Why Writing Matters:
Quotes, Cites & Sources in MLA

By Michelle Bowen (2025)

Each source ("work") used in an essay using Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation style must be listed on the last page of the essay, a page titled "Works Cited." MLA lists there only the sources actually used and cited in the essay. (Other documentation styles require a "bibliography"—a list of all sources looked at during the course of the research.)

An "Annotated Bibliography" is a kind of research log that lists all sources accessed during research, in MLA style, but includes extra information: the "annotation." That annotation is most often a paragraph summarizing the article, as well as some indication of the value or credibility of the source. It is a useful tool during research (especially a lot of research) because it's a way to easily remember what has been read, what the main idea was, and why it might be useful (or not).

The following is a list of different types of sources and how each would appear as a source entry on a Works Cited page. The keyword search used to compile these examples was ***"why writing matters"*** (or some variation of that). So the research here was done with the thought that an essay on that topic might follow.

The first several examples, which are the most typical types of sources used in Composition courses—an article from the web; articles from databases; books, including textbooks—also show ways in which the source might be cited in a sentence.

Of course, in an MLA essay, the source entries and sentences that use the sources would be doublespaced. These examples, for purposes of readability, are not.

Notes:

- In the Table of Contents below, the main headings (**bold**) link to types of sources and how the source entry and citation should appear.
- The indented headings (not bold) are to specific issues that relate to source entries and to quotes and cites. The indented headings are issues that are discussed in the course of examining source entries and cites, but they may be (and often are) relevant to more than just that type of source.

Contents

Article from the Web

The basic format for an article from the web is this:

Author (last name first). **"Title of Article."** ***Website*****, date** (in MLA style), **URL** (copy and pasted).

One Author. Here is an example of a source entry for a web article. This article has only one author listed. (Some sources have two authors, some have three or more, and some have no named authors. We will examine each of those situations in the examples that follow.)

Griffin, Thomas. "Why Writing Still Matters in Today's Tech-Driven World." *Forbes*, 4 June 2020, https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2020/06/04/why-writing-still-matters-in-todays-tech-driven-world/.

Original language from the source:

> Aside from the creative benefit of writing, scientists have found it can improve your memory and aid in learning. It can slow down mental aging because it forces people to use more motor skills and engage different parts of the brain. Handwriting researchers have also found that writing by hand can have a calming effect on the brain and reduce stress and anxiety.

Examples of Cites:

- Thomas Griffin explains that the value of writing, particularly handwriting, is more than just creative: "[S]cientists have found it can improve … memory and aid in learning." In fact, Griffin adds, "[W]riting by hand can have a calming effect on the brain and reduce stress and anxiety."
- Writing can "slow down mental aging because it forces people to use more motor skills and engage different parts of the brain" (Griffin).
- According to Griffin, the act of writing, especially writing by hand, offers benefits that include better memory, easier learning, and less anxiety.

[Square] Brackets. The first use of the source above has changed some of the quoted language. The [square brackets] are used to show that a change has been made to a word (the lowercase letters are changed to uppercase because the quoted language actually functions as a sentence (what some call a "main clause" or an "independent clause")).

Ellipsis (…). The ellipsis (those three dots) shows that a word (or more) has been left out—deleted from—the quoted language. As a general rule, we use the ellipsis inside a

quote but not at the very beginning or very end of the quote—the quotation marks are usually enough to tell the readers that the language has been excerpted from the source.

The second example shows a partial quote—here, as is usually the case with a partial quote, it just flows into the sentence without punctuation.

Paraphrase. The third example is a paraphrase—the writer using the source has put Griffin's idea into her own words. In each use of the source, even if we put the source's information or idea into our own words, a citation to that source is necessary.

Key Tip: The cite in MLA connects readers to the **first word** of the source entry.

No Author Named. Here's another example from the web, but this one has no named author, so the source entry starts with the article title:

"Why Is Writing Important?" *Grand Canyon University*, 25 Mar. 2022, https://www.gcu.edu/blog/gcu-experience/why-writing-important.

Original language:

> Employers generally recognize that someone who demonstrates good writing skills is more likely to be someone who thinks clearly, knows how to organize information and understands how to put themselves in someone else's shoes. As a result, good writers may be more likely to work well with other people. Plus, their ability to organize information in logical ways can support their problem-solving and decision-making abilities.

Examples:

- Writing can be the skill that helps someone get hired: "Employers generally recognize that someone who demonstrates good writing skills is more likely to be someone who thinks clearly, knows how to organize information and understands how to put themselves in someone else's shoes" ("Why").
- The article "Why Is Writing Important" points out that writing demonstrates to employers that a job applicant can likely "think[] clearly, [and] knows how to organize information."

In the first example, the parenthetical citation connects readers to the first word of the source entry, but since that first word is part of a title, we put quotation marks around that word in the parenthetical: ("Why").

In the second example, the article title is spelled out, and that is the citation. But notice how the partial quote is used in that example. Because we must make the quote fit our own sentence logically and grammatically, we made a few edits to the quote. The original

language uses the word "thinks," but that doesn't flow right, so we remove the "s"; to show that we changed the word, we use [square brackets] with nothing inside them (because we deleted the letter "s"). Furthermore, we just wanted to use two examples from the source, so to make the quote flow better in our sentence, we inserted the "and" between the two examples. That separate addition of a word into the quote also uses square brackets. That punctuation tool is used only inside of a quote and always means that something in the quote has been changed or added. In this case, we have used the square brackets to change a word and to add a word to the quote, to help the reader better hear and understand the message.

An Article from a Periodical inside a Database

The next few examples come from databases in our library. Note that the database article requires more information—the periodical, volume number, issue number, page numbers, database name. (A "periodical" is a journal, magazine, or newspaper.) Note, too, the punctuation between the elements.

Author. "Article Title." ***Periodical*** (journal, magazine, newspaper), **volume number, issue number, date, page range** (first page to last page on which the article appears). ***Database name*****, URL.**

Page Numbers. In the example below, notice that there is only one "p." (page); that shows that the article is brief and appears on only that one page. If it were longer, we would see something like this: **pp. 30-33**. That would show us that the article is on multiple pages; the article *starts on* p. 30 and then *ends on* p. 33. (The citation inside a sentence connects the readers to the actual page number where the language or idea or information appears, so it is more specific, whereas the source entry shows the range of pages (firstpage-lastpage) on which the article appears.) These rules for page numbers also apply to an essay inside a book, as we will see later.

Heitman, Danny. "Write for Your Life: Why Writing Still Matters in the Age of AI." *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*, vol. 103, no. 3, Fall 2023, p. 30. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A771914510/AONE?u=tel_a_nsti&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=b81cb482.

Original language:

> I'm not against technology that can help writers clarify their thoughts and correct grammar and spelling. It's important to remember, though, that writing is about more than telling others what you think. It's also a vital way to tell you what you think. Writing, like painting, music, or any other art, is a path to self-discovery, a way for us to learn more about who we really are.

Examples:

- Editor and writer Danny Heitman speaks to the value of the creative process of writing, itself; he says that "writing is about more than telling others what you think. It's also a vital way to tell you what you think" (30).
- Heitman reminds us that writing is an art: "Writing, like painting, music, or any other art, is a path to self-discovery, a way for us to learn more about who we really are" (30).
- Writing is, after all, a form of art, and art—whatever form it takes—is a way to understand ourselves and what we know and what we think (Heitman 30).

In this next example of an article from a database, the "plus" (+) after the number indicates that the article starts on page 417 but then continues on later in the journal. (The pages are not consecutive.)

Osbeck, Mark K. "What Is 'Good Legal Writing' and Why Does It Matter?" *Drexel Law Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, spring 2012, pp. 417+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A346926615/AONE?u=tel_a_nsti&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=ef803360. Accessed 9 Oct. 2024.

