



Help With: MLA In-Text Citation

In MLA format you indicate what books or sources your quotations come from in a Works Cited list at the end of your paper. In-text citation refers to how you format and indicate the quotations within your paper.

You must show your readers that the information or words are not yours, both to tell them where they can find out more information, and to protect yourself from charges of plagiarism. It's not necessary to cite common knowledge (World War I ended in 1918) but obscure facts or opinions need to be acknowledged (The Belgium index fell to 2453 in May 1919. Some scholars believe this was the end of Belgium's dominance of the wool industry.)

The usual way to cite in MLA is to list the author's last name (Jones 6) or names (Jones and Thomson 6). If there is no author, you can list the publication (*Time* 18)—notice the italics because it's a magazine—or some 'key words' from the source which will be recognizable in the Works Cited list: ("Binge drinking" 21). Note the quotation marks.

You might have seen sources using small numbers to mark quotations: One problem with obesity is that "doctors can't legislate exercise."² The page has a footnote at the bottom or an endnote at the end of the paper. This style is also called Chicago style citation. MLA style papers in the history genre often use this format, but humanities papers mostly cite in-text.

Here are seven common ways to organize a quotation within your text. None of them are better or worse; your situation often helps determine which one is best, and it can be monotonous to use the same format over and over.

- Straight quote: Experts agree that "No one in the industry is to blame" (Green 8).
- Attribution – Quote: Green argues, "No one in the industry is to blame" (8).
- Quote – Attribution: "No one in the industry is to blame," according to Green (8).
- Quote – Attribution – Quote: "No one in the industry," argues Green, "is to blame" (8).

The first example is the most common format. It's used when the author's identity is not particularly important. The second three assume some reason for pointing out the author's name.

Note the punctuation. The period always goes to the end, but the comma goes inside. The page number also goes to the end in parentheses. If you cite a web page, you might need to omit the page number: (CNN). If you're using a PDF file you can cite those numbers.

If you have a series of sentences with quotations from the same author, you might even cite the name once and then omit it: Furthermore, "efficiency naturally falls over time" (8). Avoid doing this across paragraphs, as you might move the paragraph later during editing and break the link.

- Key-word quote: Experts can only surmise that "no one" is solely at fault (Green 8).

Key-words quotations work well when you want to credit someone's ideas in a short space, or if the phrasing or style of the source doesn't fit your sentence. Advanced writers often favor them as they let you pack more information into a shorter sentence.

- Block quotations. A block quotation is *four* or more lines of text. Skip a line before and after the block quotation, and indent on the left side. Don't overuse block quotations to fill space.

Green makes an important point:

No one in the industry is to blame. There were really no inventors of the modern stock trade system as now used on Wall Street; it is a system which has developed over centuries based on its European, mostly British, ancestors. Rapid expansions and crashes are simply built into the system. (8)

Notice that there are no quotation marks (unless there is a quotation within the quotation), and that the period, mysteriously, goes *before* the parentheses. You will see some sources which single-space block quotations, but generally they are double-spaced.

- Paraphrase quotation: Green argues that it is foolish to assign blame to any one agent (8).

You can also paraphrase someone's writing in your own words. This is good if you want to summarize a long quotation, or if the original is strangely phrased or in a foreign language. Notice there are no quotation marks.

Indirect Citation

You might have a source where the writer quotes somebody, and you want to use that quote as well. You need to indicate that you are quoting someone else's quotation and not the author by using "qtd. in," short for "quoted in".

Before taking off, the pope said he would "pray earnestly" for the victims of the terrorist attack (qtd. in *Newsweek*, 34).

Advice for Better Citation

- It gets repetitive saying "according to" or "says" *ad nauseum*. Here are some alternatives:

writes, argues, contends, states, notes, relates, describes, remarks, asserts, maintains, implies, suggests, holds, mentions, concludes, announces, declares, insists, observes, discusses, says, relays, finds, surmises, ventures

- Don't overdo quoting. If your paper is mostly quotations, your readers will lose trust in you. They will ask themselves why they are bothering reading your paper if you have nothing new to say and are just shoveling in other people's opinions.
- Be careful to write your quotation as a complete sentence. Try to match the grammar and verb tense of your quotation with the rest of your text. Delete the quotation marks and ask yourself whether you have written a grammatical sentence.

No: Park argues that "Dokdo, being a continual point of argument with Japan." This is not a sentence.

Yes: Park argues that Dokdo remains "a continual point of argument with Japan."

- Avoid orphan quotations where you insert a quotation and then move on to a new topic. The reader wants you to discuss the quotation and explain why it is important or relevant to your argument. Ultimately the paper is about what *you* think. The sources are there to support and not to replace your ideas.