

Pattie Paperwriter

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Knowledge Acquirement 101

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Writing in the Style of the Modern Language Association

The Modern Language Association (MLA) was created in 1883. The group advocates for literacy and provides a platform for its members, which total more than 30,000 individuals, to share scholarly findings. It is the foremost association for scholars in the departments of language and literature. As such, MLA formatting is practiced primarily in English Language Arts courses. The primary users of MLA format are academic scholars, professors, and graduate students. Thus, the writer of an MLA formatted paper finds himself or herself in elite company.

When one begins a paper in MLA format, one should remember to adjust the margins so that they are one inch all the way around the paper. One should also set the spacing to 2.0, commonly known as “double spacing.” Another important aspect of an MLA paper is numbering. Papers should have page numbers located at the top right corners, but not on the first page. The paper writer’s last name should precede the page number. When setting the font to Times New Roman (the required font of MLA papers), the writer should also check the page numbers to make sure they are in the same font as the rest of the paper.

MLA papers normally contain citations. Noted scholar Harold Quotable states, “If the person quoted is identified in the signal phrase, he or she need not be identified again in the citation” (35). Thus, all that is necessary after such a quote is a page number in parentheses. However, it is important to remember that “the speaker must always be identified, somehow” (Quotable 35). This means that the person being quoted must be noted in the parenthetical

citation. The citation format is also important. As Quotable asserts, “using a signal phrase or introductory sentence before a quote is important, as is an analytical sentence afterward, creating a proverbial ‘quote sandwich’ to keep the writing cohesive” (36). Introducing a quote and explaining it are signs of an effective paper writer. Some wonder about the rules of block quoting; however, block quotes are unnecessary and ineffective in papers that are not of significant length. The use of block quoting detracts from the writer’s percentage of original content and should be avoided in most paper writing. If a writer chooses to paraphrase instead of quote directly, the paraphrased material must be at least 80% original work and must still be cited (Quotable 37).

More information on MLA formatting and effective academic writing (such as citations, punctuation, and active voice) can be found in the Writing Studio and at esu.edu/clubs/writingstudio/.