Original language (BUT this language is ALL a quote *within* the source):

> "Those who won our independence by revolution were not cowards. They did not fear political change. They did not exalt order at the cost of liberty. To courageous, self-reliant men, with confidence in the power of free and fearless reasoning applied through the processes of popular government, no danger flowing from speech can be deemed clear and present, unless the incidence of the evil apprehended is so imminent that it may befall before there is opportunity for full discussion. If there be time to expose through discussion the falsehood and fallacies, to avert the evil by the processes of education, the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence. only an emergency can justify repression. Such must be the rule if authority is to be reconciled with freedom. Such, in my opinion, is the command of the Constitution."

Examples:

- Mark K. Osbeck, in his article about the value of good writing within the field of law (which is, itself, essentially a publishing field), offers several examples of poor writing before turning to the words of Justice Brandeis in *Whitney v. California.* In the finding of that case, Brandeis says that "'Those who won our independence by revolution were not cowards. They did not fear political change. They did not exalt order at the cost of liberty.'"

- Though he offers the caveat that "'only an emergency can justify repression,'" Brandeis argues: "'[T]he remedy to be applied [to hate speech] is more speech, not enforced silence'" (qtd. in Osbeck).
- The best way to address hate speech or dis/misinformation is not to censor speech, but to offer the contrary argument using reason and persuasion (Osbeck, quoting Brandeis).

The first example above shows a full-sentence quote from the source. The second example shows a partial quote. That second example includes some words inside [square] brackets; the brackets show that the language has been inserted into the quote. But that inserted language is helpful; it clarifies the meaning of the quote.

A Quote inside the Quote. In the examples above, we are quoting the source, but the source is quoting someone else. So we must give credit to (that is, we must cite) the source, while also showing that the language in the source is quoted. Note that the "quote inside a quote" uses 'single' quotation marks to show that fact. In American English, the only time we use 'single' quotation marks is to show a quote inside our quote from a source.

Dealing with single quotation marks can get tricky; if we are using curly quotes (and that may be a default setting on our word processor), they may face the wrong way; that's because the word processor connects the quotation mark to what is just before it. The easiest way to handle that is to space before the single quotation mark and then backspace to remove the space:

Step 1: " 'only

Step 2: "'only

That is, delete the space.

Here is another example of an article from one of the library's databases.

Ward-Smith, Peggy. "Words Matter." *Urologic Nursing,* vol. 37, no. 5, Sept.-Oct. 2017, pp. 233+. *Gale Academic OneFile,* https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.nscc.edu:3443/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T002&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=514ca427-4a13-46fe-8d7c-754b1f3166f1&hitCount=89&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=13&docId=GALE%7CA514056223&docType=Editorial&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZONE-MOD1&prodId=AONE&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CA514056223&searchId=R4&userGroupName=tel_a_nsti&inPS=true.

Original language:

> Price, McNeilly, and Surgenor (2006) describe the role of the nurse as one that is multifaceted, and includes facilitator, supporter, counsellor, educator, and teacher activities for our patients and their family members. In addition, nurses are instrumental members of a multidisciplinary care team. While we may have a small role in initially conveying healthcare news, we also have an obligation to support the patient and family during this process. These are times when patients and family members desperately want the outcome to be different than what it is. Placing the information in context, neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic, and repeating the facts and using consistent words, allows people to process the information. Every receipt of a less-than-desired healthcare outcome should have access to timely, up-to-date, accurate, and consistent information. This should be available in an appropriate format and language. This information may need to be provided over time as the information becomes processed. Literature suggests that the manner in which people are told about their diagnosis affects both the way in which they adjust to the situation and their wellbeing (Janse, Sprangers, Ranchor, & Fleer, 2016).

Examples:

- One study points out that the "role of the nurse … is multifaceted, and includes facilitator, supporter, counsellor, educator, and teacher activities" (Ward-Smith).
- Peggy Ward-Smith describes that how a nurse communicates to the patient (and the family) matters: "Placing the information in context, neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic, and repeating the facts and using consistent words, allows people to process the information."
- It is important, for example, for a nurse to use clear language and to emphasize the facts and not opinions when speaking with patients (Ward-Smith).

In the two database sources above, no page number is provided in the cite because the database we used does not show the individual page numbers. If we can see the page number we are on, then we cite to it. If not, we just include the information in the source entry. If no page numbers are given at all, we skip that element—that part of the source entry—and put the period after the date.

