Joe Student

Prof. Jeffrey R. Wilson

Expos 20: Why Shakespeare?

17 Dec. 2014

A Sample MLA Style Paper

This paper is formatted in MLA style, which is the style you will usually follow for papers of literary criticism. If you want to be taken seriously as a writer, your paper must be properly formatted. Doing so signals your membership in an academic field or profession. Before turning in a paper meant to be written in MLA style, hold it up next to this one. If they do not look the same, then you have incorrectly formatted your paper. If, however, a professor provides specific guidelines for formatting a paper, you should follow them, even if they differ from what is described below (and resist the urge to tell your professor that his or her formatting guidelines are incorrect, even though they are).

If you are submitting a hard copy, papers should be printed from a laser-quality printer on separate sheets of 8½ x 11 inch paper, stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Whether submitted as a hard copy or electronically, all MLA-style papers should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with double-spaced lines. The entire paper – including the front matter (i.e., name, date, title, etc.) and the Works Cited page – should be in the same type and size of font, nothing bolded or otherwise stylized. Also, the entire paper – including the front matter, the Works Cited page, and any block-quotes – should be double-spaced. Margins on all sides should be one inch (not 1.25 inches, which is sometimes the default setting in some word processing programs). Paragraphs should be indented one-half inch and left-justified (not full-justified). Do not skip lines between paragraphs. It is standard to include only one space after periods that end sentences; however, double-spacing between sentences is okay.

For your front matter, do not make a title page for your paper. Instead, include your name, your professor’s name, the course name, and the date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Then center your title: do not add extra space above or below the title of the paper, and do not bold or otherwise stylize your title. Capitalize the first letter of the first word of your title, the first word after a semicolon or colon if you use either, and the first letter of all the other words except articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. Begin your paper just below your title. Finally, using the automatic function in your word-processing program, create a header. Put your last name and the page number in the upper right-hand corner of the header, one-half inch from the top and right-justified.

Italicize the titles of books and other long works, such as web sites. Use italics, not underlining, throughout your paper: typographically, italics mean the same thing as underlining, and italics look better. Use quotation marks around the titles of periodical articles, short stories, poems, and other short works.

Regardless of the style you’re using, you must remember to cite your sources, whether you are quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or utilizing ideas or information someone else has published. MLA style does not use footnotes or endnotes for citations (though those notes can be used for other purposes). Instead, MLA style uses parenthetical citations. As such, MLA documentation consists of two parts: (1) parenthetical citations in the text that refer readers to a Works Cited page, and (2) a Works Cited page filled with entries that include complete bibliographic information.

An in-text citation in MLA style usually includes two key pieces of information: the author’s last name and a page number. When a source has no known author, your in-text citation should use a shortened title of the work instead of an author’s name. When a source has no known page numbers (as with, for example, a film), simply omit that element of your in-text citation.

There are different ways to format an MLA in-text citation. The author’s last name and the page number can both appear in parentheses after a quote, paraphrase, or summary, as in this example: “There are different ways to format an MLA in-text citation” (Wilson 2). Whenever possible, however, you should make the author or title you’re referring to clear in your introduction of the quote or information; if you do so, you don’t need to state the author/title in your citation, only the page number. For example, according to Jeffrey Wilson, “Make the author or title you’re referring to clear in your introduction of the quote” (2). Note that, in the quotes in this paragraph, the end punctuation comes after the parenthetical citation.

If a quotation is less than four lines, incorporate it in your text and enclose it in double quotation marks, as in the quotes in the previous paragraph. If a quotation is four lines or more, it should be block-quoted, meaning that it is displayed in a freestanding block of text, indented one inch, without quotation marks, as in this passage from the MLA Handbook:

[QUOTE HANDBOOK]

Note that, in a block quote, the end punctuation comes before the parenthetical citation.

After the last paragraph in an MLA-style paper, force the document to begin a new page for the Works Cited page. The Works Cited page should still have the one-inch margins all the way around and have the heading of last name and page number. Center the word “Works Cited” at the top of the page (but don’t put it in quotes, make it bold, or otherwise stylize it), and keep the page double-spaced throughout, with no extra space between entries. Items in a Works Cited page will be alphabetized by the first word of each entry (author’s last name or title of work). Each entry will use a hanging indent, meaning that lines after the first should be indented half an inch. Because the URLs in a Works Cited page are not underlined, remove the hyperlinks so that URLs will be formatted correctly. MLA guidelines for citations are extremely detailed. Each citation must follow the format specified in the most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, which at the time of this writing is the seventh edition, published in 2009. Be very cautious of information about MLA style that is available on the internet, as it is often outdated, incomplete, sloppy, or just wrong. The sample Works Cited page that follows has the entry for the *MLA Handbook* and then templates for some of the most common types of sources used.

Works Cited

Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: MLA, 2009.

Lastname, Firstname. *Title of the Book*. City of Publication: Publisher, Year.

Lastname, Firstname. “Title of the Article.” *Name of the Scholarly Journal* Volume.Issue (Date): first page-last page.

Lastname, Firstname. “Title of the Newspaper Article.” *Title of the Newspaper* Date, edition: SectionPagenumber+.

“The Title of the Article.” *Title of Magazine* Date: page number. *Name of the Library Database*: Name of the Service. Name of the library with city, state abbreviation. Date of access <URL>.