

# MLA Style Guide for Middle School



## Guidelines for Making a Bibliography and Documenting Sources

Lakewood City Schools  
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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with some guidance on how to write your essays in MLA style. In the following pages you will find information about the basics of the style and how to correctly cite your sources. It is important to remember that in the space of this small handbook, only the most important elements of the style are covered; therefore, your teacher may need to share other material with you in order for you to complete your assignments in MLA format.

It is expected that all middle school students and teachers will use the MLA style when documenting sources used in written assignments.

Finally, this handbook was reviewed and adopted by the Middle School Writing Plan Committee, October 2008. (Revised February 2011) It conforms to MLA style, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition.

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# 1. MLA Style Guide Basics

## **What is MLA Style?**

The **M**odern **L**anguage **A**ssociation (MLA) developed a style guide for academic writing. Specifically it deals with ways to document the writer's source materials and the format of the paper.

MLA provides guidelines for the creation of a bibliography (called a "Works Cited" page) and the corresponding parenthetical (within the text) citation.

## **How do I use this MLA Style Guide?**

Students and teachers in the middle schools are expected to use this MLA style guide as a reference when writing pieces that require information to be cited from other sources.

## **Why is it Important that I Cite Sources?**

As a writer, it is your responsibility to give proper credit to your sources. It is also very important that you give this credit in accordance with MLA style. If you fail to give proper credit to a source, you have committed plagiarism. (See [plagiarism](#)).

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## **2. Plagiarism—What is it? How can I avoid it?**

### **What is plagiarism?**

If you have not given proper credit to your sources, you have committed plagiarism. Essentially, it is like you are lying to your reader. You have used someone else's ideas without telling your reader where you took it from. This is dishonest.

Whether you have intentionally tried to pass off someone else's ideas as your own or, through careless research, you unintentionally "forgot" to cite a source, the charge is plagiarism.

### **What needs to be cited?**

Simply put: any idea or fact that is not common knowledge needs to be cited.

Common knowledge is a fact or idea that most educated people just happen to know. Where they learned about it is unclear. Although they were not born with this knowledge, it's just something that "most people know." For example, most people know that the planets rotate around the sun and that it takes our Earth 365 days to go completely around it. This is common knowledge. However, most people do not know how many days it takes Neptune to complete the same journey. If you found that fact in a book, you must cite it. Give that source credit.

There is some "gray area" here, but the bottom line is, if you're learning about it for the first time from a source, you need to cite it. Final piece of wisdom, if you're unsure if it is common knowledge, cite it!

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### 3. Works Cited Page

#### What is a "Works Cited" Page?

A "Works Cited" page is the name that MLA gives to a bibliography. It is a listing of all of the sources you cited in the body of your paper. The website, [EasyBib.com](http://EasyBib.com) is a great tool for helping you make a bibliography.

Here are a few things to keep in mind about the "Works Cited" page:

1. The "Works Cited" page is always going to be the last page of your essay or report. You should type the words "Works Cited" and center it on the page.
2. Each entry must be complete and accurate.
3. Each entry reads like one long sentence. What this means is that it does not matter where the second line begins in an entry; it begins on the second line only because you ran out of room on the first line.
4. The second and subsequent lines are always indented five spaces.
5. The sources are listed alphabetically by the first word or name of the entry. This first word or name should be what you use in your parenthetical citation.

A note about Easybib.com: If you use Easybib, most of the formatting will be taken care of for you. WARNING: if you input wrong information (i.e. spell the author's name wrong or have the wrong publication year) the entry will be wrong. Think of the old saying, "Garbage in / Garbage out."

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## Example of a "Works Cited" page:

Hines 3

### Works Cited

Jensen, Thomas W. "Mars." *Compton's Encyclopedia*. 2007. Print.

"Mars | Nine Planets." *The Nine Planets Solar System Tour*. 2010. Web. 09 Feb. 2011.

<<http://nineplanets.org/mars.html>>.

"Mars." *Mars Exploration Program*. 2011. Web. 09 Feb. 2011. <<http://mars.jpl.nasa.gov/>>.

Murray, Stuart, and Edward S. Barnard. *Mars*. New York: DK Pub., 2004. Print.

Savage, Donald, and Guy Webster. "NASA - Reports Detail Rover Discoveries of Wet Martian History." *NASA News*. 2 Dec. 2004. Web. 14 Feb. 2011.

<[http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2004/dec/HQ\\_04385\\_MER\\_science.html](http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2004/dec/HQ_04385_MER_science.html)>.

Squyres, Steven W. "Mars." *World Book Student*. 2011. *World Book Online Reference Center*. Web. 9 Feb. 2011.

<<http://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar346000&st=Mars>>.

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## 4. Parenthetical Citation

### What is Parenthetical Citation?

Parenthetical citation is when a writer directly puts into the text a note from where he or she got the information. Parenthetical or “in-text” citation allows your reader to know from what source each idea/fact came.

This is how it looks in the text of your paper:

**“In 2007, 37 percent of American adults sought medical information from the internet regarding a health problem they were experiencing before consulting a doctor” (Smith 38).**

In the example above, notice that the author’s name and the page number on which this fact was found are set off from the text within parenthesis. Note also that the punctuation of this parenthetical citation is also important. The reader would understand from this citation that on page 38 of Smith’s book, this fact is mentioned. Furthermore, since the words are contained within quotes, the above example illustrates that this is a **direct quote** from that page.