Here's another example that does show the range of pages. Note how the examples below it include the specific page number where the quoted language or idea is found.

Two Authors. This source has two authors. The first author listed at the source is the one we use first on the source entry, with the name reversed. But the second author's name is not reversed. (Note the punctuation.)

McGreevy, Jolion, and Rosamond Rhodes. "Triage: Medical Details and Words Matter." *American Journal of Bioethics*, vol. 21, no. 11, Nov. 2021, pp. 64-67. *Academic Search Premier*, https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.nscc.edu:3443/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=6&sid=8b976490-7071-43eb-b97a-98871f3036c7%40redis&bquery=words+matter&bdata=JmRiPWFwaCZjbGkwPUZUJmNsdjA9WSZ0eXBlPTEmc2VhcmNoTW9kZT1TdGFuZGFyZCZzaXRlPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d.

Original language:

> At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York during the spring of 2020, the Mount Sinai Hospital expanded inpatient bed capacity by 27% and critical care capacity by 126% to meet the demands of 2,591 COVID-19 positive patients, 614 of whom required ICU-level care (Wang et al. 2021) The aim was to achieve justice for the patient population by trying to avoid all avoidable deaths. Wilkinson's approach based instead on maximizing benefit would have focused resources on patients with the highest chance of survival, setting high exclusion criteria, such as whether a candidate for critical care was likely to survive for one-year post discharge. It is easy to imagine that a number of patients who survived for weeks to months under the "avoid avoidable deaths" approach would have been denied critical care resources and died much sooner under the "save the most lives" approach. If we had allocated ICU beds to only those patients with a frailty score predicting at least a 50% chance of surviving for the next year, patients with a reasonably good chance (10–49%) of surviving for one year could have been left to perish even when access to critical care would have given them a reasonable chance of surviving the acute period. Excluded frail patients might have exceeded their anticipated life span if they received needed critical care.

Examples:

- According to Jolion McGreevy and Rosamond Rhodes, how words are used in the approach to medical service greatly matters to the outcome of that approach. They examine the Spring 2020 reaction to Covid-19 at one hospital in New York, arguing that "a number of patients who survived for weeks to months under the 'avoid avoidable deaths' approach would have been denied critical care resources and died much sooner under the 'save the most lives' approach" (65).
- McGreevy and Rhodes insist that had a different approach to care been used, determined by the framing of the language used for that care choice, "Excluded frail patients might have exceeded their anticipated life span" (65).

- How we frame our decisions depends on how we use words; those words and the kind of approach to care those words determine may make the difference in the length of a patient's life (McGreevy and Rhodes 65).

Three or More Authors. Finally, here is one more example of a database article. This one has three or more authors listed at the source. Notice that only the first author listed at the source is the author named in the source entry. After that, the phrase "et al." is used. That common English phrase is actually a Latin phrase ***et alii***, abbreviated in English, which means "and the others." And because that phrase makes the authors plural, the verb we might use in our sentence must also be plural—we are essentially saying "they" when we say something like "Beatrix Kiddo et al. explain …."

Harris, Dylan, et al. "Value of Medical Writing: The Regulatory Writer's Perspective." *Medical Writing*, vol. 31, no. 2, June 2022, pp. 80-85. *Academic Search Premier*, https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.nscc.edu:3443/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=d0edac62-e41c-4a84-a487-4d36828f5745%40redis.

Original Language:

> Most regulatory medical writers report that their duties extend beyond basic document preparation following a template to include providing strategic guidance to teams and participating in some form of project management activity.

Examples:

- Researchers Dylan Harris et al. point out: "Most regulatory medical writers report that their duties extend beyond basic document preparation" (85).
- One study found that the work of regulatory medical writers goes "beyond basic document preparation … to include providing strategic guidance to teams and participating in some form of project management" (Harris et al. 85).

Here are a few final notes before we move on to other types of sources:

Never quote from or draw your information from the "abstract"—the summary paragraph at the top of an article or on a search list. Always draw from the actual article. If you cannot see more than the abstract, you don't have a source.

