

MLA Survival Guide



English 12- Contemporary Themes/Writing
Mrs. Burke

- The purpose of this packet is to provide you with the most important aspects of writing an essay that includes the use of secondary sources, while also examining the most frequently used citations.
- As a result, this packet does not include every type of citation! Depending on the secondary sources you are using, you will have to utilize other citation formats. For this reason, acquire a writing manual and use it!

The Golden Rules

- Do not begin research for a topic until you have established a working thesis! You need a concrete idea of what argument you want to prove in order to find **quality** supporting material.
- When conducting research for an essay, be certain your sources are reliable! In order to do this, you must sometimes do research on your research!
- While conducting research, keep accurate notes of the material you are using! This helps you avoid confusing your ideas with the ideas of another author.
- Once you have gathered sources you believe you will be able to use to support your thesis, create a Works Cited List Draft. This will help you correctly format your parenthetical references throughout the essay! Once your essay is complete and you are satisfied you have a final draft, you may delete sources that you did not use from your Works Cited.
- If you include the ideas of another author within your essay whether by using summary, paraphrasing, or direct quotations, you **must** provide a citation! The author you are using as a source deserves credit for his or her ideas. Without a citation, it is plagiarism!
- If any time during the writing of your essay, you feel that you are using the idea of another author, **cite!** Even though the following saying is cliché, it is true: It is better to be safe than sorry!
- Do not quote drop! Always introduce the quotation and explain its significance! A quotation cannot stand alone!

Creating a Working Thesis

Once you have been assigned or have chosen a topic, begin formulating the idea or argument you intend to discuss by creating a **thesis statement**. According to the Modern Language Association, a thesis statement is “a single sentence that formulates both your topic and your point of view.”¹ When writing a thesis, consider the purpose of your essay and who the audience of your essay will be. Since this will be only the beginning of your writing process, the thesis you create will change as your ideas evolve and research is conducted. Once you have completed your essay and you are satisfied you have a final draft, revise your working thesis to ensure that it relates to your essay as a whole.

Conducting Research: Evaluating Sources

Once you have determined the direction of your essay by writing a working thesis, you may begin gathering secondary sources to support your discussion. When conducting research, you must carefully evaluate the reliability and value of any work **before** you include it as a source. According to MLA standards, to avoid utilizing information that is biased, incorrect, or out of date consider the following criteria when you are considering using a source:¹

- Is the source authoritative?
- Is the source current?
- Is the source accurate?

1) How can I determine if my source is authoritative?

- Consider using a source that is peer reviewed. –

- A peer reviewed journal article or book has been reviewed by several academic experts in order to determine if the work is fit for publication.
- Experts will review the content of the work by checking it for originality and accuracy.

¹ Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Sixth Edition. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

NOTE: It is always more difficult to determine the reliability of an internet source! Online information is often self-published so be careful!

- In order to determine if a source (print or non-print) is reputable and peer-reviewed, look for the following:
 - 1) Can the author responsible for the work be identified?
-The author's name should always be in an area that is noticeable!
 - 2) Is the author qualified to write this work?
-Check the author's credentials! He or she should be trained, educated, or experienced in the subject they are writing about.
 - 3) Is there evidence that the work underwent the peer review process or an editing phase?
-An editor or a list of editorial board members should be available at the end of the document.
 - 4) Is there a publisher or organization supporting this work?
-Institutions like these are prominent and will not connect their name with fraudulent or inaccurate material.

2) How can I determine if my source is current?

- In a book, the publication date is always stated within the first few pages. It will appear with the copyright information.
- In a journal article, the publication date will usually appear at the beginning. If not, then it may also appear with the works cited information at the conclusion of the article.
- A website may have a publication date and/or a date on which the website was last revised that will appear at the bottom of the main page.

3) How can I determine if my source is accurate?

- An accurate article, book, or website should contain a works cited list.

Conducting Research: Note Taking

When you have determined that a source will be valuable to your discussion, you are ready to begin reading the material and recording information that you believe supports your thesis. As you become accustomed to researching, you will determine a note taking method that works for you.

NOTE: If you take notes on your computer in a word processing program, beware of copy and pasting! Be certain that you clearly mark copied passages! If you do not, it is very easy to confuse your ideas and copied material or to place a copied passage in your essay without quotation marks.

