

biblatex-mla

MLA Style Using Biblatex

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1 Introduction

Biblatex-mla provides support to Biblatex, BibTeX, and LaTeX for citations and Works Cited lists in the style established by the Modern Language Association (MLA). The style defaults to inline parenthetical citations, but it also offers support for MLA-style footnotes. For more on the commands and options for changing package defaults, see § 2.1 and § 2.2, respectively, below.

MLA style, a common standard for writers in the humanities, is outlined in the *MLA Style Manual*, in its 3rd edition, and the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, now in its 7th edition. By default, these files follow definitions for these latest editions, though they also offer the option of support for the previous style (used until 2009). Biblatex-mla also follows the logic of the MLA when citing similar material repeatedly, borrowing the function—but not the form—of *ibid* and *idem*. Biblatex-mla is compatible with Biblatex’s support for hyperref and tex2ht, and the main word in each citation (either the author’s name, the title, or the page number) serves as a link to the particular entry in the Works Cited. For anything not covered by this manual, please also see the Biblatex documentation or contact me by email.

2 Use

To ensure American-style quotation marks (if that’s your thing),¹ you need to call the `babel` and `csquotes` packages in the preamble of your Latex document:

```
\usepackage[american]{babel}
\usepackage{csquotes}
\usepackage[style=mla]{biblatex}
\addbibresource{<bibfile.bib>}
```

Replace “<bibfile.bib>” with the name of your .bib bibliography file. The style (provisionally) supports footnote citations with the **autocite=footnote** package option. Some of the other options supported by `biblatex-mla` include **firstlonghand**, **mladraft**, **annotation**, **noremoveinfo**, **nofullfootnote**, **publmedium**, and **guessmedium**, all discussed in § 2.2.

2.1 Commands

The standard commands for `biblatex-mla` generally follow those defined by `Biblatex`. Included below are the most typical commands. For more commands and options, reference the `Biblatex` manual.

\autocite Insert a citation. See table 1 for examples. For best results, use the command before punctuation like this:

```
\autocite{x}.
```

`Biblatex-mla` defaults to parenthetical citations for **\autocite**, but a package option—**autocite=footnote**, explained below in § 2.2—changes this default behavior. In this example, `x` represents the bibkey of the particular bibliographic entry being cited. Insert page numbers and citational prenotes using square braces:

```
\autocite[z][y]{x}
```

Here, `y` is the page number, and `z` is the prenote (such as “qtd. in”). If indicating a prenote but no page number, you must include an empty set for the page number:

```
\autocite[z][]{x}
```

When citing a page number without any prenote, only one set of square brackets is needed:

```
\autocite[y]{x}
```

¹Other localization files, `mla-spanish.lbx`, `mla-portuguese.lbx`, and `mla-italian.lbx`, are also available to use `biblatex-mla` in languages other than English. These and other localization files are included in `biblatex-mla` releases, but they will not always be the latest versions available. Updated and new localization files will be uploaded to GitHub (<<https://github.com/jmclawson/biblatex-mla/>>) once they are ready. There is also support for proper punctuation in non-American dialects of English. Try **british**, **canadian**, or other Babel identifiers, such as **spanish**.

Input	Output	Comment
<code>\autocite[12]{morrison02aa}</code>	(Morrison 12)	A typical citation
<code>\autocite[34]{morrison02aa}</code>	(34)	Immediately subsequent citations to the same source
<code>\autocite{morrison02aa}</code>	(Morrison)	Immediately subsequent citations lacking page reference
<code>\autocite[12]{frye57ab}</code>	(Frye, <i>Sound and Poetry</i> 12)	Citation to a text by a prolific author
<code>\autocite[34]{frye57ab}</code>	(34)	Subsequent immediate citations to the same source
<code>\autocite[56]{frye91aa}</code>	(<i>Double Vision</i> 56)	Citation to new source, same author
<code>\autocite[101]{morrison02aa}</code>	(Morrison 101)	Citation interrupting those by Frye
<code>\autocite[78]{frye91aa}</code>	(Frye, <i>Double Vision</i> 78)	Author tracker starts over

Table 1: Syntax and output for typical citations using `biblatex-mla`

`\autocite*` Suppress the author’s name in a citation. See table table 2 for examples. Use this starred variant of the above command when indicating the author’s name in the sentence calling the citation.

`\autocites` Insert a citation for multiple sources at once. The respective citations will be separated by semicolons.