That is not unusual on the web, as opposed to the databases in our library: You may find yourself in a database on the web—treat the article the same way as the examples above. But if you see only a long abstract, you do not have a source. Be thoughtful about what you

see. You may be able to click a link to get to the actual article (but absolutely do not agree to download some software to help you read a .pdf!—beware the sales pitch; focus on finding a good source).

When you are in the library's databases, one way to avoid the issue of having only an abstract but not the article is to toggle on "Full-Text" when you are searching inside a database. That way, you should see only search results for full articles that you can access easily in the database.

Never completely trust a citation provided by a source or by a third party. They are often incorrect. *You are responsible for the source entry.* And **never ever** trust Microsoft Word to provide your citations or source entries—those are always **very, very wrong**!

Book (including Textbook)

This used to be the first and most simple source entry example in MLA—until we started doing so much of our research online! Here's the way to handle a book.

All of the information for a book source entry appears on the "title page" (the page just a few pages into the book, itself, or just past the front cover in a digital version), except for the copyright, which appears on the back of that title page. **If multiple years appear on the copyright, use only the most recent date.**

The basic structure of the book is this:

Author. *Title*. Publisher, Copyright year.

In the following example, the original publication date is included in a parenthetical after the title; the latest copyright year is at the end of the entry. Also, this example shows a particular edition of the novel. That information follows the title. You'll see editions again in the textbooks that come after this example. (If an edition is not provided, don't include it.)

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451* (1951). 60th anniversary ed., Simon & Schuster, 2013.

Example:

- The simple question that triggers Guy Montag's awakening in the dystopian future of *Fahrenheit 451* is the same question that may awaken each of us: The young girl Clarisse, at the end of their first meeting, asks: "'Are you happy?'" (Bradbury 7).

In the quotation above, we are quoting Bradbury, but the language we are using is dialogue spoken by one of the characters, so that "quote inside a quote" appears in 'single' quotation marks.

The next two examples are of textbooks that include essays by different authors inside them.

Hoffman, Andrew J. *Monsters: A Bedford Spotlight Reader*, 2d ed., e-book ed., Macmillan, 2019.

Jacobus, Lee A. *A World of Ideas: Essential Readings for College Writers*, 11th ed., e-book ed., Bedford, 2020.

If we are drawing information from or quoting from the introduction to an essay in the book or the introduction to a chapter, we must cite to the book's author (or editor, if that's the only name on the title page). Otherwise, we must have a source entry for the essay (or article or story) that we are using from that book.

Bacon, Francis. "The Four Idols." *A World of Ideas: Essential Readings for College Writers*, 11th ed., e-book ed., edited by Lee A. Jacobus, Bedford, 2020, pp. 724-35.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire." *Monsters: A Bedford Spotlight Reader*, 2d ed., e-book ed., edited by Andrew J. Hoffman, MacMillan, 2019, pp. 184-188.

But what if we are using multiple essays from the same book? We can simplify the source entry for each of those separate essays from the same book—but ***only*** if we also include a source entry for the whole book.

For example, if we were using two sources from Jacobus's anthology of essays, our Works Cited page could include these two shortened source entries—but again, **only** if the book is **also included** on the Works Cited (whether we cite to Jacobus in our paper or not). Notice that the source entries are alphabetized:

Bacon, Francis. "The Four Idols." Jacobus, pp. 724-35.

Jacobus, Lee A. *A World of Ideas: Essential Readings for College Writers*, 11th ed., e-book ed., Bedford, 2020.

Jefferson, Thomas. "The Declaration of Independence." Jacobus, pp. 92-95.

Examples:

- Thomas Jefferson, as Lee A. Jacobus reminds us, uses a particular rhetorical strategy that was common to the legal writing of the time, the *periodic*

sentence, in which the sentence is "long and carefully balanced, and the main point comes at the end" (90).

- Jefferson's most famous phrase is that curious combination of natural rights: "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (92).
- According to Francis Bacon, one of the tendencies we have as humans is to close ourselves around a preconceived notion rather than to open our minds to a different possibility, "The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion … draws all things else to support and agree with it" (726).

