Citing the World Wide Web in Style

Modern Language Association Style

This handout is part of the Troy University LibGuide titled Modern Language Association Style http://troy.libguides.com/mla

This handout is intended to assist writers in preparing MLA-style works cited entries for articles and books, as retrieved from electronic databases such as provided by the Troy University Library, and, to a lesser extent, articles from print journals and print books.

Contents
Quick Advice .................................................................................................................................................. 2
MLA Handbook and A Writer’s Reference .......................................................................................... 3
How to document sources ...................................................................................................................... 3
Examples of works cited entries for articles....................................................................................... 4
Examples of works cited entries for books......................................................................................... 7
Technical issues clarified ....................................................................................................................... 8
   Citation tools within Library databases and other online tools..................................................... 8
   Digital Object Identifiers (DOI’s) ..................................................................................................... 8
   Database names ................................................................................................................................. 12
   URL’s (Uniform Resource Locators) ............................................................................................... 13
   Persistent or Stable URL’s .............................................................................................................. 15
   Why Document ................................................................................................................................ 16
Quick Advice

The following information is offered by the Troy University Libraries.

First and foremost, pay close attention to your classroom instructor and follow his or her directions. Understanding what your instructor requires is critical.

Many of the databases provided by the Troy University Library provide citation tools. Those tools should never be relied upon to create accurate works cited entries. Likewise, no other online tool should be relied upon to create works cited entries—it is up to you to ensure that your documentation is correct.

Keep notes about your information sources (books, articles, etc.), including: where you got it (e.g., from which database you accessed it), and the information that you will need in order to document it (the author, title, publication information, and more).

*MLA Handbook, Eight Edition*, is the book that prescribes MLA style. Most students do not purchase this book, but doing so is something to consider.

The book, *A Writer’s Reference* (9th edition with MLA update) by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers is the book most students use for their MLA guidance. This book is a required textbook for classes such as ENG1102.

The Troy campus and TROY Online both have Writing Centers to assist students with many aspects of their writing.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) is a reliable source of guidance on MLA style. [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)

The Troy University Writing Center provides an MLA handout. [http://www.troy.edu/writingcenter/assets/documents/research/MLA.pdf](http://www.troy.edu/writingcenter/assets/documents/research/MLA.pdf)

The MLA Style Center has resources that may be of use. [https://style.mla.org/](https://style.mla.org/)
**MLA Handbook and A Writer's Reference**

The official guide to MLA style, the *MLA Handbook*, is published by the Modern Library Association. Print (paperback) version: ISBN-10: 1603292624 ISBN-13: 978-1603292627. Also available as a Kindle ebook. It should be noted that the Kindle version does not include page numbers that correlate to the print version; but, the Kindle does allow you to add highlighting and notes within the text. Unless you are extremely comfortable using electronic books—reference books in particular—you may be better served by the paperback version.

Ownership of the *MLA Handbook* is typically not required of Troy University students. Instead, most classes that incorporate MLA style as an integral part of the coursework, e.g., ENG 1102, require the book, *A Writer's Reference*, by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. Nevertheless, it is good to understand that the *MLA Handbook* is the original source of information regarding MLA style.

The Dothan, Montgomery, and Troy campus Libraries each have a copy of the *MLA Handbook* for use in the Library. If you wish to have a copy to take home, you will need to purchase one from a book retailer.

Suggestions regarding these books:

- If you already have a copy of *A Writer's Reference*, the MLA Handbook will not provide much additional assistance with MLA style.

- If you do not own either book and desire a printed guide to MLA style, the *MLA Handbook* is the much less expensive choice.

**How to Document Sources**

The *MLA Handbook* is explicit and detailed in regard to formatting each of the individual elements of a reference, e.g., how to capitalize, italicize, and punctuate authors’ names, publication titles, et cetera. The *MLA Handbook*, *A Writer’s Reference*, and the Purdue OWL should be used as your primary guides to MLA style.

The information presented in this guide focuses on articles and books, which are the information sources most frequently associated with libraries. The information contained in this guide is based on MLA style as presented in the *MLA Handbook* (print book) and the MLA Style Center, [https://style.mla.org/](https://style.mla.org/).
Examples of Works Cited Entries for Articles

The primary differences you will encounter with journal articles are:

How many authors are there?