`\autocites[z1][y1]{x1}[z2][y2]{x1}[z3][y3]{x3}`

The curled braces always indicate the bibkey, and the squared braces respectively belong to the curly braces that follow them.

`\mancite` Reset only those internal trackers for `biblatex-mla` which shorten subsequent citations to the same work or to other works by the same author. See table table 3 for examples. If `biblatex-mla` is getting so ambitious in shortening subsequent citations that it leads to ambiguity, please consider using this command before the ambiguous citation.

`\citereset` Reset all the internal trackers for `biblatex-mla`, including those which shorten subsequent citations to the same work or to other works by the same author and including those associated with the **`firstlonghand`** and **`nofullfootnote`** options, explained in § 2.2.

`\printbibliography` Insert the list of Works Cited.

2.2 Package Options

`Biblatex-mla` defaults to the recommendations established by the MLA, but there may be times when you need to change some of these options for publication or other uses. As such, a number of package options have been defined to change the functionality of `biblatex-mla` within reason.

Input	Output	Comment
<code>\autocite*[102]{morrison02aa}</code>	(102)	Suppressing the author's name for an entry with a single attribution to a given author prints only the page numbers
<code>\autocite*[91]{frye57ab}</code>	(<i>Sound and Poetry</i> 91)	Suppressing the name of a prolific author will print enough information to avoid ambiguity
<code>\autocite*{morrison02aa}</code>	(<i>Sula</i>)	Suppressing author's name without a page number prints the title of the work

Table 2: Suppressing the name of an author in citations using a starred citation command

autocite=footnote Using `\autocite` with biblatex-mla defaults to MLA-preferred inline, parenthetical citations. To style citations as footnotes, set the **autocite=footnote** option in your preamble:

```
\usepackage[style=mla,autocite=footnote]{biblatex}
```

firstlonghand The first citation of a source with a shorthand defined will always print a citation with author's name and, potentially, the shorttitle field. (For more on this field, see section § 3.2, below.) Add **firstlonghand=false** to your preamble to disable this option and print only the shorthand even on the first citation:

```
\usepackage[style=mla,firstlonghand=false]{biblatex}
```

nofullfootnote When using biblatex-mla for footnotes, the style file will provide full bibliographic detail for the first citation of every source. To turn off this option, add to your preamble **nofullfootnote**:

```
\usepackage[style=mla,autocite=footnote,nofullfootnote]{biblatex}
```

annotation It is possible to print annotations to entries in the Works Cited if the **annotation** field is defined in an entry. To turn on this option, add **annotation=true** to your preamble:

```
\usepackage[style=mla,annotation=true]{biblatex}
```

mladraft When using MLA parenthetical citations, it is best practice to cite only as much as is necessary to avoid ambiguity. Biblatex-mla can flag consecutive citations to the same page range, allowing you to defer citations to the end. In draft mode, biblatex-mla will place a clover (♣) in the margin, along with a single footnote explanation. To use the tool outside of draft mode, set the **mladraft** option in your preamble to true; similarly, to avoid seeing these clovers and the footnote in draft mode, set the option to false:

```
\usepackage[style=mla,mladraft=true]{biblatex}
```

noremoveinfo Modeled after the implementation in biblatex-apa to suppress remote information in the .bib file from being printed in the bibliography, this option affects isbn, issn, isrn, doi, and eprint fields.

Input	Output	Comment
<code>\autocite[12]{morrison02aa}</code>	(Morrison 12)	Typical citation
<code>\mancite</code>	(Morrison 34)	Citation ignoring the previous citation
<code>\autocite[34]{morrison02aa}</code>		

Table 3: Using a command to reset trackers for shortening subsequent citation

```
\usepackage[style=mla,noremoveinfo=true]{biblatex}
```

showmedium Biblatex-mla version 0.9 introduced support for the latest MLA style, defined in the 3rd edition of the *Style Manual*, requiring the publication medium of each entry to be printed in the list of Works Cited. By default, biblatex-mla will do the same, using the `howpublished` field. Turn off this option—and the other new changes from the 3rd edition—by setting the **showmedium** option to false:

```
\usepackage[style=mla,showmedium=false]{biblatex}
```

guessmedium An entry with no defined `howpublished` field will default either to a “Web” publication (if there’s a defined `url` field or `eprint` field) or a “Print” publication (if there’s not). To avoid biblatex-mla guessing the publication medium, thereby printing nothing when the field is undefined, deactivate the **guessmedium** option:

```
\usepackage[style=mla,guessmedium=false]{biblatex}
```

3 Database Guide

Biblatex (and, thus, biblatex-mla) uses BibTeX-style databases to manage the citations and list of works cited. While these databases are just flat text files, there are many good programs available to help you manage them. Zotero, for example, can export as BibTeX, as can Endnote and other commercial programs; each of these will nevertheless export with varying degrees of success. Standalone BibTeX managers such as JabRef and BibDesk use `.bib` files as their native filetype and are much more reliable for managing your list of sources.

