Solomon Student

Professor Template

Formatting 101

24 October 2023

An Essay Formatted in MLA Style

For even experienced students, formatting a paper can be a daunting task. The Excelsior Online Writing Lab created this template to give writers a foundation for formatting using the Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines. Throughout this essay, you’ll find helpful links to topics related to the MLA and the essay writing process in general. For instance, in the opening paragraph of your essay, [it’s important to create a strong thesis statement.](https://owl.excelsior.edu/writing-process/thesis-sentence/)

Every essay begins with a heading. Your heading should include your name, your instructor’s name, the class, and the date. Note that the date should be in military style, with the day coming before the month. Place your title one line below your heading. The title of your essay does not receive any special formatting, like underlining or italics.

You will notice that we’ve chosen 12-point Times New Roman font for our template essay. Other standard fonts, such as Arial or Calibri, are perfectly acceptable. You’ll also notice that all our text – from the heading to block quotes – is double-spaced. The margins are set to 1 inch on all sides. A header with your last name and the page number should be placed in the top right corner, a half inch from the top, on every page. The header can be accessed on most word processing programs by double-clicking or right-clicking on the top of the page. [These MLA standards are covered in our formatting checklist.](https://owl.excelsior.edu/citation-and-documentation/mla-style/mla-checklist/)

Quoting from sources will probably be an important part of your essay. [The Excelsior OWL has resources to help integrate quotes into your writing.](https://owl.excelsior.edu/research/drafting-and-integrating/drafting-and-integrating-using-quotations/) Short quotations (four lines or less) can be incorporated into the paragraph with a parenthetical citation, as seen in the next sentence. To get started writing, some authors recommend that writers “find a subject you care about and which you in your heart feel others should care about” (Vonnegut 1). You’ll notice that because we didn’t introduce the source (Vonnegut) when setting up the quote, we needed to use his name in the citation along with the page number. If you introduce your source, as we do in the next block quote, you don’t need to include their name in the in-text citation.

Excerpts longer than four lines should be formatted in block quotations. Remember to introduce your block quote, typically with a sentence that ends with a colon. Vonnegut went on to describe how writers should find their voice:

I myself find that I trust my own writing most, and others seem to trust it most, too, when I sound most like a person from Indianapolis, which is what I am. What alternatives do I have? The one most vehemently recommended by teachers has no doubt been pressed on you, as well: to write like cultivated Englishman of a century or more ago.

I used to be exasperated by such teachers but am no more. I understand now that all those antique essays and stories with which I was to compare my own work were not magnificent for their datedness or foreignness, but for saying precisely what their authors meant them to say. (2)

As you’ll notice above, block quotations are double-spaced just like the rest of the text. There are no quotation marks used with block quotes. The entire block quote should be indented a half inch. This can be accomplished by highlighting the block quote and pressing the ‘tab’ key. If you quote a passage that contains multiple paragraphs, those additional paragraphs should be indented.

If you’re referencing poetry, excerpts longer than three lines should be placed in a block quote. For example, if we were to quote from the poem “For the young who want to,” that would look like this:

The reason people want M.F.A.’s,

take workshops with fancy names

when all you can really

learn is a few techniques,

typing instructions and some-

body else’s mannerisms

is that every artist lacks

a license to hang on the wall (Piercy)

When block quoting from poetry, try to preserve any special spacing or formatting, like the stanza break seen above. If a single line of poetry spills over to a second line in your block quote, you should use a hanging indent for the remainder of the line. [More information about quoting from poetry can be found on the OWL.](https://owl.excelsior.edu/citation-and-documentation/mla-style/mla-in-text-citations/verse/)

If you are using figures like images, graphs, or tables in your essay, they should be formatted as seen below:

A person sitting at a desk with a book and a pen

Description automatically generated

Fig 1. Leonid Pasternak. *The Passion of Creation*. 1917, Oxford.

Note that if your caption includes full source information, it is not necessary to add a reference to your figure on your Works Cited page.

On the topic of Works Cited, we have included an example page at the end of this template. Remember that your Works Cited list should be on a separate page with “Works Cited” centered at the top. Your sources should be in alphabetical order. Each reference should have a hanging indent after the first line. On most word processing programs, a hanging indent can be created by highlighting the paragraph, selecting the ‘Paragraph’ option, and then selecting the ‘hanging indent’ option from the ‘special indentation’ dropdown box. You can find [more information about constructing your Works Cited page](https://owl.excelsior.edu/citation-and-documentation/mla-style/mla-works-cited/) at the Excelsior OWL.

In conclusion, as this template is preformatted to adhere to MLA guidelines, students should feel confident simply deleting these paragraphs and replacing them with their own essay. For further assistance, please consult your instructor or [visit the Excelsior OWL.](https://owl.excelsior.edu/)

Works Cited

“Article title (no author).” Website name, URL. Date accessed.

Author’s Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Edition, Publisher, Year of Publication.

*MLA Handbook.* 9th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2021.

“MLA Style.” *Excelsior Online Writing Lab*, https://owl.excelsior.edu/citation-and-documentation/mla-style/. Accessed 1 October 2023.

Piercy, Marge. “For the young who want to.” *Poetry Foundation,* https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47399/for-the-young-who-want-to. Accessed 1 October 2023.

Poet’s last name, First name. “Title of Poem.” Source, hyperlink. Date accessed.

Vonnegut, Kurt. “How to Write with Style.” *Power of the Printed Word.* International Paper Company, 1980. https://www.bu.edu/clarion/guides/vonnegut-1980.pdf