

Understanding Core Elements of MLA Style

The newest edition of MLA style has changed how we create Works Cited entries. Instead of looking up the type of source and using individualized directions for each different type of source, MLA has created a single process/formula for citing all types of sources.

CORE ELEMENTS

1. Author.
2. Title.
3. Title of Container,
4. Other Contributors,
5. Version,
6. Number,
7. Publisher,
8. Publication Date,
9. Location.

Everything that is included in a Works Cited entry will be one of the **nine core elements**. This basic list can get you through citations for simple things like novels and websites.

This handout is designed to help you understand what each element is asking for, where you might find the information, whether or not you need to include it, and what it should look like in your citation.

Understanding and Identifying Core Elements:

- 1. Author:** You are looking for the author of the specific article, book, or material that you are citing. This is usually a person or persons. If the source has no author, skip item one and move on to the title. Begin with the author's last name, followed by a comma and the rest of the name as presented in the work. Omit prefixes (Dr. Fr. Mrs.) and suffixes (Jr. Sr. M.D.). (The new edition allows for some alternative uses of this piece of information that are explained under "Other Contributors.")

An author can be an organization or corporation, **but do not cite a corporate author if it is the same as the publisher**; in this instance, skip the author and move straight to the title.

Author Formatting:

One Author	Last Name, First Name.	Truss, Lynne.
Two Authors	Last Name, First Name, and First Name Last Name.	Yousafzai, Malala, and Christina Lamb.
Three or More Authors	Last Name, First Name, et al.	deBettencourt, Megan, et al.
Corporate Author	Name of Corporation/Govt. (if it's different from the publisher)	United States.
No Author	"Title of Article." OR <i>Title of Source</i> .	"Complementary and Alternative Medicine."

- 2. Title of Source:** The title of your source should be given in its entirety in the Works Cited entry using upper case to capitalize the major words. Small titles that are "contained" within something else (articles, songs, stories, poems) go in quotation marks, and titles of large works (books, anthologies, overall websites, television series, movies) go in italics.

Title Formatting:

Title of Article on a Website.	"The Backwaters Prize."
Title of Overall Website.	<i>Backwaters Press</i> .
Title of Article in a Journal.	"Closed-loop Training of Attention with Real-Time Brain Imaging."
Title of a Journal.	<i>Nature Neuroscience</i> .



3. **Title of Container:** Most sources have at least one container. Many of our scholarly sources have more than one. When your source is “contained” within something else like an article contained in a journal or on a website, or a movie contained in Netflix, or an episode of a TV show contained within a TV series, the larger item is the container.

Examples of First Containers:

- Anthologies or Collections
- Magazines and Newspapers
- Music Album
- Scholarly Journals
- Television Series
- Titles of Overall Websites

Second Containers: It is possible for a single source to have more than one container: an article is contained within a journal that is contained within a database, or a television episode contained in a series contained on Netflix.

Examples of Second Containers:

- Electronic Reading Platforms like Google Book
- Subscription Services like Netflix or Spotify
- Databases

Example with Two Containers: The article “Closed Loop Training” was published in the Journal *Nature Neuroscience* and is housed in the database *Academic Search Premier*.

deBettencourt, Megan, et al. “Closed-loop Training of Attention with Real-Time Brain Imaging.” *Nature Neuroscience*, vol. 18, no. 3, Mar. 2015, pp. 470-475. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1038/nn.3940.

4. **Other Contributors:** Not all sources will have other contributors. These include other people who contribute to the work AND whose participation is important to either a.) your research or b.) locating the work. **Editors** and **Translators** are almost always included because they are so important to the work. Additionally, if the content of your paper directs you to list someone besides the author in the author’s spot, the writer, director, or other important individuals may be listed here.

Example of a Movie Listed by Writer:

Here, the citation for the movie *Captain America: Civil War* begins with the writers of the film, like most sources, but lists the director as well since directors are typically important when discussing films.

Markus, Christopher et al. *Captain America: Civil War*. Directed by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, Marvel Studios, 2016.

However, if you are writing a paper discussing the direction styles of the film, you might put the directors in the opening spot since that’s the focus of your research and move the writers to the “Other Contributors.”

Example of a Movie Listed by Director:

Russo, Anthony and Joe Russo, directors. *Captain America: Civil War*. Written by Christopher Markus et al., Marvel Studios, 2016.