Whether exporting from Zotero or another program, whether managing your `.bib` files in a standalone editor or manipulating them in a text editor, you will at some point have to know the fields available to biblatex-mla—especially as some of these are unique to Biblatex, and as I’ve had to repurpose some of the fields to suit biblatex-mla.

3.1 Typical fields

The best way to acquaint oneself with biblatex-mla is to explore the included `.bib` files, `.tex` files, and the resulting `.pdf` output. Much of the the bibfile database is pretty obvious. Take a look at figure 1, for example.

```
@book{douglas93aa,
  author= {Mary Douglas},
  booktitle= {Purity and Danger},
  date= {1993},
  location= {London},
  origdate= {1966},
  publisher= {Routledge},
  title= {Purity and Danger},
  subtitle= {An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution
and Taboo}}
```

Works Cited

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. 1966. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Figure 1: A standard .bib file **@book** entry and its corresponding output in the list of Works Cited, beneath.

Using `bibtex-mla` will automatically format the list of works cited entries to follow the most recent guidelines outlined in the *MLA Style Manual*. In addition to many of the standard fields one might expect to find, `bibtex-mla` is also capable of handling unusual fields, described below. For a fuller consideration of the fields supported by `bibtex-mla`, see the example files and consult the Biblatex manual.

3.2 Unusual Fields

Biblatex also supports the following fields, sometimes concerned more with presentation than bibliographic merit, in all entrytypes. Define these in your **.bib** files:

- crossref** the key of a parent source in which a shorter source is found. The `crossref` field is handy to avoid spending time re-inputting similar data, but it is also useful for including MLA-style cross-references in the list of Works Cited. Keep in mind the problems inherent in using the `crossref` field, outlined in section 2.4.1 of the Biblatex manual. In the future, `bibtex-mla` may provide further support for the Biblatex `xref` field, making `crossref` secondary in importance.
- shorttitle** the shortened title to be printed in citations to disambiguate among multiple titles by one author. `Bibtex-mla` will only print this field in citations when necessary; when this field is not defined, `bibtex-mla` will use the whole of the `title` field.

shorthand when defined, a unique label to be printed in citations instead of the author and shorttitle. By default, `biblatex-mla` will only use the `shorthand` label after a first citation with author (and title, if necessary). See the **firstlonghand** option on page 4 to disable this feature.

options separate the following options with a comma:

useauthor=false allows the label of the entry to default to something other than the author, when the author field is defined. If the editor is defined, the label will default to that. The **useauthor** option defaults to true.

useeditor=false allows the label of the entry default to something other than the editor in the case of the author field being undefined or the **useauthor** option set to false. The **useeditor** option defaults to true.

usetranslator=true allows the label of the entry to inherit the name of the translator when the author and editor fields are undefined or the **useauthor** and **useeditor** options are set to false. The **usetranslator** option defaults to false.

totalnames=true allows the label to include all the names in its list, rather than maxing out at three. The **totalnames** option defaults to false.

uniquetranslator=true indicates that a translator of a particular @incollection entry is unique to that work, rather than the collection at large. The **uniquetranslator** option defaults to false.

noreMOTEinfo=false indicates that the “remote” information of an entry is to be printed, including the fields `isbn`, `issn`, `isrn`, `doi`, and `eprint`. These fields are usually omitted. See also the global option also called **noreMOTEinfo**, on page 4, above, for defining this option on a per-document basis. The **noreMOTEinfo** option defaults to true.

4 Meta

4.1 License

`biblatex-mla` is copyrighted © 2007–2013, by James Clawson. Permission is granted to copy, distribute, and modify this software under the terms of the LaTeX Project Public License, version 1.3: <<http://www.ctan.org/tex-archive/macros/latex/base/lppl.txt>>.

4.2 Feedback

If you have any questions, requests, or other feedback please email me. My email address is at the top of this document. If you end up improving the code to be more accurate to the MLA standard, please be kind to the rest of us and share; I’m very happy to incorporate improvements! If anything works differently than you feel it ought to work, please let me know. Apart from time and my willingness to write documentation, I’m limited only by the problems of which I’m unaware.