In the first example, by naming Jacobus in the sentence, we have cited to the source entry. All that is needed (because this is a book and does have page numbers) is to cite the page number where this language (or idea or information) is found.

E-book

Both of the textbooks noted in the section above are e-books (that at one point appeared inside D2L as textbooks), but the next two examples speak directly to the e-book as a type of source.

This book does not have a URL (because it is read on a device like a Kindle):

Carter, Awena, et al. *Why Writing Matters: Issues of Access and Identity in Writing Research and Pedagogy*. eBook ed., John Benjamins Publishing, 2009.

The next source entry is the same book, but this one does have a URL (because it comes from the college library). Note that the database is included before the URL:

Carter, Awena, et al. *Why Writing Matters: Issues of Access and Identity in Writing Research and Pedagogy*. John Benjamins Publishing, 2009. *eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost)*, https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.nscc.edu:3443/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=2d48c4ce-199c-49c0-9693-4c75b8f3d386%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=277838&db=e000xna.

Film

If the source is the actual film:

Reservoir Dogs. Directed by Quentin Tarantino, Miramax, 1992.

If the source is a clip from the film posted online:

"Why Am I Mr. Pink?" Clip from *Reservoir Dogs*, *YouTube*, uploaded by Movieclips, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4W5KhfJHF_4.

Example:

- Words matter. Why else does Steve Buscemi's character in Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* complain: "Why am I 'Mr. Pink'?"

Video (such as *YouTube*)

If there is a clear speaker listed, start with that person's name as the author. If there is not, start with the title of the video.

Brabazon, Tara. "Vlog 23: Why Writing Matters." *YouTube*, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OFoowbmhJg.

Example:

- In response to comments by graduate students in STEM fields that writing doesn't matter in the Sciences, Tara Brabazon introduces her series of vlogs about publishing in the sciences by explaining, "The point of a Ph.D., in fact, the point of research, is to communicate your ideas to an audience." She notes that our modern world is what it is because of what scientists like Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, and Stephen Hawking wrote and published.

Sometimes the phrase "uploaded by …" needs to follow the website (*YouTube*) to show who posted the video, if that info is not obvious already.

Benn, Adam. "Write Well. Start Writing Now." *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUKgJsvoDUk. Accessed 26 Nov. 2024.

(How to source *YouTube* videos in MLA: https://style.mla.org/citing-youtube-videos/)

TV Show

"Shadows." *The X-Files*, Fox, 22 Oct. 1993.

Example:

- When Dana Scully accuses her partner, Fox Mulder, of lying, he responds: "I would never lie. I willfully participated in a campaign of misinformation" ("Shadows").

Song

Kristofferson, Kris. "Me and Bobby McGee." (1969) *AZLyrics*, 2000-2024, https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/kriskristofferson/meandbobbymcgee.html.

Example:

- In the immortal words of Kris Kristofferson: "Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose / And nothin' ain't worth nothin' but it's free" (lines 11-12).

Forward Slash. Notice in the quote above the forward slash mark with a space before and after it. That shows the line break in these lyrics. The same punctuation is needed when poetry (or a verse play) is quoted: ***Where the author breaks the line is essential to the lyric and must be shown to the readers.***

Also note that the numbers are identified here. See "Line Numbers" in the next section for more information. (Unless the numbers in a cite are identified, they are assumed to be page numbers.)

Poem

Millay, Edna St. Vincent. "Dirge without Music." (1928). *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52773/dirge-without-music. Accessed 1 Apr. 2024.

Example:

- Edna St. Vincent Millay begins her poem "Dirge without Music" with this assertion: "I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground" (line 1). A few stanzas in, she insists:

> The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,—
> They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
> Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
> More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world. (9-12)

Block Indent1. Notice that when a block indent is used, the quote has no quotation marks (the indent replaces them) and ends with the period, followed by the parenthetical, with no punctuation after that cite.

Here, the block indent is used to show the lines from the poem. But the block indent **must be used for *any quote* that is longer than 4 lines of the paper (that means prose, too, not just lyrics)**.

