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English 101

17 March 2019

Sample MLA-format Essay

As you know from the course syllabus, all of your essays *must* be is standard MLA-8 format, or they will not be accepted, read, or graded. If you have to re-do a paper because of its format (spacing, margins, font, etc.), and you have not yet used your one class re-write then it will be your one class re-write, and this is a silly reason to burn your re-write. If you have already used your re-write option, then the paper will have to be corrected and turned in late, which means it will be docked the 10% late penalty. Don’t have either of these things happen; be sure your paper is in the correct format before you turn it in. By the way, this paper is set up in correct MLA format; you can use this as a model. I strongly recommend that you print it out and use it as a reference and checklist.

There are other formats; however, in the humanities and liberal arts most instructors require you use MLA formatting for your essays. If you are asked to set up your paper in a different format, there are loads of YouTube videos, and the LAHC Library website has excellent citation guides for MLA, APA, and CMS.

OK, now here is the sad news. Microsoft Word (which is what most of you should be using; you can download it free from the Student Portal on our LAHC website), is not set up for college essay writing; it is set up for businesses. That is why Word is part of a suite of software called Microsoft Office. So some of the default settings are wrong for MLA format; they need to be changed. Here is a quick list:

* The font needs to be changed to Times New Roman, size 12.
* You need to Insert Headers with your last name and the page number in the top right.
* The spacing must be set to Double.
* On the same page where you set spacing, be sure Before and After are both set to 0.

Once you have changed all of those, you are ready to type, though you may want to check to make sure that the margins are all set to 1” (you do that in the Layout tab).

There are some other important features. Notice that the Heading goes in the top left, is double spaced like the rest of the paper and is made up of four lines: First name Last name (no comma), Professor’s name, Class name, Date (the assignment’s due date), and note the date order is day and then month (spelled out) and then year (no commas). Hit Enter one time and center your Title. Then hit Enter once and hit Tab once to indent your paragraph. Start typing. At the end of the paragraph, hit Enter once so that you do not get any extra spacing between the paragraphs. Your paper should never have any extra spacing anywhere.

So this is what an MLA document looks like. To see how to fix the spacing and headers and such, there are lots of YouTube videos; just search for “MLA-8 how to set up a paper in Word” You will find lots of examples. There’s a good example on the LAHC Library website as well. But there is still one other very important MLA-8 area to cover, documentation.

A lot of college writing involves research. You will need to find sources, quote directly from them, credit them in the body of your paper, and include all necessary source information on a Works Cited page at the end. There are a lot of different sorts of sources (videos, websites, books, magazine articles, books in e-databases, lectures, podcasts, and so on). All require slightly different detailed information on the Works Cited page, and you can find much more information on the Purdue OWL site or by clicking the LAHC Library website’s Citations link (select MLA and look for the How to Cite tab up top. I will not go through all MLA-8 documentation here, but I will show you a couple of examples that you will probably use a lot. I will describe them here, but you will see the actual entries on the Works Cited page. I will also show you what parenthetical citations look like; this is how you credit your sources in the paper itself, and each citation is matched to the very beginning of one of the Works Cited entries. You’ll see.

Imagine I am writing about Gabriel Garcia-Marquez’s short story “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” that the teacher put on Canvas in the Files section. I might write that the author calls the story, “a tale for children” (Garcia-Marquez 1). I have quote directly then follow that with a parenthetical citation including the author’s last name and the page number from the story if there are page #s on the file. Sometimes the files have no page #s; in that case, just put the author’s last name. This entry matches the one on the Works Cited page that starts with Garcia-Marquez. It includes the author, title, course management system name (Canvas, Blackboard, etc.), who uploaded the file and when, and the short web address (URL).

Quoting from a web article is a bit different. Sometimes there is no author given, and there are no page numbers listed, so what goes inside that parenthetical citation? Here’s an example: The author states, “Tiny homes can cost as little as one-tenth of a median house price in most markets” (“The Pros and Cons of Tiny Living”). Since we have no author, you look for what is first on the Works Cited entry; in this case it is the article title in quotation marks, and so we include that title and those quotation marks in the parenthetical citation. Other important things in the Works Cited entry are the website name, associated organization (if given), the date the article was put on the web if it is included (it often is not, and it is sometimes just a year), and the complete web URL skipping “http://”; it is not blue and not underlined. You will typically have to right click on these and Remove Hyperlink, or you can just highlight them, turn the text black, click the Underlined icon to get rid of underlining.

The third sort of entry that is very common is a book, like this: In Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore, the shop has an ominous appearance compared to “an old Transylvania forest, a forest filled with witches and dagger-wielding bandits, all waiting just beyond moonlight’s reach” (Sloan 8). You will see the matching entry for Sloan, Robin (yes, we use last name comma first name, and a period goes after that) on the Works Cited page along with the book title in italics, the publisher, and the year of publication.

That brings up an important point. All quotation marks and italics, periods and commas (including the final period at the end of each entry) must be exact. You might notice five more things: 1) Works Cited starts 1” from the top of its own page (yes, it must start on a new page); 2) Works Cited is centered; 3) the entries and all of the spacing on this page is still Double (never more or less); 4) there are Hanging Indents (that is, the first line of an entry is left aligned just like the paper, but any entry longer than one line has the SECOND and any other line(s) indented ½”; this is done using the Special Hanging Indent setting in the Paragraph section on Word. Again, the easiest way to do this is by searching “MLA-8 How to set up a Works Cited page in Word” and choose from a lot of YouTube videos; 5) the entries are in alphabetical order.

Works Cited

Garcia-Marquez, Gabriel. “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings..” *Canvas*, uploaded by John Corbally, 3 Aug. 2018, ilearn.lahc.edu.

“The Pros and Cons of Tiny Living.” *Tiny Home Journal*, RealEstate.com, 2017, www.realestate.org/TheProsandConsofTinyLiving/costs.html.

Sloan, Robin. *Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore*. Picador, 2013.