

MLA Documentation Style: In-text Citations

Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation style is used for citing sources primarily in the humanities. Like similar documentation styles, MLA requires that you cite your sources in two ways:

- With an in-text citation (also known as a parenthetical citation) following any quoted or paraphrased material from your sources

- With a works cited entry at the end of the paper that provides a full bibliographic entry for each of your sources

This resource focuses specifically on the first method of citation, in-text citation. However, we also have a resource on MLA works cited entries if you would like more guidance on those.

In-text Citation

MLA requires that in-text citations include the author's last name and the page number on which the quoted or paraphrased material appears. Do not place a comma between them. Place the citation AFTER the closing quotation marks but BEFORE the sentence's punctuation.

Example: There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez 36).

However, if your sentence already includes the author's name, you do not need to include it in the in-text citation.

Example: According to Hernandez, there are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (36).

Note: Remember that you must include citations for any material that you directly quote OR paraphrase from your sources. Even if you put an author's quotation into your own words, if you are still using that author's idea or argument, you need to cite it. Failure to do so could constitute plagiarism.

Frequently Asked Questions about In-text Citations

Q: What if my source doesn't have page numbers?

A: If your source has numbered paragraphs, use those with the abbreviation “par.” **Example:** There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez par. 3). Otherwise, simply exclude this item from your citation. **Example:** There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez).

Q: What if my source doesn't have a named author?

A: Use the title of the source instead. Place the title in quotation marks if it is a shorter text like an article; place it in italics if it is a longer text like a book. **Example:** There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (“All About Chickens” 36).

Q: What if my source has multiple authors?

A: If it has two or three authors, include all authors' last names in your citation in the same order that they are listed on the source. **Example:** There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez, Williams, and Schultz 36). If it has more than three authors, include the first author's last name and the abbreviation “et al.,” a Latin phrase which means “among others.” **Example:** There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez et al. 36).

Q: What if I want to use a quotation from someone else that my author quotes?

A: These are called indirect sources. You want to attribute both your source and the person who originally said the quotation, and you do this by using the abbreviation “qtd. in.” **Example: There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Bailey qtd. in Hernandez 36).** In this example, Bailey originally said the quotation, but you are getting the quotation from Hernandez’s text.

Q: What if I don’t need to use the whole quotation but just parts of it?

A: You can use ellipses (...) to cut out text from the middle of a quotation. **Example: There are “several breeds...that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez 36).** Here, I have cut out “of chicken” to save space. Be aware that it is unethical to use ellipses to change or obscure the meaning of a quotation. For example, if your original quotation is “Cholesterol is not unhealthy,” it would be unethical to use ellipses in the following way: “Cholesterol is...unhealthy.”

Q: What if I need to change the wording of a quotation?

A: You may occasionally need to change the wording of a quotation so that it makes better sense to your readers. This often occurs when authors use a pronoun whose antecedent is unclear out of context. Surround any words that you change or add to the quotation with brackets. **Example: “They lay eggs more frequently than others” → “[Some breeds of chicken] lay eggs more frequently than others.”** Here, I have added the phrase “some breeds of chicken” in place of the unclear pronoun “they.”

Q: What if my quotation is long?

A: If a quotation takes up more than four lines of text, treat it as a “block quotation.” In MLA style, block quotations do NOT use quotation marks, are indented so that they appear in the middle of the page, and place the period BEFORE the citation. Example:

Many people have a specific image that comes to mind when they think of chickens. However, the world of chickens is actually much more diverse than one might think. In fact,

There are hundreds of breeds of chicken all across the world. These breeds vary in such factors as feathering, color, and size. In addition, there exist several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others. Beyond that, breeds can lay different egg colors; for example, brown leghorns lay white eggs, while buff Orpingtons lay brown eggs. Some chickens are even bred to produce unusual egg colors like blue and green. (Hernandez 36)

This description illustrates just how varied chickens can be. The rest of this paper will explore...

Note: It is generally unwise to use too many block quotations, as this can cause your readers to suspect you are relying too heavily on your source material. It is often preferable to break up longer quotations into smaller pieces or find a way to paraphrase long quotations.