



# Writing Manual

Oakdale Academy

Fall 2019

# MLA Formatting Basics

## Font

Type all papers on a word processor and print on an 8.5x11in. paper. Use a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman, Garamond, Arial, etc.) in 12pt. size.

## Page Numbers

In the top right-hand corner of each page, include your last name and the page number. This can be done by first inserting the page number and then typing your last name to the left of the number.

For Microsoft Word: Insert – Header & Footer – Page Number

For Google Docs: Insert – Header & Page Number – Page Number

## Headings

Unless you are instructed otherwise, you should begin your papers with the heading laid out by the Modern Language Association (MLA). MLA headings should follow this pattern:

Your Name	ex.	Jane Doe
Your Teacher's Name		Mr. John Smith
Class of the Assignment		Ancient History
Date Assignment is Turned In		September 1, 2020

## Titles

Your papers should always include a title, spaced one line below the last line of your heading, centered on the page. Capitalize all words in the title except articles (e.g. a, an, the), prepositions (e.g. of, before, to), and conjunctions (e.g. and, or, yet). The only exception to this guideline is the first word in the title, which should always be capitalized. Your title should be in plain text, **not** italicized or underlined.

However, if you include the title of a work in your paper title, italicize the work you are referencing.

E.g. Darkness in Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles*

You may want to have a longer title that includes a subtitle. Put both the title and the subtitle on the same line but separate them with a colon.

E.g. Darkness: The Prevalent Theme in Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles*

If you choose to use a quote in your title, set the quote off in quotation marks. If you would like to follow the quote with a subtitle, place the colon after the close of the quotes.

E.g. "Darkness Rather Blacker Than Before": The Dark in Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles*

### **Margins/Indents/Spacing**

Your paper should have a one-inch margin on all four sides.

Each paragraph of your paper should be indented by an additional half-inch. Do not hit the “Space” bar 5 times. Instead, either hit “Tab” or use the ruler to set a pre-chosen indent.

Double-space the entirety of your paper, including the heading. Do not add extra spaces between paragraphs. Each line, including the last line of one paragraph and the first line of the next, should be equidistant.

### **Citation**

Whenever you utilize the work of another person, you must cite their work. If you do not do this, you are committing plagiarism, an illegal form of theft that will result in a grade of 0 on your assignment.

Unless otherwise instructed, follow the MLA guide for citation. Comprehensive guidelines for this can be found at the *Purdue Online Writing Lab* (Purdue OWL). Use parenthetical citation, meaning that at the end of a sentence where another person’s work is referenced or quoted, use parentheses to indicate which work is being referenced and, if possible, from what page number the reference is taken.

E.g. (citing a quote): Frankenstein was intrigued by a tree that was destroyed by lightning: “I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed” (Shelley 21).

E.g. (citing a reference): Frankenstein was intrigued by a tree that was destroyed by lightning and exclaimed that he had never before seen anything ruined to such a degree (Shelley 21).

### **Quote Punctuation**

Punctuation marks such as periods, commas, and semicolons should appear after the closing quotation marks and the parenthetical citation.

Question marks and exclamation points should be within the quotation marks if they are a part of the quote, but after the parenthetical citation if they are a part of your words. If the question mark or exclamation point will be included inside the quote, follow the parenthetical citation with a final period.

E.g. (punctuation belonging to the quote): Roger Chillingworth asks “Is Hester Prynne the less miserable, think you, for that scarlet letter on her breast?” (Hawthorne 123).

E.g. (punctuation not part of quote): Was Dimmesdale honest in his reply of “I do verily believe it” (Hawthorne 123)?

If you add words in a quote, put brackets around the words to show that they are not a part of the original quote:

E.g.: Frankenstein was intrigued by the lightning-destroyed tree: “[He] never beheld anything so utterly destroyed” (Shelley 21).

If an unnecessary part of the quote must be omitted, indicate the missing passage with an ellipsis [...], which is three periods followed by a space:

E.g.: Dimmesdale responds: “I do verily believe it... Nevertheless I cannot answer for her” (Hawthorne 123).

### **Integrated Quotes**

WHAT TO DO: Make sure the quote is always part of your own sentence. For example:

E.g. (using a colon): Frankenstein was intrigued by a tree that was destroyed by lightning: “I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed” (Shelley 21).

E.g. (using a comma): As he came upon the lightning-struck tree, Frankenstein exclaimed that he “never behind anything so utterly destroyed” (Shelley 21).

E.g. (comma): Henry questioned Frankenstein about his unhappiness, saying, “‘My dear Frankenstein,’ exclaimed Henry, when he perceived me weep with bitterness, ‘are you always to be unhappy? My dear friend, what has happened?’” (Shelley 41).