Regardless of the note taking method you choose, be sure to take accurate notes as you are researching. When you find a passage that you believe supports your ideas, be sure to **record page numbers and the author's name.**

As you are reading your research materials, you will begin to notice that you will need to utilize passages in different ways. There are three possible uses of research material; however, all **must be cited:**

- **Direct quotation:** When you decide that a passage in its original wording will be a positive addition to your essay, you must set it off with quotation marks. Following the sentence(s), you must cite the quotation by identifying the source in parentheses.
- **Paraphrasing:** If you find that you need to include specific sentences or passages, but do not need to use the original wording, you may restate the information in your own words. You must cite paraphrased passages, because they contain the ideas of other authors.
- **Summarizing:** When researching you may find that you need to state the overall general idea of a large amount of material. When you summarize, you will be including the ideas of another author. As a result, you must cite!

Including Research in your Writing

Once you have selected passages you believe support your thesis statement, you can begin working these passages into your essay. Remember, cited passages should not take over your paper! Instead, use them to support **your** ideas. When including information from sources, be sure to do so smoothly by working the cited material into a clear sentence. Following the quoted material, explain its significance to your topic.

1) Including a source for the first time:

When including a source **for the first time** in your essay, you must introduce the author before including the quotation. For example:

According to Richard Lehan, as tragic as they were, America's casualties were "eclipsed by the fact that the allies – Britain, France, Russia, and Italy – mobilized almost thirty-five million men, twenty-one million of whom died" (1).

Within this passage, the essay's writer alerts his audience to the fact that he will be using Richard Lehan throughout the essay as a source.

2) Including a source for the rest of the essay:

Once a source has been introduced, it may be cited throughout the essay by using parenthetical references. For example:

During this time, F. Scott Fitzgerald sought to examine the moral and emotional malaise of American society, producing in his work *The Great Gatsby* a depiction of "both the romance and the sadness" of this era (Lehan 2).

The parenthetical reference will include the source's author's last name and the page number on which you found the passage. The author's last name should also appear as the first part of this source's citation in your Works Cited List.

3) Including a source that does not have an author:

Although it is desirable to have an author available, it is not always the case. If you wish to include a source that does not have an author, simply introduce the article's name when using it for the first time. For example:

According to the essay "Fitzgerald and the Collapse of the American Dream", following their awkward reunion "the legendary Daisy dims a little in luster" and *Gatsby's* vision of her as the personification of the romantic ideal begins to lessen as well (42).

Avoiding Plagiarism

The MLA defines plagiarism as “the false assumption of authorship or the wrongful act of taking the product of another person’s mind, and presenting it as one’s own”.¹ The severity of the punishment for plagiarism varies depending on an educational institution’s policy and the extent to which an offender plagiarizes. **However, do not allow the fear of plagiarizing stop you from including secondary material to support your thesis.** Take careful notes by including page numbers and authors and label these passages as “direct quotation,” “summary,” or “paraphrasing,” so that you recall in what way you wanted to utilize the passage within your essay. **When in doubt, cite it!**

Forms of Plagiarism

The most obvious and serious form of plagiarism is to intentionally take another author’s work (his ideas and/or wording) and submit it as your own. It can be an entire essay or it can simply be a single sentence. Other forms of plagiarism are less blatant, often resulting from the writer of the essay failing to properly acknowledge the author of their source.

1) Paraphrasing or repeating an author’s wording ¹:

Original Source :

The black man lives in a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world, the white world.²

Plagiarism :

An African American lives in a society which gives him no self-consciousness, and instead lets him view himself through the eyes of the white world.

Even though the wording has been altered, the above sentence would be considered plagiarism because you borrowed another author’s wording without acknowledging the author.

² Twagilimana, Aimable. *Race and Gender in the Making of an African American Literary Tradition*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

To fix the problem, either cite the quotation directly using quotation marks and paraphrase the material. In both instances be sure to provide the author!

Correction :

According to Aimable Twagilimana, “The black man lives in a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world, the white world” (49).

OR

As Aimable Twagilimana has suggested, in the 1920s African Americans lived in a society which provided them with no true identity, but instead only allowed them to see themselves through the white world surrounding them (49).

2) Using an author’s original term without citing ¹ :

Original Source :

The African American identity created by the society of the 1920s was a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire which denies true “African Americanism.”³

Plagiarism :

American society of the 1920s denied true “African Americanism.”

Although you are only utilizing a single word of the original source, it is a word created by the author of the source. For this reason, you must acknowledge the author!

Correction :

The society of 1920s America denied what Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Toni Morrison has called “African Americanism” (38).

³ Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

3) Paraphrasing arguments or an author's thought process ¹ :

Original Source :

Until now the human race has undergone two great waves of change, each one largely obliterating earlier cultures or civilizations and replacing them with the ways of life inconceivable to those who came before. The First Wave of change – the agricultural revolution – took thousands of years to play itself out. The Second Wave – the rise of industrial civilization – took a mere century.⁴

Plagiarism :

There have been two revolutionary periods of change in history: the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution. The agricultural revolution determined history for thousands of years; the industrial revolution lasted about a century.

The above passage is considered plagiarism because you borrowed the author's line of thinking, or the order in which they present their ideas, without acknowledging him or her.

Correction :

According to Alvin Toffler, there have been two revolutionary periods of change in history: the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution. The agricultural revolution determined history for thousands of years; the industrial revolution lasted about a century (10).

⁴ Toffler, Alvin. *The Third Wave*. New York: Bantam, 1981.

Using Quotations Accurately

Quotations are extremely important to your essay as they are a means of supporting your thesis statement. Use words, phrases, and sentences that are interesting and apply **directly** to your essay topic. When incorporating quotations into your essay, remember the following:

- Beware of over-quoting! Not only can you bore your readers, you can also imply that you are not knowledgeable of your subject and instead must depend on the ideas of others!
- Reproduce the original source! Do not alter spelling, grammar, or capitalization of the quotation.
- Do not leave a quotation by itself! A quotation **cannot** function independently. Instead, create a sentence that allows you to introduce and incorporate the quotation.

Quoting Prose:

1) If you wish to include a quotation that is no more than four lines from a prose work, simply put it in quotation marks and provide a parenthetical reference that includes the author and page number. For a parenthetical reference, **place the period after the citation!** For example:

Nick Carraway asserts “Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” (Fitzgerald 6).⁵

⁵ Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1995.

2) If a prose quotation is more than four lines **in your paper** you must set it off from the rest of your text. Introduce the quotation with a sentence ending in a colon (:), and then begin a new line that is indented **one inch**. **Double-space the quotation and do not add quotation marks.**

For example:

Nick acknowledges Gatsby's powerlessness, stating:

—**1 inch**→ He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about. (Fitzgerald 169)⁵

Quoting Poetry:

1) When quoting **up to three lines of poetry**, be sure to place a **slash and space** between each line. This indicates to your reader where lines of the poem begin and end. For example:

Robert Frost's use of imagery becomes apparent as he states, "My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree / Toward heaven still, / And there's a barrel that I didn't fill" (1-3).⁶

2) When a quotation from a poem is more than three lines, the quotation should begin on a new line, indented one inch from the margin. Introduce the quotation with a sentence ending with a colon (:). This quotation should be double-spaced.

⁶ Frost, Robert. "After Apple-Picking." *Poetry of Robert Frost: The Complete Works*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1987.

For example:

Robert Frost's use of imagery becomes apparent as he states:

1 inch → My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough. (1-5)

Quoting Drama:

1) If you are quoting dialogue between two or more characters in a play, the quotation must be set off from the rest of your text. Indent each part of **the dialogue one inch and begin with the character's name**. The character's name should appear in capital letters and the name should be followed by a period. If a character's part is more than one line, indent each of the lines that follow **three spaces**. Start a new line when another character begins speaking. For example:

Prior to the Ghost's arrival, the watchmen discuss the apparition's existence stating:

1 inch → BARNARDO. I have seen nothing.
MARCELLUS. Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him,
Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us. (Shakespeare 1.1.30-33)⁷

2) If you are quoting less than three lines of a single character, follow the rules for quoting poetry of three lines or less. For example:

Determined to use the play to catch Claudius, Hamlet states "The play's the thing /
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (Shakespeare 2.2.594-595).

⁷ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. New York: Barron's Publishing, 1986.

3) If you are quoting more than three lines of a single character, follow the rules for long prose quotations while also maintaining the correct line numbers. For example:

Critics often question Hamlet's sanity as he states:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles

And by opposing end them. (Shakespeare 3.1.63-67)

Omitting Material from a Quotation:

In the event you wish to omit material from a quotation (a word, phrase, sentence, or sentences), you may use ellipsis points, or spaced periods. This will tell your audience that **you** have taken out a portion of the original quotation. Your ellipsis points should be placed within square brackets so that the audience also understands that it is not the original author's addition. For example:

During his final conversation with Gatsby, Nick asserts "They're a rotten crowd [...]

You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (Fitzgerald 162).

In this quotation the writer of the essay omits two sentences from Nick's dialogue, because they did not directly apply to the point being discussed within the paragraph.

