

The Rules: An *MLA* Primer

COMMON IN-TEXT CITATION FORMATS, RULES & EXPLANATIONS

- 1) Quote **with** an author introduction (notice that the period goes outside the whole sentence):

Joe Shmo, the author of *When Things Go Wrong*, says, “Blah blah, blah blah blah, blah blah blah blah – blah blah blah – blah blah blah” (163).

- 2) Two quotes, **without** an author introduction (notice there is **no comma** between the author’s name and the first page number):

The author points out “blah blah blah” and then later goes on to clarify his position by saying that some people are “blah blah blah” (Shmo 163, 167).

- 3) Two quotes, one inside the other (notice that the inner quotation marks are **single**, not double):

Joe Shmo, quoting from Chicken Little, explains that “blah blah ‘Blah blah blah.’” (163).

- 4) Paraphrased quotation (notice that **no quotation marks** are used in a paraphrase):

Joe Shmo disputes the fact that blah blah has a significant impact on blah and argues that when blah blah blah starts to blah then things really start to fall apart (163).

- 5) Punctuation other than a period at the end of the sentence:

Later in the essay, Shmo poses this question: “Blah blah blah blah?” (163).

- 6) Poetry: lines of poetry should be copied exactly as they appear in the actual poem. Use forward slashes (/) to indicate line breaks. Subsequent references to other lines from the same poem do not need the word “line” in the parenthetical reference.

A bad poet once wrote, “Roses are red / Violets are blue / My socks stink / and so do you” (lines 1-4).

For Shakespeare and other verse plays, note the act, scene and line numbers. Use numbers, not Roman numerals, and separate the numbers with periods.

In Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, the king’s friend Gloucester learns a profound lesson from his tragic experience out on the heath: “A man may see how this world goes / with no eyes” (4.2.148-49).

- 7) WORKS CITED LISTS: Standard entry for a work in an anthology:

Kincaid, Jamaica. “Girl.” *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. Ed. Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, Bonnie Lisle. 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004. 421-423.

- 8) Block quotes (**4 or more** typed lines of prose, or **3 or more** lines of poetry **after** it's been typed into your essay): Introduce the block quote with a colon, indent it **2 tabs** from the left margin, **double space** it, and **do not use quotation marks** (unless they're already part of the original quote), like this:

In "The Sky is Falling" Joe Shmo explains at some length that if the sky actually were to fall, it would probably cause a lot of damage:

Blah blah blabbity blah blah blah blabbity blah blabbity blah blah blah
blah blah blabbity blah blah blabbity blah blah blah blabbity
blah blah blah blah blabbity blah blah blabbity blah blah blabbity
blah blah blabbity blah blah blah blah blah blah blabbity
blah blabbity blah blah blabbity blah blabbity blah! (163)

Shmo notes here that we can easily prevent the sky from falling if we could only figure out how to tie the sky to the moon and the stars.

- 9) Works Cited Lists: Standard entry for a full-length work:

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Anchor, 1998.

- 10) Works Cited Lists: Standard entry for a selection from a website (site author, site name, sponsoring institution, access date):

Pirates Net. Modesto Junior College. 8 Jan. 2007

Do's AND DON'TS

- **Commas and periods INSIDE quotation marks, NOT outside:** Commas and periods always go *inside* quotation marks (except when adding an in-text MLA page citation after them as outlined above). Colons, semicolons, question marks and exclamation points only go inside if they are actually part of the title, term, etc. being quoted. Otherwise, they go outside.
- For the types of essays you write in this class, academic convention dictates that you **write in the PRESENT tense**, even when speaking about things said or written in the past, **NOT past tense** unless otherwise directed for a given assignment
- For the types of essays you write in this class, academic convention dictates that you write only in the **3rd person point of view** (he, she, it), **NOT** 1st person (I, me) or 2nd person (you, you all) unless otherwise directed for a given assignment
- **Introduce the name of each source** you use (book, essay, article, etc.) **ONCE** at the beginning of your essay. Thereafter, refer to it as “the story,” “the essay,” etc. or by a shortened version of the full title.
- When referencing authors in your work, **introduce the full name of the author ONCE** at the beginning of your essay, as in: Greg Christensen. Thereafter, refer to the author **by last name only** (Shmo) or by “he” / “she,” “the author,” etc. **NEVER** refer to an author as Mr./Ms./Mrs. or by first name only.
- Label your **works cited list** as **Works Cited** (not “References,” “Bibliography,” etc.). List titles are always center aligned at the top of a fresh page at the end of your essay.
- **Titling:** Names of **full-length works** get ***italicized*** (things like novels, encyclopedias, poetry collections, dictionaries, magazines, newspapers or music albums)
- **Titling:** Names of **smaller works** get placed in **“quotation marks”** (things like essays, articles, chapters, stories, poems or any other kind of individual selection which is taken from within a full-length work)
- Do not begin quoted selections with **ellipsis points** (...): A lower-case letter at the beginning of the quoted selection (“blah blah blah”) is the signal that your quoted selection does not come from the beginning of a sentence.
- **Brackets** [] are only ever used to insert your own clarifying language into quoted selections: “Blah explained that they **[purple explosions in the sky]** usually indicate an impending disaster.”
- Put **page numbers** on every page in the bottom right-hand corner of each page using the auto pagination tool in your word processing application, not by typing in each number by hand
- Format the document correctly:
 - **1” margins** on all four sides
 - **12 pt. Times font, black type**
 - **“Ragged right”** text alignment
 - **Double-spaced** text throughout the entire document
 - **No additional spaces** inserted between paragraphs
 - **Paragraphs tabbed in once** at the beginning of each new paragraph