- One author is present as: Henderson, George
- Two authors are presented as: Diken, Robert and Christopher Laustsen
- Three or more authors are presented as: Slade, et al.

Does the article have a digital object identifier (DOI), a stable URL, or a URL that can be used as presented or shortened?

- The issues involved with these concepts are presented elsewhere in this guide.

Below are three examples of works cited entries for articles retrieved from Troy University Library databases.

—An article with one author. An article with a digital object identifier.

—An article with two authors. An article without a digital object identifier (URL included in entry).

—An article with three authors.

EXAMPLE 1. An article with one author and a digital object identifier.

The notations provided with each example entry are intended to help you to better understand how to create an MLA works cited entry.

Weir, Robert E. “Dark Chocolate: Lessons from the 1937 Hershey Sit-Down Strike.”


The example above is an article.

- There is one author, so the name is presented last name, first.
- An article is a type of information source that exists inside of a container—in this case, a journal. Note: The concept of “containers” is emphasized in the *MLA Handbook* and on the MLA Style Center, but not in *A Writer’s Reference*. The titles of these types of sources are enclosed in quotation marks. Examples of other types of information sources which
exist inside a container are: a song (contained in an album) and an episode of a television program (contained in a series).

- In the title of the article, the major words in the title are capitalized. In this example, the only words that are not capitalized are the words from and the. MLA’s rules for capitalization of the titles of works (pages 67-68, section 1.2.1 of the MLA Handbook) may be challenging, so just take your time, do the best you can, and don’t worry needlessly. Words that start the title or the subtitle are always capitalized. The following parts of speech are not capitalized: articles (a, an, the), coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), and prepositions. Prepositions are words that show direction, location, or time. They include short words such as, as, at, by, for, in, of, off, on. They also include the longer words: about, above, across, after, against, along, among, before, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, beyond, except, following, from, inside, regarding, through, toward, under, until, upon, with.

- The title of the journal (the container for the article) is capitalized (because it is a proper noun—the name of the journal) and italicized (because it is the container).

- The volume, number, date, and page numbers of the article are formatted as shown, specifically:
  - Abbreviate volume as vol.
  - Abbreviate number as no.
  - Pages numbers are abbreviated as pp. when the article is greater than one page in length, and p. if the article appears on only one page. Section 2.5.1 (page 110 of the MLA Handbook) states, that if an article “is not printed on consecutive pages, include only the first page number and a plus sign, leaving no intervening space.” For example, 154+.
  - Shorten page numbers, e.g., pp. 136-89, would be how you would display page numbers 136 through 189.

- The name of the database from which the article was retrieved is italicized because it is the container. “Container” is a term used in the MLA Handbook to describe a resource that holds a smaller information source such as an article in a journal (the container).
EXAMPLE 2. An article with two authors. An article without a digital object identifier (URL included in entry).


See additionally, the information in “Example 1,” above.

- This article has two authors, so they are presented as shown, the first author’s last name, first, and the second author’s name in traditional order.
- This article does not have a digital object identifier, therefore, the choices for the presentation of a URL (see the section of this guide on URL’s) are:
  - If the instructor desires or allows, do not use a URL.
  - Use a persistent URL or the best URL you can identify for the article.
  - Use a shortened version of the URL.

EXAMPLE 3. An article with three authors.


See details of example 1. Additionally:

- This article has three authors, so they are presented as shown, the author’s last name is listed first, followed by their last name, and then the abbreviation et al., meaning and others. Use et al. when there are three or more authors. Be care to not use a period after the et, but to use a period after the al.
Examples of Works Cited Entries for Books

Most every book has only one author. For books with multiple authors or, more likely, multiple editors or translators, see page 23 of the *MLA Handbook* or refer to the proper section of the source you are using for your MLA style.

EXAMPLES OF ENTRIES FOR PRINT BOOKS IN A WORKS CITED LIST.


