

# MLA: Parenthetical or In-text Citations

## Part I: Understanding In-text or Parenthetical Citations

First of all, it is important to understand that in-text or parenthetical citations—the stuff you actually insert in the body of your paper—refer the readers of your paper to the works cited page where they can learn more about the source. In turn, the works cited page directs readers to the source itself. To make the reader's job easier and your text more credible, effective in-text citations are essential. Here are some examples:

➤ **In-text:**

Crime is on the rise in most metropolitan areas in the U.S. (**Barker** 25).

**Works cited:**

**Barker**, Tim. *Crime in the United States*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1999.

**Note:**

The student writer included the name Barker in-text citation to refer the reader to Barker in the works cited page. Notice how easy it would be for a reader to find the source in the Works cited page because the in-text citation was well done.

➤ *How about an in-text citation for a source with an anonymous author?*

**In-text:**

The number of people who are becoming vegetarians has been on the rise since the 1970s (“**Trends in Eating Habits**” 4).

**Works cited:**

“**Trends in Eating Habits.**” *Vegetarian Times* Mar. 2000: 20-25.

**Note:**

Why didn't I use *Vegetarian Times* in my in-text citation rather than “Trends in Eating Habits”? If I had done so, my reader would have had a time locating the source in my works cited page. They would have been searching under “V” for *Vegetarian Times* instead of “T” for “Trends.” In addition, what if I used several articles from *Vegetarian Times*? How would my reader know which one I was referring to?

➤ *How about an in-text citation for a definition from a dictionary?*

**In-text:**

Rape is defined as “the crime of forcing another person to submit to sex acts, especially sexual intercourse” (“**Rape**” def. 1).

**Works cited:**

“**Rape.**” *The American Heritage Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1993.

**Note:**

Why did I use “Rape” instead of *The American Heritage Dictionary*? Once again, I need to make it easy for my reader to locate the source information on my works cited page.

## Part II: General Notes about In-text Citations

### References

Throughout this handout, I reference several sources to give you more assistance with in-text citations. For these references, I use the acronym that appears in bold after the title of each work.

- *Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* (the blue section: pp. 685-708) **SFH**
- *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Chapter 5: pp. 203-229) **MLA**
- *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum* (pages ) **WRAC**
- *Evaluating Online Sources* (pages ) **EOS**

### Important Things to Remember

- **What to Cite:** Include in-text citations for summaries, paraphrases and direct quotes
- **Introducing a Source for the First Time:** When you introduce a source into your paper for the first time, it is important to incorporate the author's name (at the very least) into your sentence. It is also wise to include the title of the author's work and/or the author's credentials. Doing so will strengthen the credibility of the quoted material and, in turn, your research paper.
  - Example:** *Barra, author of "Intercultural Communication Stumbling Blocks" states, "Learning the language, which most foreign visitors consider their only barrier to understanding, is actually only the beginning" (25).*
  - Example:** *Fred Donner, law professor at Harvard University, stated, "Capital punishment violates the Constitution of the U.S. in that it is discriminatory and is a form of cruel and unusual punishment" (16).*
  - Note:** By adding Donner's credentials, I add credibility to the quoted material and, thus, credibility to my argument.
- **Location of Citation:** Parenthetical citations occur after the quoted (or borrowed) material, but before the sentence's punctuation in ordinary quotations/paraphrases. If the citation only applies to a portion of the sentence, then place it after the quote or paraphrase but in a place that will least likely disrupt the flow of the sentence.
  - Example:** *The government is covering up the existence of alien life forms ("Aliens" 4).*
  - Example:** *While Tedrow argues that "the classroom is not the place for hate speech" (45), Baker asserts that freedom of speech cannot be restricted in the classroom (33).*
  - Example:** *The superstition that "if you walk under a ladder, you will have seven years bad luck" (Black 2) came into being as a way to protect children from injury..*
- **Format:** In parenthetical citations, do not use a comma between the author's last name and the page number. Also, do not include pp. or pg. before the page number.
  - Example:** *(Smith 45).*
- **One Page Sources:** Do not include page numbers for one-page sources.
- **Block Quotes:** If a quote is longer than four typed lines, then create a block quote.
  - To do so, begin the quote on a new line and indent the entire quote ten spaces from the left margin. The right margin will remain the same as the rest of your text.
  - Do NOT include any of your own quotation marks, but DO include any quotation marks found in the original text.
  - Double space the block quote
  - Place the period after the last word of the quote instead of after the in-text citation
  - Example:**  
According to Smith and James, authors of "Living Well,"  
Diet and exercise are the two most important factors in determining a person's health. One can exercise regularly but without a balanced diet, she will never reach her most healthy self. The same is true with eating. One can eat well, but without regular exercise, she will never be able to tone muscle, increase bone density nor strengthen her cardiovascular system. (55)

### Part III: Specific In-text Citation Scenarios

Below, I have included various in-text citation scenarios that you are likely to encounter. However, it is impossible to address all the situations you might find yourself in when citing sources. If you understand the MLA style, then you can use that knowledge along with some common sense to write a citation for even the strangest of situations.