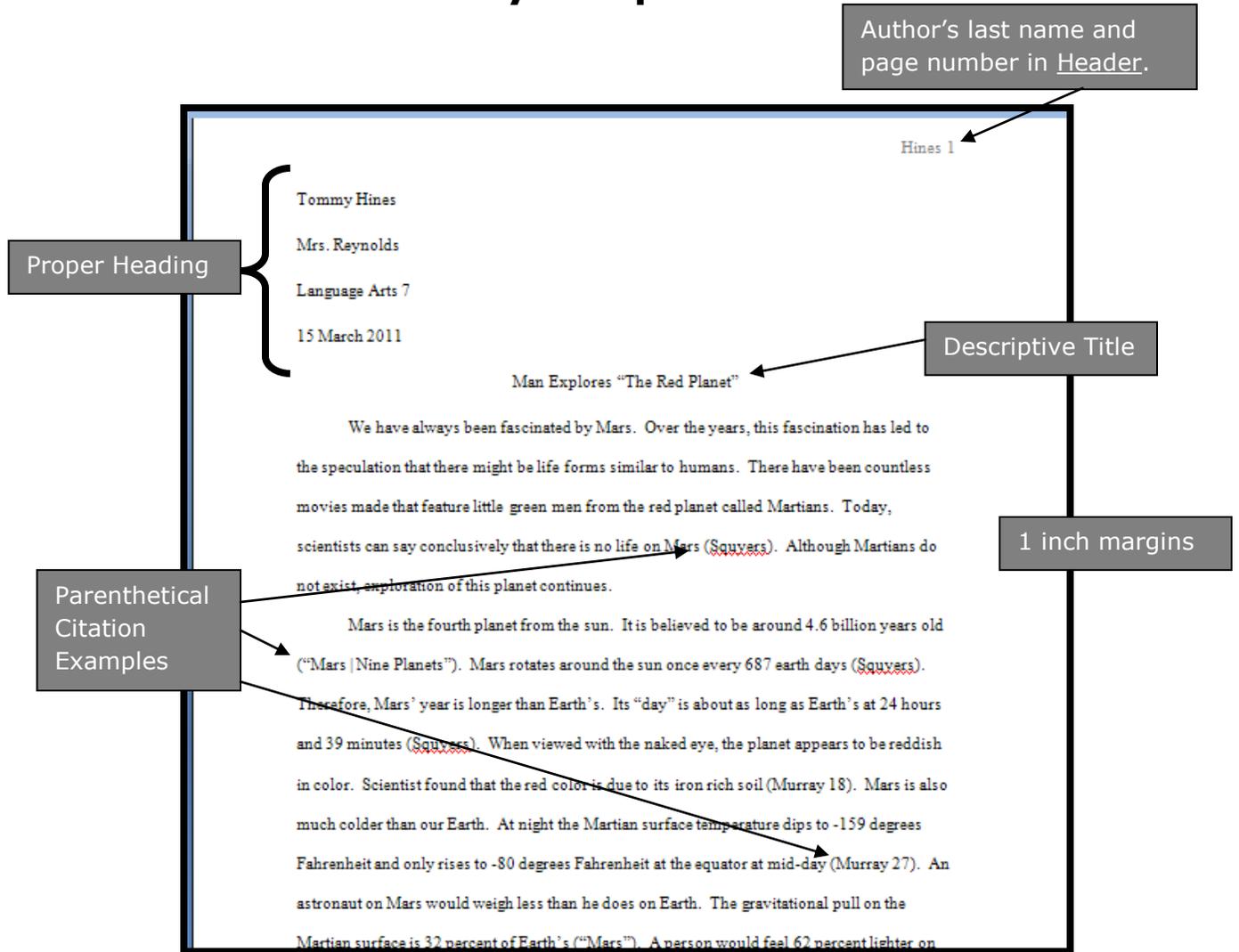
Here is an example of the same idea presented as an **indirect quote**:

**Instead of going to a doctor right away, a recent study found that 37 percent of Americans are now turning to the internet for medical information (Smith 38).**

See the difference between direct and indirect quotes in the [glossary](#) section.

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# 5. Format of a MLA Style Paper



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## 5. Glossary

**Bibliography**—a listing of sources that a student used to write his/her essay or report.

**Citation**—is the identification of a specific idea or quote taken from a source.

**Direct Quote**—is a quote in which the author uses words from a source exactly as they were written. The words are taken verbatim. A direct quote is indicated by putting the words in quotation marks (“ ”). A direct quote must be cited.

**Indirect Quote or Paraphrasing**—is a quote in which an author paraphrases, or puts into his/her own words, an idea or fact from a source. An indirect quote must be cited.

**Parenthetical Citation**—is when credit is give to a source directly within the text of the paper. The source information is presented inside parenthesis.

**Works Cited**—is the name that MLA gives to a bibliography. It is the last page of an essay or report. It lists all of the sources the student has used in his/her writing.

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