- Get information about the book from inside the book, e.g., on the title page, not from the book’s cover or spine. Information on the cover, spine, or top page may have been changed for its visual appeal of the product and may not represent the true information identifying the book. The title page of a book typically includes the book’s title, the name of the author, and the name of the publisher.
- Sole authors are displayed last name, first. The titles of the books are italicized because, in terms of MLA, they stand alone, they are not inside of a container in the way that a journal article is located inside of a journal (its container).
- Following the title of the book is the publisher and the publication date.

For books accessed from a database, add the name of the database (italicized because it is a proper noun) and the DOI or URL. Hardly ever will a book have a DOI, though book chapters retrieved from the *PsycBooks* database will. In terms of URL’s:

- If the instructor desires or allows, do not use a URL.
- Use a persistent URL or the best URL you can identify for the article.
- Use a shortened version of the URL.

Both examples below use a shortened version of the database’s URL (e.g., *ebscohost.com* and *proquest.com*). See the section of this guide pertaining to URL’s.


Technical issues clarified

While online resources such as journal databases make it fast and easy to access information, they often add a layer of complexity when it comes to documenting such resources (so if you are feeling confused, don’t let it worry you, some of it is, admittedly, confusing). Neither the MLA Handbook, The Writer’s Reference, or the Purdue OWL provide the information necessary to fully understand how to decipher what you see in terms of an article or book from a database with what MLA prescribes for a works cited entry. It is hoped that the detailed information that follows can help you to better understand the technical issues which pertain to MLA style for online resources. “The Devil is in the details, but so is salvation” —Hyman G. Rickover

Citation tools within Library databases and other online tools

None of them work perfectly—most of them are far from good and cannot be relied upon.

Digital Object Identifiers (DOI’s)

Most articles do not have a DOI, so don't go crazy looking for one.

The primary purpose of a DOI is to enable the reader (of a works cited list, for example) to use a relatively short piece of information (the DOI) to find detailed information about (and possible access to) an information source such as a journal article. For example, this is a DOI, 10.1080/15248372.2013.815623. Click on this link and you will see information about an article http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15248372.2013.815623.

Locating and using DOI’s in a works cited list can be relatively simple and painless. Understanding a few of the issues involved with DOI’s can help to make this process much smoother.

Where to find a DOI:

- On the top, bottom, or side of the first or second page of an article (if you have the printed article or page image).

- On the databases’ abstract listing for the article.

- If a DOI is not listed in either of the two places listed above, there still may be a DOI (for an undergraduate paper, don’t waste
your time looking for a DOI if it is not apparent within the article or its listing in a database). Additional ways to check for a DOI:

- CROSSREF GUEST QUERY
  https://www.crossref.org/guestquery/

- CROSSREF METADATA SEARCH
  https://search.crossref.org/

- GOOGLE SEARCH ENGINE (look in the search results for the publisher’s listing of the article, this information will often be the very information the DOI points to on the Internet):
  https://www.google.com

**Don’t confuse other information pertaining to articles with a DOI.** Alphanumeric information associated with articles includes the journal’s International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), and the article’s accession number or document ID (pertaining to the database in which the article resides). Examples of such numbers (as well as DOI’s) are shown on pages 10 and 11 of this guide.

For the most part, the term DOI only applies to journal articles. Other than articles, the primary place you will find DOI’s is for book chapters indexed in the PsycBooks database. Unless you are researching a field such as nursing or psychology, many articles will not have a DOI, so if you do not see one, do not be surprised or waste too much time looking.

DOI’s look like this:

- 10.1037/fsh0000218
- 10.1080/10509208.2016.1144129
- 10.1056/NEJMoa1610300
- 10.1162/LEON_r_01212
- 10.1146/annurev-anthro-102215-100232

**All DOI’s start with 10. There are no exceptions to that rule.** They are virtually always accompanied by text to let you know it is a DOI. They will be
preceded by text such as *doi* or *DOI*, or will be part of a URL that begins
*http://dx.doi.org/*, for example, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/xge0000145*. The
“*http://dx.doi.org*” *is not part of the DOI*, it is hypertexting code that allows
the user to link to the information the DOI points to on the Internet.

