

MLA In-text Citations

1. Introduction
2. Introducing sources
3. Common citations
 1. One author
 2. Two authors
 3. Three or more authors
 4. A work with no author (organization or website)
 5. No citation needed
4. Avoiding repetition

Introduction

Integrating sources and source citations within original writing is important when writing in an academic setting. Any time authors refer to, comment on, paraphrase, or quote a text, they must document this in their own writing using citations. The purpose of a Modern Languages Association (MLA) in-text citation, sometimes called a parenthetical reference, is to help readers easily find the sources in the Works Cited page that correspond to the referenced passage

The citations are always placed at the end of the sentence and should always correspond with the first word of the matching Works Cited page entry. Let's suppose that this is a sentence from a student's essay:

The author explains, "Clutter is the disease of American writing" (Zinsser 10).

The reader should be able to refer to the Works Cited page and easily find the bibliographic information for this source. It might be listed like this:

Zinsser, William. "Simplicity." *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, Harper Perennial, 2006, pp. 7-12.

Notice that the author's name in the citation corresponds to the first word of the Works Cited entry. This makes it easy for the reader to find information, which is the purpose of in-text citations.

These two primary elements of a quoted passage should be given to the reader:

- the author's last name and
- the page number where the referenced passage is found.

The page number is always included in the citation at the end of the sentence, but the author's last name can be placed either in the citation or in the sentence. Here are a few items to remember concerning in-text citations:

- No "page" or "pg." or "p.#" or any other variant is used to indicate the page number.

- End punctuation goes at the end of the citation, not at the end of the passage.
- No comma or other punctuation mark is needed to separate the author's name and the page number.

Introducing sources

When beginning to quote, paraphrase, or summarize, it is useful to use introductory phrases with rhetorically accurate verbs. Below is a short list of possible verbs:

- adds
- agrees
- argues
- asserts
- asserts
- assesses
- claims
- comments
- concedes
- concludes
- confirms
- contends
- defines
- denies
- emphasizes
- explains
- maintains
- notes
- observes
- proposes
- responds
- says
- shows
- states
- suggests

Common in-text citations

One author:

Example 1: Louis Armstrong easily reached difficult notes, the F's and G's that hindered so many other trumpeters (Bergreen 258).

Example 1a: Bergreen explained, "Louis Armstrong easily reached difficult notes, the F's and G's that hindered so many other trumpeters" (258).

- Note: If the work has no page numbers (i.e. website) simply put the author's last name in parentheses.

Two authors:

Example 3: In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson suggest that metaphors “actually structure our perceptions and understanding” (57).

Example 3a: In *Metaphors We Live By*, the authors suggest that metaphors “actually structure our perceptions and understanding” (Lakoff and Johnson 57).

- Note: If the work had three authors the citation would read (Lakoff, Johnson, and Smith 57). Remember that there is no comma between the names and the page number, and all authors must be listed either in the sentence or in the citation.

Three or more authors:

Example 4: Changes in social regulations are likely to cause new fears among voters (Carber et al. 64).

Example 4a: Carber et al. claim that changes in social regulations are likely to cause new fears among voters (64).

- Note: Only the first author, followed by the term "et al." is listed either in the sentence or in the citation. Don't forget to place a period after "al" since it is an abbreviation of a Latin word, but no period is used after “et.”

A work with no author (an organization or website):

Example 5: According to The Center for Contemporary Cultural studies, “There is nothing concrete about hierarchy” (10).

Example 5a: “There is nothing concrete about hierarchy” (Center 10).

- Note: When we don't have a known author or editor, we can use the book title (in italics), the article title (in quotation marks), or the Web site title (in italics). If we include this title in our sentence, we should write out the entire title. If we include it in our citation, we can shorten it using the first keyword (just be sure that your reader can still find the corresponding entry in your Works Cited page).

When a citation is not needed:

You do not need to give sources for familiar proverbs, well-known quotations, or common knowledge. Remember, this is a rhetorical choice, based on audience. If you're writing for an expert audience of a scholarly journal, for example, they'll have different expectations of what constitutes common knowledge.

Avoiding repetition:

If you're using information from a single source more than once in succession (i.e., no other sources referred to in between), you can use a simplified in-text citation.

Example:

The writing process is "a long, slow haul" (Zinsser 7). It is this "long, slow" process that allows writers to "discover their true voice" (8). Many important writers have contributed to how we think of writing and they have formulated various methods of revision (20).