MLA Basic Formatting Guide

Properly formatting your MLA papers from your heading to your “Works Cited” page is an important element in your writing. Many English instructors and other professors from various courses stress proper formatting for their assignments. Let’s start with the heading.

A separate title page is not usually required for an MLA style paper. Your title page is basically your first page. All pages in your essay must have one-inch margins all around. The exception is the page number, which must be half an inch from the top of the page. The first line of the page, however, must still be one inch from the top. Your full name starts at the top of the page followed by your instructor’s title (i.e. Professor Stevens or Doctor Stevens), class and section number, and the due date (day, month, year). The page number (last name, page number) must be aligned on the top right corner. A centered title then comes after all of these items. All text should be 12-inch font, and everything, including your heading, must be double-spaced. Once you address these items, you’re ready to begin your paper. Let’s see all of this information in action.

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English 3000-02
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Learning Styles in China and the United States

Here are some extra tips to consider during the writing process. Don’t make the title font bigger than 12 inches, italicize it, or put it in bold. As your paper progresses, place the appropriate number on each page (i.e. Davis 2, Davis 3, etc.). Be sure to indent the start of every paragraph half an inch from the left (this is normally accomplished by pressing the “Tab” button once). Also, don’t put extra spaces between lines. This sometimes happens between paragraphs, and instructors will notice and mark them down for grading. Be sure to acknowledge your sources and authors within the essay, and remember to capitalize and italicize book titles.
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Once you complete your paper, all that remains is the “Works Cited” page. This page stands on its own apart from the rest of the essay. A page number still goes at the top right corner of the page, and “Works Cited” is typed and centered on a separate line. If you only use one source for your essay, then you would type “Work Cited” instead. List your sources alphabetically by the authors’ last names. If names are unavailable, use the title of the source in their place. The first line of every entry should start one inch from the left, and every subsequent line of an entry should be indented half an inch from the left. Let’s take a look at an example.

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Work Cited


Every line is double-spaced, and the “Works Cited” page does not count as a full page of text for your essay despite it having a page number. The “Works Cited” page can take a while to complete as you will most likely encounter sources that don’t have certain information, which will require different ways of formatting them. The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers: Seventh Edition and the Purdue Online Writing Lab website are two excellent resources for this part.

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References - The following works were referred to during the creation of this handout: MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers: Seventh Edition (MLA).