Emphasizing the Titles of Sources

Within your essay and in your Works Cited List you must emphasize the titles of works by underlining, italicizing, and using quotation marks.

Underlined Works

According to MLA standards, when writing your essay underline or italicize works that are published **independently**. Titles of the following should be underlined:

- books
- plays
- long poems published as books
- newspapers, magazines, and journals
- films
- ballets, operas, and musical compositions
- paintings and sculptures
- ships, aircrafts, and spacecrafts

When underlining, do not break the underline between words. For example:

- The Importance of Being Earnest (play)
- The Awakening (novel)
- The New York Times (newspaper)

Using Quotations Marks

Quotations marks should be used when citing a work that is published **as a part of** a larger work. The following works should appear in quotation marks:

- articles
- essays
- short stories
- short poems
- chapters of books
- episodes of a television program
- unpublished works such as lectures and speeches

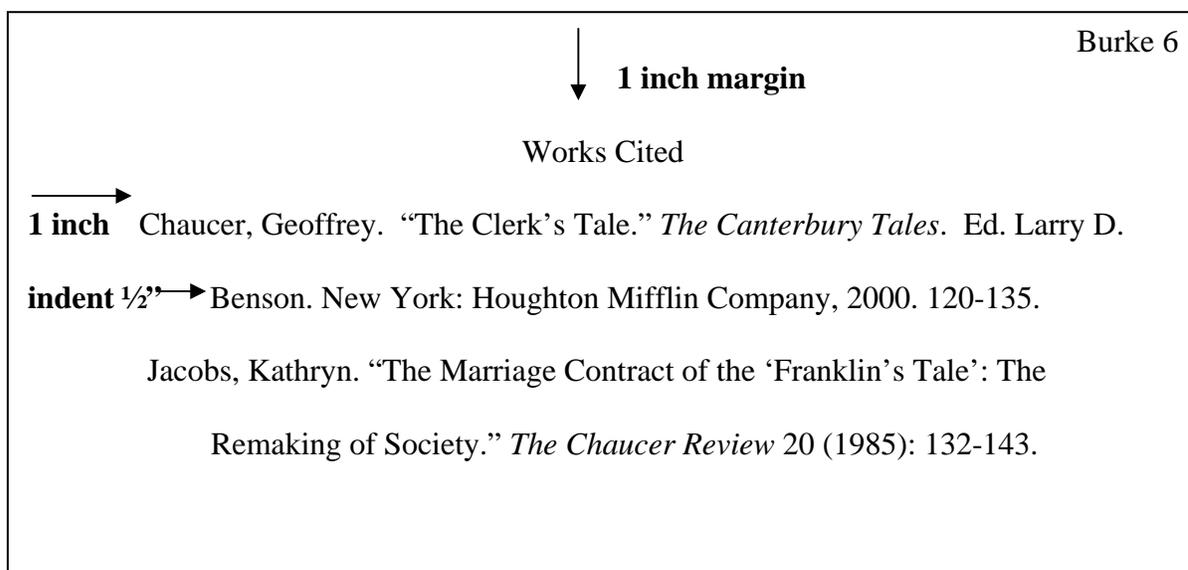
The following are examples of works published within anthologies:

- “The Yellow Wallpaper” (short story)
- “The American Consciousness in Literature” (essay)
- “The Abolition” (encyclopedia article)

Creating a Works Cited List

Once you have researched and determined which sources you will be using for your essay, create a Works Cited list. Although the Works Cited appears at the end of your paper, you should always draft this section in advance. By doing so, you will know exactly what information to give in the parenthetical references you include throughout your paper. The purpose of a Works Cited list is to provide your audience with information on the sources you have utilized; therefore, be sure your citations are accurate!

The Format of a Works Cited



- The heading should always appear at the top center, on the top line! This means it should be just after your top margin of 1” ends.
- Each entry should begin as the left margin ends; 1” from the left end of the paper.
- Entries should appear in the list in **alphabetical order!**
- Entries **should not** be numbered!
- The Works Cited list should always be **double-spaced!**
- When an entry continues beyond a single line, subsequent lines must be **indented a ½ inch** from the margin.

The Basic Entry: a Book with a one Author

This citation will always include the author's name, the title of the book, and publication information. These items should appear as follows in your Works Cited:

Author's Name (Last name, First name). Title of the book.

Publication information.

For example:

Ellison, Ralph Waldo. Invisible Man. New York: Vintage Books,
1980.