For print (paper) or electronic (PDF) journal articles that have a DOI, it is
usually listed on the first page of the article. Usually at the top, but sometime
on the side or bottom. Example shown below:

Examples of a DOI notation, as shown on the first page of a journal article:
Within databases, some articles are not available in PDF (page image) format. The text of these articles is provided in HTML format (as text on a web page).

In these cases, clicking on the databases’ link to view the article abstract will list the DOI (if there is one). As stated previously, only the 10.xxxxxxxxx portion of the listing is the DOI. Listings may label something as a DOI and begin the listing with text such as http://dx.doi.org or http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.troy.edu, but that text is not part of the DOI. Below are three examples showing different ways that databases may identify a DOI.

Author Affiliations: ¹Durham University, UK

ISSN: 0031-8094

DOI: 10.1003/pq/pqv055

Accession Number: 112223684

Publisher Logo: WILEY Blackwell

Digital Object Identifier:
http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.troy.edu/10.1037/fsh0000218

PMID: 27571541

PsycARTICLES fsh-34-4-378

Identifier:

Accession Number: 2016-41513-001

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Database names

There are times when it is difficult to identify the name of the database in which an article resides.

Keep accurate notes on your research so you will know where you obtained your information. Rarely will a PDF or printout identify from which database you obtained the article—you need to have a separate record of that.

There are two primary ways that users access articles and books from Library databases.

1. By selecting a database from the Library’s databases page. The Troy University Library has more than 200 individual databases. If you search a database and obtain text from within that database, you should know the name of the database (you should have made note of it when you selected it). On occasion you will identify an article within a database, but it will send you to another database or to a website (e.g., a publisher’s web page, not a database) for the text of the article. When that is the case, take extra care with your research notes in identifying where the text is located.

2. The Library’s “discovery tool” is the primary search box that resides on the Library home page. This box searches many of the Library’s databases and its cataloged holdings (books, videos, and more) simultaneously. When you identify and access a full text item using the discovery tool, it may not be clear from what database (or other resource) the text is being retrieved. (“Discovery” is a recent library term used to identify a search system that indexes multiple resources such as academic databases.)

When you use the Troy University Library resources and need assistance in identifying (for citation purposes, or otherwise) where the text resides, please ask the Library for help. Use our chat, telephone, or email contacts, and we will be glad to help. Just tell us what you know and what you need to know, for example, you might ask:

Hello. I found the article "Godzilla Vs. The Egghead: Negotiating the Cultures of Fandom and Academe" by William Tsutsui from the Journal of American-East Asian Relations, using the Library search box, but I need to know the database name it came from for my citation, can you please help me?

Note: The Library cannot help you create your work cited entries, but we can help you use of the databases we provide.
If an article has a DOI, do not put a URL. Instead, use the DOI. If an article does not have a DOI, MLA recommends the inclusion of a URL with your works cited entry unless your instructor prefers that you do not. (See page 48 of the *MLA Handbook*.)

If you include a URL with your works cited entry and need to break the URL, consult The MLA Style Center, in “URLs: Some Practical Advice,” by Angela Gibson (associate director of scholarly communication at the MLA), https://style.mla.org/2016/11/02/urls-some-practical-advice/. The “MLA breaks URLs before a period and before or after any other punctuation or symbol (e.g., /, //, _, @). We do not break URLs after a hyphen in such publications, to avoid ambiguity.”

**EXAMPLERS HERE**

If a database offers a Persistent URL, Permalink, Stable URL, or a similar URL, use that as the URL. The next entry in this guide covers that topic.

In practical terms, including a URL for articles retrieved from a database is not particularly helpful. It cannot provide access to the database and does not identify the database.

The following is an example of a URL (taken from the web browser’s address bar) for an article at the time the article was accessed:

http://web.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.troy.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=4&sid=1f0c079d-99b9-48fb-a5d2-94a43d3b4d3f9%40sessionmgr103&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=hlh&AN=99017857

Nevertheless, if you need to place a URL in your works cited entry, the following advice is offered:

You should consult The MLA Style Center, in the “URLs: Some Practical Advice,” by Angela Gibson (associate director of scholarly communication at the MLA), https://style.mla.org/2016/11/02/urls-some-practical-advice/. The MLA Style Center suggests truncating a URL to its shortest usable length (a URL that works). The point being that the URL, by its very presence, indicates to the reader that the resource was accessed online, even if the reader cannot use the URL to access the resource.
In practical terms, ninety percent of the information from Library databases that a student will be citing in MLA style will come from a database provided by one of three database vendors: Gale, Ebsco, or ProQuest.

