondervan NIV Study Bible: New International Version*.

From then on your Bible quotations can be followed by parenthetical citations that contain only the book, chapter, and verses, like this: (Matt. 28.18-20). The reader will know which version you are using.

If you jump to another version, you need to mention that Bible by name, either in your sentence or in your citation, like this: (*Holy Bible: King James Version*, Hab. 3.17-18). You may shorten that title in the citation to *Holy Bible* if that is the only entry in your bibliography that begins with those words, but use the whole title if saying it in your sentence for the first time.

MLA still uses a period, not a colon after the chapter, but you may choose to use the traditional colon between chapter and verse as long as you are consistent throughout the paper.

If you mention the book of the Bible in your sentence, it is spelled out and not italicized. Abbreviate it in the citations. MLA’s list of Bible abbreviations is found on pages 97-99.

No citation is needed if the whole reference is in your sentence, like this: Matthew 28.20 makes this point clear, when Jesus says: “….”

If only part of the reference is stated in your sentence, then the rest of it needs to be in the citation: Mark says in his Gospel: “News about him spread quickly…” (1.28).

The word “Bible” is not italicized but is ALWAYS capitalized if God’s Word is the meaning; it is not capitalized when used metaphorically: The *MLA Handbook* is the style bible for many students. “Bible” is not italicized because it refers to any edition of God’s Word. Italics are used for specific names of published Bibles: *Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.

For the same reason, a version does not get italicized unless it is being given as part of the full name of a particular Bible. Many Bibles use the same version, but the *Holy Bible: New International Version* is not the same book as *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version*. The version is the name of the translation, not the name of the book.

**The Second Main Thing: The List of Works Cited**

At the back of the paper goes a list of every work that you have used in the paper. Every work on this list needs to be referred to in some way in the paper (works you actually have cited).

Basically, the order of an entry goes like this:

Author. Title of Source. Title of container, other contributors, version, number, publisher,

publication date, location.

Not all of those things will be needed every time, but that is the order to go in for whichever ones are present.

Commas string together everything about the container. Periods go after authors and titles.

“Location” might mean the inclusive page numbers of an article, or the database and URL (or DOI—digital object identifier, if there is one).

The professor can decide not to require URLs if they clutter things up too much and are too liable to change (DOIs are preferable, supposedly being “permalinks,” as if anything online—or in this life—is *permanente*). The URLs for *ATLA* and *Credo Reference* do not stay active, probably because they are library subscriptions and must be logged into, so giving those URLs may not be all that helpful. But do what the professor asks.

The abbreviations “vol.” and “no.” are used when giving volumes and issue numbers, but spell out “edited by,” “adapted by,” and other such phrases. (An odd inconsistency appears with “Translated by,” which is preceded by a period and then capitalized, while the other such phrases are preceded by a comma and not capitalized; this is probably a nod to the work of a translator as producing a different work, not an edited version.)

The abbreviations “p.” and “pp.” are used for giving page numbers in the works-cited list (but do not use them in the parenthetical citations).

City of publication is not given unless there is some important reason for giving it (which you would be aware of as a result of your research).

Date of access for a website is optional but recommended (tell what day you logged on to that particular site). Do what your professor prefers.

Many websites have “cite” features which are a great help but are often inaccurate. Always choose “MLA” to get MLA (choose “APA” if you want APA, obviously). Then check to see that the site is using MLA 8th, not MLA 7th. *Credo Reference* is using 8th already, but *ATLA* is not yet.

The goals are exactness, clarity, and consistency for finding sources used. Some samples are on next pages. They may look complicated, but, really, they aren’t. Just read them carefully.

**Some Samples for a List of Works Cited**

**A Print Bible:**

*Zondervan NIV Study Bible: New International Version*. Zondervan , 2002.

**An Online Bible:**

*Holy Bible: New International Version*. Biblica, 2011, *Biblegateway.com*. (URL and date of access are optional elements for online sources, depending on what professor wants; examples below are shown various ways.)