Citing an Entire Anthology

When citing an anthology that was edited by someone whose name appears on the title page, begin your entry with the name of the editor, followed by a comma and the abbreviation *ed*. The rest of the entry will follow the format of the basic book entry:

Editor's Name (Last name, First name). Title of the book.

Publication information.

For example:

Works Cited
Mishkin, Tracy, ed. <u>Influence and African American Writers: Collected Essays</u> . New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

Citing two or more Books by the same Author

When citing two or more books by the same author, give the name of the author in the first entry only. Following the first entry, you can replace the author's name with three hyphens followed by a period:

Author's name (Last name, First name). Title of the book. City of publication: Publishing company, year of publication.

---. Title of the book. City of publication: Publishing company, year of publication.

For example:

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Works Cited
Steinbeck, John. <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> . New York: Penguin Group, 2002.
---. <i>Of Mice and Men</i> . New York: Penguin Group, 1993.

Citing a book with two or more Authors

When citing a book by two or three authors, restate their names **in the order they appear on the title page**. The reason for this is that they may be placed in order of how much they contributed to the publication of the book. Only the first author's name should appear in reverse order (last name, first name). Follow the first author's name with a comma and the other author's names as they appear on the title page:

Author's name (Last name, First name), and Author's name (First name, Last Name). Title of the book. City of publication: Publishing company, year of publication.

For example:

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Works Cited
Gougeon, Leonard and Joel Myerson. <i>Emerson's Antislavery Writings</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

A Work in the Anthology

When citing an article, essay, poem, or short story that appears within an anthology, you must cite the work you are using as a source as well as the anthology it appears in:

Author's name (Last name, First name). "Title of the work." Title of the anthology. Ed. Editor's name. City of publication:

Publishing company, year of publication. Page numbers.

For example:

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Works Cited
Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." <u>Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson</u> . Ed. George Stade. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004. 113-134.

Article in a Newspaper

When citing an article from a **nationally known** newspaper (e.g., *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*), you do not have to include the city of publication. Provide the author of the article, the title of the article, the title of the newspaper, the date of publication, the edition, and the page numbers.

Author's Name (Last Name, First Name). "Title of the article." Title of the Newspaper Date of publication, edition: page numbers.

For example:

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Works Cited
Chang, Kenneth. "The Melting of Antarctica." <u>New York Times</u> . 2 April 2002, late ed.: F1.

Citing a Print Copy Magazine

If you are citing a **printed magazine**, you do not have to state the edition, issue number, or volume. Instead, you include the complete date of publication including the month and year. Follow the date with a colon and the page numbers of the article:

Author's name (Last name, First name). "Title of the article." Title of the Magazine. Date of publication: page numbers.

For example:

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Works Cited
Van Biema, David. "The Pope and der Führer." <u>Time</u> . 19 September 1999: 61-65.

Citing a Document from an Internet Site

When citing a document from the internet, you must include as much of the following as possible: the author's name, the title of the document, information about its print publication and electronic publication, and access information. The more information you provide about a source, the more reputable that source becomes:

Author's name (First name, Last name). "Title of the document."

Title of the website. Date of publication or update.

Organization responsible for the site. Access date <web address>.

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Works Cited
Ross, Don. "Existentialism." . <u>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</u> . May 2002. Center for the Study of Language. 6 July 2002 < http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/exist >.

Works from a Library of Personal Subscription Service

When citing an article from an online database that is provided by an institution, such as EBSCO, SIRS, and Lexis Nexis, you must give credit to the institution that provides the service. For this reason you must include both the name of the service and the library.

Author Name (Last name, First name). "Article name." Magazine, Journal, or Newspaper name. Volume number (year of publication): page numbers. Name of service. Name of library or university. Access date <web address>.

For example:

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Works Cited
Rigby, S.H. "The Wife of Bath, Christine de Pizan, and the Medieval Case for Women." <i>Chaucer Review</i> 35.2 (2000): 133-165. Project Muse. University of Scranton, Weinburg Memorial Library. 21 November 2005. < http://rose.scranton.edu:2110/plweb-cgi/fastweb?searchform+muse >.
Nachtwey, Gerald R. "Geoffroi de Charny's <i>Book of Chivalry</i> and Violence in the 'Man of Law's Tale' and the 'Franklin's Tale'." <i>Essays in Medieval Studies</i> 20 (2003): 107-120. Project Muse. University of Scranton, Weinburg Memorial Library. 21 November 2005 < http://rose.scranton.edu:2110/plweb-cgi/fastweb?searchform+muse >.