If you are using one of the Gale resources like *Artemis Literary Sources, Literature Criticism Online, Literature Resource Center,* or *Twayne’s Authors Series,* a good URL to use in a works cited entry is: http://go.galegroup.com. In the entry, MLA has you leave off the http:// part, so you would use go.galegroup.com.

Ebsco databases (there are 40+ databases) have a trademark blue and green coloring and a logo of the search interface, EBSCOhost. A good URL to use for these databases is https://www.ebscohost.com. In the works cited entry, it would be presented as ebscohost.com.

The 40+ databases from the ProQuest Company will also include their name/logo somewhere. A good URL to use is http://www.proquest.com/. In the works cited entry, it would be presented as proquest.com.

If you need a short URL for a database other than one covered by the advice provided just above, the following are offered:

For *Britannica Academic,* use eb.com as the truncated URL
*Cambridge Histories Online,* cambridge.org
*CQ Researcher,* cqpress.com
*Credo Online Reference Service,* credoreference.com
*Emerald Insight,* emeraldinsight.com
*Films on Demand,* films.com
*JSTOR,* jstor.org
*Nexis Uni,* nexisuni.com
*Lippincott Adviser,* advisor.lww.com
*Ovid Medline,* ovid.com
*Project Muse,* muse.jhu.edu
*Wiley Online Library,* onlinelibrary.wiley.com
Persistent or Stable URL’s

If an article has a DOI, do not put a URL, use the DOI. If an article does not have a DOI, MLA recommends the inclusion of a URL with your works cited entry unless your instructor prefers that you do not. (See page 48 of the *MLA Handbook*.)

If a database offers a stable URL, use it as the URL for the information source.

In databases from the **Ebsco Company** (see previous entry), when viewing the entry for an item, look to the right side menu for “Permalink.” If one has a Troy University Web Express account, they will be able to use that link to access the article in question. Example:


In databases from the **ProQuest Company** (see previous entry), the “Document URL” listed under Abstract/Details, should work as a permanent URL for those Web Express credentials. Example:

https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.troy.edu/docview/195369863?accountid=38769

The JSTOR database lists a **Stable URL** for each item, e.g., http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.troy.edu/stable/25605494, but to be correct, you should not use the “.libproxy.troy.edu” part.

**Date of access**

For information sources that are likely to change, e.g., a traditional web page, you should always include the date of access. For information that is unlikely to change, e.g., a journal article or book from a database, MLA says that you may include the access date, but do not need to.
Why Document

An excellent explanation comes from the book *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed., by Kate L. Turabian, which puts it this way:

To give credit. Research is hard work. Some who do it receive concrete rewards—money, promotions, good grades, degrees, and so on. But no less important is recognition, the pride and prestige of seeing one's name associated with knowledge that others value and use. . . . (You also guard against the charge of plagiarism.)

To assure readers about the accuracy of your facts. Researchers cite sources to be fair to other researchers, but also to earn their readers' trust. It is not enough to get the facts right. You must also tell readers the source of the facts so that they can judge their reliability, even check them if they wish. Readers do not trust a source they do not know and cannot find. If they do not trust your sources, they will not trust your facts; and if they do not trust your facts, they will not trust your argument. You establish the first link in that chain of trust by citing your sources fully, accurately, and appropriately.

To show readers the research tradition that informs your work. Researchers cite sources whose data they use, but also cite work that they extend, support, contradict, or correct. These citations help readers not only understand your specific project but connect it to other research in your field.

To help readers follow or extend your research. Many readers use sources cited in a research paper not to check its reliability but to pursue their own work. So citations help others not only to follow your footsteps, but to strike out in new directions. (135-36)