Line Numbers. For poetry, the line numbers are listed (instead of page numbers). With the first cite—(**line** 1)—we establish that the number refers to a line. So when we quote from Millay again, the reader should assume that the next number cite (9-12) refers to line numbers, as well.

To quote these same lines internally, use slash marks to show the line breaks—it is important in both poetry and song lyrics to show how the author intended each line to break. See the "Song" section above for more information.

Example:

- Millay insists that roses are secondary to the loss: "The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,— / They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses" (lines 9-10). She ends the stanza: "But I do not approve. / More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world" (11-12).

Play

How we cite to a play depends on how it is segmented. In the two examples below, the first source is for a **verse play** from William Shakespeare. Instead of page numbers, we cite to act, scene, and line numbers—so that any version of the play could be accessed to get us to the quote or idea we cite.

The second example is a more modern play that is prose, not verse. Tennessee Williams' play has just seven scenes (no acts), so we will cite to the scene.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. *The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, Houghton-Mifflin, 1942.

Williams, Tennessee. *The Glass Menagerie*. Random House, 1945.

Examples:

- Juliet wishes that her love Romeo were from any other family than that of her family's sworn enemy: "O, be some other name! / What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet; / So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd" (2.2.42-45).
- Tennessee Williams' Gentleman Caller, Jim, tells Laura she needs more confidence: "[O]ther people are not such wonderful people. You're one times one. …. They're common as—weeds, but—you—well, you're—Blue Roses!" (Scene 7).

The Shakespeare cite (2.2.42-45) is to Act II, Scene II of the play, lines 42-45. The MLA cite uses Arabic numbers, not Roman.

As with any quote, note that we keep the author's punctuation (including all of Williams' dashes!), showing any change with [square] brackets and any omission with the ellipsis (…). The 4th dot in the ellipsis in that quote is for the period at the end of the sentence we omitted. Note, also, that the quote ends with an exclamation point, so we keep that punctuation, whereas if the quote ended with a comma or period before that parenthetical cite, we would delete the punctuation.

Dictionary

If we need to provide a meaning for a term, first of all, it is best if ***we, the writer,*** define the word, ourselves. (Dictionary language is not often all that helpful!) But if we must use a dictionary, the word defined becomes the "article title," and we must give credit to the source:

"Cursive." *Merriam-Webster*, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cursive.

Example:

- Handwriting, particularly "cursive," a type of "flowing" writing "with the strokes of successive characters joined and the angles rounded" is not only unique to each individual writer, but also part of the thinking and writing process: Whether we are taking notes or drafting a piece of writing, the physical nature of using a pen or pencil to put words together on the page is one of the best ways to capture ideas. And this is true both for creative work and for note-taking.

Putting quotation marks around the word being defined is the citation—it gets readers to the first word of the source entry. Moreover, we should always use quotation marks (or some other method) to point out a word in our sentence.

As with any quote, we put quotation marks around the language from the dictionary that we are using in our sentence. **A dictionary is a source.**

What we don't really need to do is gum up the works by naming the dictionary. That info is in the source entry, so there's no need to repeat it in the sentence (that is, avoid language like "*Merriam-Webster* defines 'cursive' as …"). Give the reader what the reader needs, but stay on message.

Bible (Sacred Text)

Here are two ways we might handle using the Bible as a source: The first is a print version (with the info found on the title page and the copyright used being the most recent year on the back of that page). The second is an online version. Note that the URL is the website's homepage, an exception to the general rule of using website URL's. This is because it is not necessary to connect readers to the specific book, chapter, and verse on that URL.

The Holy Bible. Giant Print Reference Bible, New King James Version, Holman Bible Publishers, 2013.

The Holy Bible, New King James Version. *Biblegateway*, https://www.biblegateway.com/.

Examples:

- As John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*The Holy Bible*, NKJV, John 1.1).
- He continues: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1.14).

On first use of the source, include the title that will connect readers to the source entry. After that, though, only the needed info is provided (book, chapter, verse); the second example is still using John, so only the numbers are needed.

