MLA Style Formatting

Most writing within humanities uses the Modern Language Association (MLA) Style. MLA Style helps a writer be consistent in formatting the text, allowing readers to focus on the writer’s ideas. Additionally, incorporating and citing sources in MLA Style increases the writer’s credibility and directs others to resources where they can learn more about the subject or topic.

This handout, based on MLA Handbook, Eighth Edition and The MLA Style Center Online (style.mla.org), focuses on formatting text in MLA Style, but writers should always tailor their work to their audience and assignment. For each topic, the corresponding handbook section is listed in parentheses; if no section is listed, the information is found at the MLA Style Center Online. Note: Formatting for MLA Handbook, Eighth Edition is the same as the seventh edition.

General Format (MLA Handbook sections 1.3 and 3) and In-text Citations
Font: Clear, easily readable; standard size (e.g., Times New Roman, 12 pt. font)
Line Spacing: Double-spaced; no extra lines between heading, title, or body
Margins: 1-inch margins

Fig. 1. Sample MLA formatted paper from MLA Style Center; “Second-year course in African American studies.” The MLA Style Center, Modern Language Association of America, 2016.
Block Quotes (MLA Handbook section 1.3.2): When using a quote that extends more than four lines (using 1” margins) you must use block quote format: indent ½ inch from the left margin, double-space, do not use quotation marks, and place the citation after the period.

Works Cited Format (MLA Handbook section 2.7)

The works cited page is formatted like the rest of the paper: 1 inch margins, double-spaced, a right-aligned header that includes last name and page number. List sources alphabetically with no extra lines between sources.

Header: Continue the pagination from the rest of the paper.

Title: Center and use same size and format as the body of the paper.

Hanging Indent:
Set a ½” indent for citations over one line. (To set the indent in MS Word, highlight citations, right-click and select Paragraph. Under Indentation, select Special Indent. Click Hanging, and set it to ½”.)

Page Numbers: List page numbers efficiently (e.g., 141–48 instead of 141–148).