Formatting Contributors:

Before each contributor's name, include a brief description of their role. The description is not capitalized unless no container precedes it.

- edited by
- created by
- illustrated by
- narrated by
- performance by
- translated by

5. **Version:** Not all sources will have a version. Version indicates that the source was released in more than one version; there is something different about the content from one version to the next.

Examples of Version:

Use ed. as the abbreviation for edition.

- 8th ed.
- Updated ed.
- Expanded ed.
- unabridged version
- director's cut

6. **Number:** Not all sources will have a number. Others, however, will have more than one number. This indicates that the source is part of a numbered sequence. This might include both volume and issue numbers, volume letters, and season and episode numbers. **This is a change** from previous versions of MLA that included volume and issue number without abbreviations and as a single unit (example: 18.4)

Examples of Numbers:

Use vol. to abbreviate volume and no. to abbreviate issue/number.

- vol 4.
- vol. 18, no. 3
- vol. A
- season 22, episode 3

Example of Volume and Issue Number for a Journal Article

deBettencourt, Megan, et al. "Closed-loop Training of Attention with Real-Time Brain Imaging." *Nature Neuroscience*, vol. 18, no. 3, Mar. 2015, pp. 470-475. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1038/nn.3940.

7. **Publisher:** Most sources will have a publisher though MLA has loosened its guidelines about when the publisher needs to be included. The publisher is the organization responsible for producing the work or making it available. For websites, this information can usually be found at the bottom of the page near the copyright or on the "about" page. MLA allows for publishers to be omitted in some instances when it simply isn't useful to include (it's repetitive or obvious) or when it isn't available.

Examples of Publishers:

When talking about university presses, use U to abbreviate University, P for Press, and UP for University Press.

- Backwaters Press
- Hatchet Audio
- Harper Collins
- NPR

Publishers May Be Omitted From:

- Periodicals (journals, magazines, newspapers)
- Works published by the author or editor
- Websites whose title and publisher are essentially the same
- Websites that act as hosts but are not actually responsible for producing the content they provide: *YouTube*, *WordPress.com*, *JSTORE*. These may be containers, but not publishers.

8. Publication Date: Most sources have a publication date. If a source has more than one date of publication listed, use the one that is most meaningful to your writing. An article on a website, for example, may have a date for the publication of that particular article, while the website as a whole has a copyright date at the bottom. In most instances, the article date will provide the reader more accurate information. However, if the article had no date attributed to it, the copyright date at the bottom of the page may be used.

Formatting Dates:

- MLA uses an inverted format of the date: **day month year** without any commas.
- Names of months that are longer than four letters are abbreviated by the first three letters followed by a period (Jan. Feb.) with the exception of September (Sept.).
- In general, provide the full day/date or as much of the date as is available.
- If you are citing an entire website or work that was developed over a range of years, cite the range: 2014-2016

9. Location: Many sources will contain location information. This tells the reader either a.) how to get back to the information you used *within* your source or container, b.) or how to get back *to the source/container*. Location information varies depending on the type of source you are citing.

Type of Source	Type of Location	Example
Print Sources	Page Numbers (abbreviate <i>p.</i> for page or <i>pp.</i> for pages)	pp. 24-29
Website	Best Option: Digital Object Identifier (doi) Second Best: Permalink or “Stable” Link Third Best: Specific URL (omit http://)	www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130896102
Database Source	Best Option: Digital Object Identifier (abbreviate <i>doi</i> .) Second Best: Database URL	doi:10.1038/nn.3940.
Physical Objects like a Piece of Art in a Museum or Gallery	Name of the Place, City (Omit the city if it’s included in the place)	Durham Western Heritage Museum, Omaha

PLEASE NOTE: The *MLA Handbook* states “We...recommend the inclusion of URLs in the works-cited list, but if your instructor prefers that you not include them, follow his or her directions” (48).

10. Optional Elements: The handbook discusses the inclusion of optional elements including, but not limited to: Date of Original Publication, City of Publication, Other Facts about the Source, and Date of Access. You can find more information about them on pages 50-53 in the handbook.

Date of Access: The one optional element most likely to be of use is the date of access. MLA encourages its use for works cited entries online that do not provide any other sort of publication date. If included, this piece would be added to the end of the entry preceded by the word *Accessed*

“Complementary and Alternative Medicine.” *Mayo Clinic*, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 1998-2016, ART-20045267. **Accessed 4 Jun. 2016.**

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