WHAT NOT TO DO: Make the quote its own sentence, separated from your own words.

E.g. Frankenstein was intrigued by a tree that was destroyed by lightening. “I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed” (Shelley 21).

### **Block Quotes**

For a quote that will take up four full lines of your page or more, use a block quote. Block quotes should be double-spaced like the rest of your paper, but they should be indented ½ inch from the left margin, like so:

Elizabeth spoke at length to Victor about her confusion over Justine’s arrest:

Alas! Victor, when falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of certain

happiness? I feel as if I were walking on the edge of a precipice, towards which thousands

are crowding and endeavouring to plunge me into the abyss. William and Justine were assassinated, and the murderer escapes; he walks about the world free, and perhaps respected. (Shelley 61)

Frankenstein admits that he suffered greatly throughout this time, feeling himself responsible for the murders. He, however, takes no actual blame or culpability for the actions.

### **Works Cited**

At the end of your paper, include a separate page that lists, in alphabetical order, all works cited in your paper. Title this page "Works Cited", but do not capitalize, bold, or underline those words.

Below the centered title, list the cited works. Double-space the entire list. Indent the **second line** of each citation by one half-inch.

Cite books in the following manner (including punctuation):

Author Last Name, First Name. *Title in italics*. City of Publication, Publisher, Publication Date.

E.g.:

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York, Vintage Random House, 1988.

## Grammar/Punctuation

### Subject-Verb Agreement

Be sure to use singular verbs with singular nouns and plural verbs with plural nouns.

E.g. (incorrect): Grigory were dumbfounded.

E.g. (correct): Grigory was dumbfounded.

### Colons/Semicolons

Be careful when using colons and semicolons. It can be easy to get confused and use them improperly.

#### **Semicolons**

Semicolons may be used when separating two independent clauses. Often, semicolons separating clauses will be followed by a conjunctive adverb (however, therefore, likewise etc.)

E.g.: Hester Prynne was an outcast from society; because of this, she was able to reach the marginalized in a way that others were not.

Semicolons may also be separate items in a list, particularly when those items use punctuations that would make the list confusing.

E.g.: On my trip, I will be traveling to the following places: London, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Buffalo, New York; Cincinnati, Ohio; Toledo, Ohio; and Detroit, Michigan.

#### **Colons**

Colons may be used when introducing a list, as can be seen in the above example. The colon falls after the last few words before the list (“following places: London...”).

Colons also may be used to introduce a further explanation. When you make a statement with your independent clause but need to offer a more thorough explanation, finish your statement with a colon before your explanation.

E.g.: I will be travelling to three cities: London, Toronto, and Buffalo.

### Commas (lists, intros, clauses)

Commas can be used between items in a list. For example, see the sentence directly above that uses commas to separate to three items of the list. Be sure, in Oakdale literature papers, to include the Oxford Comma, which is the comma that separates the last two items in a list. In the sentence above, the Oxford comma is the one that follows “Toronto”.

Commas should be used to set off introductory dependent phrases of three or more words. In the sentence below, the introductory phrase (“early in the morning yesterday”) is dependent, as the sentence is complete without it, and spans more than three words, so a comma is necessary.

E.g.: Early in the morning yesterday, I woke to the sound of my phone ringing.

Introductory phrases of fewer than three words do not need to be set off with a comma.

E.g.: Early yesterday I woke to the sound of my phone ringing.

Commas should be used to separate adverbial dependent clauses that come before independent clauses. The dependent clause can be identified by the fact that, though it contains a subject and a verb, it would not make a complete sentence on its own. Conversely, the independent clause would work as a sentence by itself.

E.g.: Since no one else volunteered (dependent clause), I will visit Santorini (independent clause.)”

Commas, partnered with conjunctions, should be used to separate two independent clauses.

E.g.: I need to go to school (independent clause), but I am too sick to drive (independent clause).

### **Fragments**

A fragment is something that is passed off as a sentence but does not contain the necessary elements of a sentence: a subject and a predicate. To be a complete sentence, there must be a subject (someone/thing) and a predicate (the thing that the subject is doing). The most common fragments are dependent clauses, which can serve as add-ons to a sentence but are not a sentence themselves.

E.g. (fragment/dependent clause): While he was on his trip abroad.

E.g. (correct use of dependent clause): While he was on his trip abroad, he went to France.

The second sentence above is correct because it contains an independent clause with a subject (he) and a predicate (went to France). It also has a dependent clause, which adds on to the independent clause.

More examples of fragments:

E.g.: Mrs. Smith, the woman who lived down the street and had three dogs.

In the above sentence, there is a subject (Mrs. Smith) but no predicate because Mrs. Smith isn't doing anything.

E.g.: Down at the train station and waited to pick up his sister.

The above sentence has a predicate but no subject who completes the predicate.