If an editor or translator is named at the sacred text source, include that (Edited by …; Translated by …) after the book title.

Personal Interview

If you are researching something and your research can benefit by interviewing someone *credible* in that field, you may shift to that kind of primary research. This is not something that one would do by interviewing a buddy. But if, for example, we are researching the career of nursing, then actually interviewing someone with multiple years of experience in that job could be helpful. Capture the information this way:

Moore, Rachel. Personal Interview. 1 Apr. 2024.

Then in the essay, include the details and titles that show the credibility of the person:

Example:

- Rachel Moore, a professor of English for 32 years, points out the increasingly casual nature of written communications over those decades: "The formality of the essay—just as with published articles—has decreased over time with a more natural style edging in."

Credibility Matters. Again, the personal interview is not something to be used unless the person interviewed has information worth sharing—and the credibility to make the information worthwhile.

Credibility is also why "just any" web article might not be useful. If the webpage is so crowded with ads that it's hard to read, that's a good sign that the article may just be junk—an excuse to share ads and collect user data. That's one reason the college subscribes to databases: The databases (mostly) offer better quality sources, many of which would otherwise be behind a paywall.

The last few examples below are social media and AI sources. **Your instructor may not permit the use of any of these**, as the likelihood that they have a lack of credibility is much higher. So do ask before you rely on these types of sources.

Social Media & AI

Be sure to read the section just above this: Not all instructors will permit the use of these types of sources!

Reddit

Yodeling Prospector. Comment on r/Writing question "Why Do You Write?" *Reddit*, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/writing/comments/9s9wm7/why_do_you_write/?rdt=34946.

Example:

- In answer to the *Reddit* discussion "Why do you write," Yodeling Prospector refers to "that wonderful mode where writing just bursts out of my fingers onto the computer" and explains that through writing, "I can write the stories I'd want to read."

(How to source Reddit comments in MLA: https://style.mla.org/citing-reddit/)

A few more social media links:

How to source a post in Instagram: https://style.mla.org/citing-instagram/

How to source a post from Facebook: https://style.mla.org/citing-facebook/

See also:

Rappaport, Jennifer. "Citing Material Posted on Social Media Platforms." *MLA*, 16 June 2021, https://style.mla.org/citing-social-media/.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The "article title" that begins the source entry is the basic prompt used. Include the specific AI used and the version. The URL should get the reader to the AI prompt and response.

"Explain in a paragraph why learning cursive is helpful." Prompt. *ChatGPT*, version 4.0 mini, *OpenAI*, 9 Oct. 2024, https://chatgpt.com/?ref=dotcom.

Example:

- When asked to explain the value of learning to write cursive, ChatGPT proffered this response:

> Learning cursive writing is helpful for several reasons. It enhances fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, which are crucial for overall writing proficiency. Cursive writing promotes faster writing, allowing students to take notes more efficiently during lectures or discussions. Additionally, it fosters a personal connection to writing; the fluid, connected letters can make writing feel more expressive and unique. Cursive is also beneficial for reading historical documents or personal letters, as many older texts are written in cursive. Overall, it enriches both the cognitive and creative aspects of writing. ("Explain")

(How to source AI-generated writing in MLA: https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/.)

Block Indent2. Note the block-indented quote in the example above. In a formatted essay—as opposed to the bulleted example above—the block indent is half an inch (0.5in) from the left margin; it lines up with the first-line indent on each paragraph.

As we saw earlier on this topic, the indent replaces the quotation marks. And the other differences with this type of quote are that the quotation ends with the period or comma and the parenthetical cite after it does not have a period after it. That's pretty much the opposite way we handle punctuation when it runs in the text instead of a block indent!

Example:

- Prompted to explain the value of learning to write cursive, ChatGPT summarized its response thusly: "Overall, it enriches both the cognitive and creative aspects of writing" ("Explain").

If you have any questions about how to cite something, and you don't see the answers in the examples above, just ask! Ask your instructor (your primary reader, after all!); ask a writing tutor; ask the web. What really matters is to understand the basic "why" of how these elements are put together. With that knowledge we can usually figure out an answer—or know where to go to find one!