

Guidelines for Using the New MLA Documentation

The purpose of a parenthetical reference is to document a source briefly, clearly, and accurately. Brevity can be accomplished in three ways.

1. Cite the author's last name and the page number(s) of the source in parentheses

One historian argues that the telephone (and certainly the advertising that lauded its innovations) created "a new habit of mind—a habit of tenseness and alertness, of demanding and expecting immediate results" (Brooks 117-18).

2. Use the author's last name in your sentence and place only the page number(s) of the source in parentheses

Brooks points out that the telephone (and certainly the advertising that lauded its innovations) created "a new habit of mind—a habit of tenseness and alertness, of demanding and expecting immediate results" (117-18).

3. Give the author's last name in your sentence when you are citing the *entire* work rather than a *specific* section or passage and omit any parenthetical references.

Brooks argues that the history of the telephone is characterized by innovations that have changed public attitudes toward technology.

Although each of these in-text references is brief, it will not be clear or accurate unless it refers readers to a specific and complete citation listed in Works Cited. That citation looks like this:

Works Cited

Brooks, John. *Telephone: The First Hundred Years*. New York: Harper, 1976.

Placing and Punctuating the Parenthetical Reference

To avoid unnecessary clutter in sentences, MLA recommends placing the parenthetical reference at the end of the sentence but before the final period. (Note that there is no punctuation mark between the author's name and the page citation.)

The decade of the 50s is often seen as a period when "nothing much was asked of us beyond reminding ourselves how good we were as a people" (Hardwick 126)

On some occasions you may want to place the reference *within* your sentence to clarify its relationship to that part of the sentence it documents. In such instances, place the reference at the end of a clause (where a pause would naturally occur) but before the necessary comma.

Although Hardwick suggests that in the 50s “nothing much was expected of us beyond reminding ourselves how good we were as a people” (126), the placid decade soon produced unexpected turmoil.

Finally, when the reference documents a long quotation set off from the text, place it at the end of the passage but *after* the final period.

Elizabeth Hardwick’s memory of the 50s serves as an apt summary of the curiously familiar attitudes of the placid decade:

Right after the war, the therapy for all our moral discomforts was the daily recital of the sins of Communism and the Soviet Union, and the subsequent healthy enjoyment of our own virtues, or at least our absent sins. Nothing much was asked of us beyond reminding ourselves how good we were as a people and a system and that we did not need to suffer the infection of despairing self-criticism. (126)

Works Cited

Hardwick, Elizabeth. “Riesman Considered.” *A View of My Own: Essays in Literature*. New York: Farrar, 1962. 112-33.

Frequently you will need to cite sources that are not as straightforward as the examples given above—for example, sources with more than one author, or several sources by the same author. In those cases you will need to modify the standard format discussed above. The following examples recommend methods for doing so. Each example of parenthetical reference is followed by the appropriate entry that would appear in the list of works cited.

1. Citing one work by an author of two or more works

If your list of works cited contains two or more titles by the same author, place a comma after the author’s last name, add a shortened version of the title of the work, and then supply the relevant page numbers. Another solution is to cite the author’s last name and title in your sentence and then add the page numbers in a parenthetical reference.

Once society reaches a certain stage of industrial growth, it will shift its energies to the production of services (Toffler, *Future* 221).

Toffler argues in *The Third Wave* that society has gone through two eras (agricultural and industrial) and is now entering another—the information age (26).

Works Cited

Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock*. New York: Random, 1970.
--*The Third Wave*. New York: Morrow, 1980.

2. Citing one work by an author who has the same last name as another author in your list of works cited

When your list contains sources by two or more authors with the same last name, avoid confusion by supplying the author's first name in the parenthetical reference or in your sentence. In the list of works cited, the two authors should be alphabetized according to first name.

Critics have often debated the usefulness of the psychological approach to literary interpretation (Frederick Hoffman 317).

Daniel Hoffman argues that folklore and myth provide valuable insights for the literary critic (9-15).

Works Cited

Hoffman, Daniel G. *Form and Fable in American Fiction*. New York: Oxford. 1961.

Hoffman, Frederick J. *Freudianism and the Literary Mind*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP. 1945.

3. Citing a work by more than one author

Citing a book with more than one author does not necessarily confuse your readers but it does clutter your sentence. If you are citing a book by two authors, you have the option of supplying their names in a parenthetical reference or in your sentence. If you are citing a book by three or more authors, you should probably place their names in a parenthetical reference to sustain the readability of your sentence. Remember, the author of a work by three or more authors can be shortened by using the first author's last name, plus "et al." ("and others").

Boller and Story interpret the Declaration of Independence as Thomas Jefferson's attempt to list America's grievances against England (58).

Other historians view the Declaration of Independence as Jefferson's attempt to formulate the principles of America's political philosophy (Norton et al. 124).

Works Cited

Boller, Paul, and Ronald Story. *A More Perfect Union: Documents in U.S. History*. Boston: Houghton, 1984.

Norton, Mary Beth, et al. *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States*. Boston: Houghton, 1984.