### **Passive verbs**

Passive verbs include a form of “to be”. They are verbs acted UPON the subject, not acted out BY the subject. Avoid passive verbs, rephrasing your sentences so the verb is in the active voice whenever possible. To do this, take the subject of the passive verb and make it the direct object of the active verb.

E.g. (passive voice): The burger was eaten by Stephen.

E.g. (active voice): Stephen ate the burger.

### **Run-on Sentences, Comma Splice**

Avoid run-on sentences, which are two independent clauses stuck together with nothing connecting them.

E.g.: I love to write papers I would write one every day if I could.

Comma splices are like run-ons, but there is a comma between the two independent clauses, but without a conjunction.

E.g. (comma splice): I love to write papers, I would write one every day if I could.

E.g. (correct): I love to write papers, and I would write one every day if I could.

### **Verb tense**

Be sure that the verbs you use stay in the same tense. If you use present tense when referring to a story, be sure that all the verbs you use about the story are in that tense. Do likewise for past tense. Avoid straying into odd tenses/voices, like progressive (verbs ending in -ing) or perfect (completed, like “had finished” instead of “finished”).

## **Things to Avoid**

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|---|---|
| <b>1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> Pronouns</b> – | Avoid mentioning yourself (“I”, “me”, “we”) or the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person (“you”).  |
| <b>Contractions</b> –                           | Avoid all contractions. E.g. don’t, won’t, shouldn’t, I’m, I’ve, etc.   |
| <b>Informal language</b> –                      | Avoid overly-familiar language. E.g. “like”, “guys”, “ok”, etc.   |
| <b>Parentheses</b> –                            | Parentheses should be used only for parenthetical citations.  |
| <b>Passive Verbs</b> –                          | When at all possible, use active verbs instead of passive ones. E.g. “Miss Smith teaches Jack” instead of “Jack is taught by Miss Smith.” |
| <b>Personal preference</b> –                    | Avoid voicing your personal opinion as fact. E.g. “The Iliad is the best work ever”   |
| <b>Prepositional Endings</b> –                  | Avoid ending a sentence with a preposition, if possible.  |
| <b>Referencing Paper</b> –                      | Avoid mentioning your paper. E.g. “In this paper, I will....”   |



## High School Paper Grade Qualities

### A — (90-100%)

Excellent, brilliant writing. The writing is not rushed or hurried.

No grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors at all.

The prompt and instructions are followed closely with impressive thoroughness.

There are both a clear introduction and conclusion that do not introduce the bulk of material but merely hint to it and reflect on it.

Exceptional and original argument/thesis that provides insightful

The language is mature, the information and thoughts insightful, and the writing professional and removed with no personal references.

### B — (80-89%)

Above-average writing.

Few grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors.

The prompt and instructions are followed well.

There is a clear introduction and conclusion.

Thesis argues a point that could be proven or disproven, and argues well.

The writing is thorough and covers the bases, but may contain overly-formal jargon.

### C — (70-79%)

Good high school writing.

More than a few grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors.

Follows prompt.

Adequate introduction and conclusion.

Adequately explained thesis.

Average word choice, or overly-conversational language.

### D — (60-69%)

Below-average writing.

Many grammar, punctuation, or formatting errors.

Follows prompt, but barely.

Little-to-no introduction or conclusion, or introduction and conclusion are nothing but a thesis.

Thesis not adequately explained or defended. No argument, simply a summary of events.

Casual language, juvenile vocabulary, “bare-minimum-required” style.

### F — (<60%)

Does not follow prompt.

**EXAMPLE PAPER**

Smith 1

Jessica Smith

Mr. Teacher

British Literature

November 8, 2018

Afraid of the Dark: Enlightened Man's Ironic Terror

Start your paper with a one-half inch indent from the left margin. The margins around your paper should all be one inch. If you are going to reference a book, be sure to put the title in italics, as I will do here when I reference *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Be sure to include page numbers and your last name on the top right corner of each page.

Paragraphs should be indented and should be spaced out as far apart as are each individual line of the paper. By that, I mean only hit the "enter" button one time, not twice. Same thing with the title. The entire paper should be double-spaced.

Whenever you quote from a text, be sure that you include a parenthetical citation: "The voyage came to an end" (Shelley 131). If, as in the previous sentence, you do not include the title of the work in your sentence, you must include the author's surname in your parenthetical citation. Also as in the previous sentence, make sure you put end quotation marks at the end of the quote and then, without a comma or any punctuation, place your parenthetical citation. After your parentheses, place the closing punctuation. The only case where this would not be is when your quotation ends in a question mark or an exclamation mark. In that case, you may include the closing punctuation before the quotation marks and place a period at the end after the parenthetical citation.