**A Source in *Logos*:**

“Amen.” *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, edited by Walter A. Elwell and Phillip W. Comfort, Tyndale

House, 2001, *Logos Bible Software*, Faithlife, 2002-16.

**An article from ATLA Religion Database in EBSCOhost:**

Appler, Deborah A. “From Queen to Cuisine: Food Imagery in the Jezebel Narrative.” *Semeia*,

vol. 86, 1999, pp. 55-71. *ATLA Religion Database. EBSCOhost.*

[http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=6cab84d7-3201-4e0a-](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=6cab84d7-3201-4e0a-a825-3edeb370257b%40sessionmgr101&vid=4&hid=124)

[a825-3edeb370257b%40sessionmgr101&vid=4&hid=124](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=6cab84d7-3201-4e0a-a825-3edeb370257b%40sessionmgr101&vid=4&hid=124). Accessed 13 August 2016.

(More than the year would be given above if the periodical dated itself more specifically.)

(The cite feature in *ATLA* is still using MLA, 7th ed., so you must convert it to 8th. By December

2016, *ATLA* intends to be using 8th.)

**One from *CCEL* as sample of online scholarly project:**

Augustine, St. “Psalm 1.” *Exposition on the Book of Psalms*. Translated by A. Cleveland Coxe,

*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st ser., vol. 8, edited by Philip Schaff, 1886, *Christian*

*Classics Ethereal Library*, Calvin College,

http://[www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf108.ii.I\_1.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf108.ii.I_1.html). Accessed 12 August 2016.

(The 1886 date is optional but interesting.)

*Perseus, Project Gutenberg*, *Bartleby.com* are other such sites.

**Another from a website:**

Wesley, John. Notes on Genesis 3. *Wesley’s Notes on the Bible*. *Bible Hub*

[www.biblehub.com/commentaries/wes/genesis/3.htm](http://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/wes/genesis/3.htm) . Accessed 29 August 2016.

**A plain old book:**

Barry, Dave. *I’ll Mature When I’m Dead.* Penguin Group/G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2010.

**A book written by an agency:**

*The MLA Handbook*. 8th ed. Modern Language Association, 2016.

**An entry from *dictionary.com*:**

“hermeneutics.” Based on *Random House Dictionary*, 2016, *Dictionary.com*,

http*://*[*www.dictionary.com/browse/hermeneutics?s=t*](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/hermeneutics?s=t)*.*

(“Based on” was added because that’s the way the site says it. Date of access has been left out because this is a pretty permanent site.)

**An article from *Credo Reference*:**

Wallace, Mark C. "Freemasonry." *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of the American Enlightenment*,

edited by Mark Spencer, Bloomsbury, 2014. *Credo Reference,*

<http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/bloome/freemasonry/0> . Accessed 13

Aug 2016. (*Credo*’s cite feature is using MLA 8th. ☺)

**A review from ATLA:**

Smith, Brian D. Review of *Listening to His Heartbeat: What the Bible Says about the Heart of*

*God*, by Harold Shank. *Stone-Campbell Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, Fall 2010,

[http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a2014ab7-5288-4bec-](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a2014ab7-5288-4bec-b41d-36dbf692497b%40sessionmgr107&vid=37&hid=124)

[b41d-36dbf692497b%40sessionmgr107&vid=37&hid=124](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=a2014ab7-5288-4bec-b41d-36dbf692497b%40sessionmgr107&vid=37&hid=124)

(Book and movie reviews are great sources, but do notice that the name of the person writing the review must come first, then title of the article and/or “Review of….”)

**A work from an anthology or festschrift:**

Winthrop, John. “A Model of Christian Charity.” *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*,

Shorter 8th ed., vol. 1, general editor, Nina Baym, W. W. Norton, 2013, pp. 91-102.

1. Those desiring to follow more closely the norms for biblical studies may choose to use the Society of Biblical Literature standard and place the scripture reference before the Bible name in the parenthetical note, e.g., (Matt. 28.20, *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)