➤ **Author's Name Not Mentioned in the Text:**

Put the author's last name and page number in parentheses. Do not use pp. or pg. in front of the page number.

**Example:** *In the last three years, the number of students carrying guns to school has increased by 5% (Wiggler 22).*

**References:** 206 MLA, 176 WRA

➤ **Author's Name Mentioned in the Text:**

If you do use the author's name in the sentence, then simply include the page number after the quote or paraphrase.

**Example:** *According to West, "One out of five teens suffer from sleep deprivation" (5).*

**References:** 206 MLA, 177-78 WRAC

➤ **Citing an Entire Work** (print, film, television program, etc...):

In this case, there are no page numbers. Therefore, it is preferable to place the name of the author in the text rather than in a parenthetical citation.

**Example:** Grant's *America* includes many examples of this trend.

**References:** 209 MLA

➤ **Anonymous Author:**

Without an author's name, you will use the title of the work instead.

**Example:** Americans eat more fast food than any other culture in the world ("Fast Food Frenzy" 8).

**Note:** You can shorten the title. In the above example, you could abbreviate the title to "Fast Food." However, if you had a title, such as "Coming Out: The Stories of Gays in America," you could not shorten this title to "Stories of Gays" because the reader would look under "S" in your works cited page rather than "C" where it would be listed.

**References:** 215 MLA, 178 WRAC, 690-91 SFH (#9)

➤ **Dictionary Definition:**

If you use a dictionary definition, include the word you are defining and the number (and letter, if appropriate) of the definition you used.

**Example:** "Intellect" is defined as "the ability to learn and reason; the capacity for knowledge and understanding" ("Intellect" def. 1a).

**References:** 216 MLA

➤ **Corporate Author:**

Include the author's name followed by a page number. Remember that it may be more reader friendly to place the name in the text, especially if the name is long.

**Example:** The population of China around 1990 was increasing by more than fifteen million annually ( Natl. Research Council 15).

**References:** 217 MLA

➤ **Two or More Authors:**

If the text was authored or edited by two or more people, then do one of the following:

**Example 1:** List all the last names of the authors in the same order as you did in your works cited page (**Franklin, Cardigan, and Davis 25**).

**Example 2:** List the last name of the first author listed in the works cited page followed by et al. (**Franklin et al. 25**).

**References:** 205 MLA, 688 SFH (#2)

➤ **Two or More Works by the Same Author:**

If you use two works by the same author, include the title or a shortened version of the title after the name and before the page number.

**Example:**

- From the 1980s to the late 1990s, the size of the typical American home has increased by 1000 square feet (Chaplan, "Homes in America" 3).
- According to Chaplan, Americans have become greedier, more materialistic, and more self-centered ("Greed" 5).

**References:** 219 MLA, 179 WRAC

➤ **Two Authors with the Same Last Name:**

What if you use two different authors but they have the same last name? In this case, include the first initial. If they also share the same first initial, then use the entire first name.

**Example:** (L. Patterson 230) or (Lucy Patterson 230)

**Reference:** 205 MLA

➤ **Using Two Sources to Support a Statement:**

Include the last name and page number of the first author followed by a semicolon and the last name and page number of the second author.

**Examples:**

1. (Kipp 22; Randolph 3)
2. (Natl. Research Council 3-5; "Death" 2)

**References:** 224 MLA & 179 WRAC

➤ **Indirect Source:**

Although it is better to get your information straight from the horse's mouth, sometimes you will need to use indirect sources. An indirect source is someone's published account of another's spoken remarks.

**Example:** Greenough claims that genetic engineering can be "a frightening concept when misunderstood" (qtd. in Lerner 45).

**Note:** Lerner is the author of the book where you found this quote. Thus, Lerner will appear in your works cited page, not Greenough. If you only included the page number here, your reader would believe Greenough was the author and would look for her name in the works cited page.

**References:** 220 MLA, 178 WRAC

➤ **Electronic Sources**

Since page numbers are often not available for online sources, it is best to avoid using parenthetical citations for these sources. Instead, incorporate the author's name or the title of the online source into your text (whenever possible). If you need to include an in-text citation, then follow the same format that you would for a print source. Although you will not have in-text citations for many, if not all, of your online sources, it is important to include the online sources in your works cited page. By the way, you can substitute page numbers with paragraph numbers, text divisions or screens if they are an inherent part of the document (not something added by the browser), but it is not necessary to do so.

**Examples:**

1. Paragraphs: "Sleep deprivation affects 1 out of 4 teens" (Barton, par. 5).
2. Text Divisions: "Sleep deprivation affects 1 out of 4 teens" (Barton, Introduction).
3. Screens: "Sleep deprivation affects 1 out of 4 teens" (Barton, screens 2-3).

**References:** 219, 212 MLA; 119 EOS; 701 SFH

Handout created by Amy Gerlach for  
the BGSU Writers Lab