USING MLA (8th edition) FORMAT for In-text Citations

There are three reasons for student writers to cite their sources properly: 1) to maintain academic integrity by acknowledging the intellectual property of other writers; 2) to lend credibility to the information they are using; 3) to enable their readers to find and learn more from the source material.

The system for citing sources that is used in many Humanities courses is the MLA (Modern Language Association) system. It consists of two steps: 1) parenthetical citations within the text (called in-text citations), which give an abbreviated reference to the author and page number of the borrowed material; and 2) an alphabetical listing of all cited words on a Works Cited page, which appears at the end of the paper and gives full bibliographical information.

IN-TEXT (PARENTHETICAL) REFERENCES IN MLA

In-text citations should show precisely where you used others’ ideas and words. These in-text citations should refer the reader to the source on the Works Cited page and, in most cases, provide the reader the exact location of the idea or quote within the source itself. Parenthetical citations are determined based on the first item of the Works Cited entry (e.g., an author’s last name) and then the location (e.g., a page number).

Choices for short quotations or paraphrases - and please note punctuation!

Identify the source’s author by name in introducing the material, and follow it with a page number in parentheses:

Smitherman explains, “The ebonics spoken in the US is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, reflecting the combination of African languages (Niger-Congo) and Euro American English” (19).

In explaining the origins of ebonics, Smitherman points to both English and African influences on the oral language of Black Americans (19).

If you don’t identify the author by name in your text, you must include the last name as well as the page number in your parentheses:

“The ebonics spoken in the US is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, reflecting the combination of African languages (Niger-Congo) and Euro American English” (Smitherman 19).

In explaining the origins of ebonics, one expert points to both English and African influences on the oral language of Black Americans (Smitherman 19).

If the text has no author, use a shortened version of the title and the page number to identify it:

Linguists have not reached consensus on the pedagogical value of the politically controversial “dialect readers” introduced in Oakland in the 1970s (“Dialect Readers” 4).

If there are 2 or more works by the same author are included in the Works Cited page, include a partial title so that the reader knows which one is referred to on the Works Cited page:

Mead puts forth a more permeable social self unlike James’s more or less rigid “concrete particular I’s and you’s” (Principles 226).

Mead puts forth a more permeable social self unlike the more or less rigid “concrete particular I’s and you’s” (James, Principles 226).

If a work has two authors, give both last names (e.g., Gardner and Lambert 14). For more than two authors, use the first author’s last name followed by the Latin et al. (making sure to include it in Roman type and to include a period after al).

“If you are a beginning writer, you may mistakenly believe you are a poor writer because you cannot produce a final copy on your first try” (Markline et al. 101).
Electronic sources

With more and more scholarly work being posted on the internet, you may have to cite research you have completed in virtual environments. While many sources on the internet should not be used for scholarly work, some web sources are perfectly acceptable for research. When creating in-text citations for electronic, film, or internet sources, remember that your citation must reference the source in your Works Cited.

For electronic and Internet sources, use the following guidelines:

- Include in the text the first item appearing in the Work Cited entry that corresponds to the citation (e.g., author name, article name, website name, film name).
- You do not need to give paragraph numbers or page numbers based on your web browser’s print preview function.
- Unless you must list the website name in the signal phrase in order to get the reader to the appropriate entry, do not include URLs in-text. Only provide partial URLs when the name of the site includes, for example, a domain name, like CNN.com or Forbes.com, as opposed to writing out http://www.cnn.com or http://www.forbes.com.

Examples:

One online film critic stated that Fitzcarraldo "has become notorious for its near-failure and many obstacles" (Taylor, “Fitzcarraldo”).

The Purdue OWL is accessed by millions of users every year. Its "MLA Formatting and Style Guide" is one of the most popular resources (Russell et al.).

Direct quotations of 4 lines or more -- block quotations:

Introduce the quote with a sentence of your own that previews or summarizes it. Then indent the entire quote 1 inch from the left margin. Double-space it, just like the rest of your text. And don’t use quotation marks. If you don’t name the author in introducing the quote, be sure to include his or her last name in the parentheses – such as (Smitherman 19):

Smitherman sees a continuum between the historical origins and the present use of ebonics:

The ebonics spoken in the US is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, reflecting the combination of African languages (Niger-Congo) and Euro American English. It is a language forged in the crucible of enslavement, US-style apartheid, and the struggle to survive and thrive in the face of domination. (19)

Do not overuse block quotations. When possible, paraphrase the material (citing the source in the same way), using direct quotations of just those phrases that seem essential to preserve.

Smitherman sees a continuum between the historical origins of ebonics, including both African and English linguistic influences, and the present socially and politically controversial use of the dialect, which she describes as "a language forged in the crucible of oppression of Black Americans" (19).

Citing indirect sources:

When you read a source that uses material (which you want to use) originally published in some other source (which you have not read), you should identify the original author in your text, but use the abbreviation “qtd. in” (standing for “quoted in”) with the author’s name and page number of the secondary source—the one that you actually read—in your parenthetical citation. Here’s an example:

Donald Larsson writes of Kate Chopin’s “consistently... strong-willed, independent heroines... [who] cast a skeptical eye on the institution of marriage” (qtd. in Hicks 1).

Altering a quotation:

In the example just given, note the use of ellipses (...) to indicate that you left out some words of the original quotation, and the use of brackets [] to indicate that the form of a word has been changed to make it fit into the sentence or to add an explanatory word or phrase that was not in the original.

With thanks to The OWL at Purdue for some examples/explanation (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl).