The Writing Center
MLA: Integrating Sources and In-text Citations

When using outside sources, it is important to understand how to incorporate them into your writing effectively. This handout explains how to introduce, use, and cite outside sources in your paragraphs.

First, create a signal phrase or introduce the source.

The signal phrase alerts your readers that a source is coming, whether it's a quotation, summary, or paraphrase. Usually, the signal phrase mentions the author and/or text and gives a context to the source you are using (Hacker 508). Typically, signal phrases are good to use when you need to establish the credibility of your sources. Here are some examples:

> **According to Anne Lamott, author of *Bird by Bird*,** readers need to have friends read their work before submitting it (27).

> Writers need to come to writing with fervor and passion **notes science fiction author Stephen King** (265).

In some situations, you may not need to establish the credibility of your sources in your signal phrase; in this case, you will integrate them into your sentence. Here are some examples:

> **Although she thought she was in the clear,** "An unexpected tap on [her] shoulder startled [her]" (Brandt 103).

> **It is unclear what Mrs. Mallard dies from:** "a joy that kills" or realizing she will not have freedom (Chopin 3).

Here are some common verbs in signal phrases (Hacker 509). Please note that MLA requires present tense verbs.

acknowledges	**denies**	**rejects**	**endorses**
believes	**implies**	**agrees**	**observes**
declares	**refutes**	**compares**	**responds**
illustrates	**writes**	**emphasizes**	**asserts**
reasons thinks	**admits**	**notes reports**	**contends**
adds	**comments**	**argues**	**grants**
claims	**disputes**	**confirms**	**points out**
	insists		**suggests**

How do I punctuate the transition?

Good question! This often creates some confusion for students, but by following a few simple rules, you can correctly punctuate this transition.

- **Comma:** When the signal phrase is NOT a complete sentence, end the signal phrase with a comma. Then insert the quotation.

    Example: **According to Diana Hacker,** "Readers need to move from your words to the words of a source without feeling a jolt" (508).

- **No Punctuation:** When the signal phrase ends with "that" or "which," do not insert a comma or capitalize the first letter of the quotation. This also applies when the quotation is necessary for the sentence to be grammatically correct.

    Example: **Diana Hacker argues that** "readers need to move from your words to the words of a source without feeling a jolt" (508).

    Example: **Writers need to make sure** "readers . . . move from your words to the words of a source without feeling a jolt" (Hacker 508).

    Example: Brandt stole the pin, which "was never mentioned again" (103).

- **Colon:** When a signal phrase is a complete sentence, use a colon.

    Example: **Grant and Lee shared an amazing quality:** "There was the ability, at the end, to turn quickly from war to peace once the fighting was over" (Diaz 267).

- **Capitalization:** Capitalize the first letter of a quotation when 1) you use a comma at the end of the signal phrase, or 2) the first letter of the quotation is capitalized in the original source.

    Example: **Although she thought she was in the clear,** "An unexpected tap on [her] shoulder startled [her]" (Brandt 103).

    Example: Brandt was not ready for "an unexpected tap" from security after she stole the pin (103).

Second, choose which way you want to use your source.

1. **Direct Quotation:** A direct quotation is the use of the author's *exact* words in your essay. When you use a direct quotation, indicate this by putting the author's words in quotation marks.

    Example: When describing her mother's English, Tan writes, "My mother's expressive command of English belies how much she actually understands" (47).

2. **Summary**: When using a summary in your essay, you condense a lengthy source to just a few sentences or a short paragraph of your own words. If you use any words from the source in your summary, you must put those words in quotation marks.

    Example: In Chopin's *The Story of an Hour*, readers see the main character, Mrs. Mallard, experience various reactions to the news of her husband's death. First, she cries, but quickly stops. Next, she gazes out of her window, imagining a freer life. Finally, she dies from a "joy that kills" upon seeing her husband alive (3).

3. **Paraphrase:** Paraphrasing is somewhat similar to summarizing; you put a source's ideas into your own words. The main difference, though, is that a paraphrase is around the same length as the original source while a summary is a shortened version of a source. The example below comes from *The Bedford Handbook*.

> Original Source: In earlier times, surveillance was limited to the information that a supervisor could observe and record firsthand and to primitive counting devices. In the computer age surveillance can be instantaneous, unblinking, cheap, and maybe, most importantly, easy.

> Example Paraphrase: Scholars Carl Botan and Mihaela Vorvoreanu claim that the nature of workplace surveillance has changed over time. Before the arrival of computers, managers could collect only small amounts of information about their employees based on what they saw or heard. Now, because computers are standard workplace technology, employers can monitor employees efficiently (493).

Third, add an MLA format in-text citation.

When citing sources in your essay, it is important to understand how to cite them correctly in the text. Writers often want a cut-and-dry answer to how to cite sources in their papers. However, there is no "one way." There are several rules based on the type of source and information available. This section explains how to cite sources in-text based on the general rules.

> **In-text citations appear after quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material.** The two key features of an MLA-style in-text citation are the following:

> 1. Author's last name, title of source, or website name AND

> 2. The page number, paragraph number, or nothing if neither the page or paragraph number are present

> You choose what goes in the parenthesis using a process of elimination. For example, if there is no author, you use the title of the source. If there is no source title, then you use the website name (for online sources). Similarly, if there is a page number, use the page number. If there is no page number and the paragraphs are numbered, use par. #. If there is no page or paragraph number, nothing goes in the slot.

Print Sources

Author Stated in the Parenthesis

In a beautiful passage, we see that "[a] fully dressed woman walked out of the water" (Morrison 50).

Author Stated in the Signal Phrase

Morrison's narrator tells us that "[a] fully dressed woman walked out of the water" (50).

Work with No Author

We see so many global warming hotspots in North America likely because this region has "more readily accessible climatic data and more comprehensive programs to monitor and study environmental change" ("Impact of Global Warming" 6).

Encyclopedia or Dictionary Entry

The word "crocodile" has a surprisingly complex etymology ("Crocodile").

Two Sources by the Same Author

It is clear that the soldiers carried items that "were largely determined by necessity" (O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* 2).

Two Authors with the Same Last Name

"The greatest challenge was getting the right sample materials" while they were trying to rebuild Haiti (R. Jones 17).

Three or Fewer Authors

The authors state, "Tighter gun control in the United States erodes Second Amendment rights" (Smith, Yang, and Moore 76).

Three or More Authors

Legal experts counter Smith, Yang, and Moore's argument by noting that the current spike in gun violence in America compels law makers to adjust gun laws (Jones et al. 4).

An Indirect Source

Ravitch argues that high schools are pressured to act as "social service centers, and they don't do that well" (qtd. in Weisman 259).

Corporate Author

In 1963, it was predicted that "Africa would evolve into an advance industrial economy within fifty years" (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 1-2).

Block Quotations (More than four lines)

At the conclusion of *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph and the other boys realize the horror of their actions:

> The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too…. Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy. (186)
>
> **Please note: If the source you are using is not paginated, refer to paragraph numbers if they are labeled. If the source does not contain page or paragraph numbers, do not insert anything in that space.*

Internet Sources

Though writers sometimes get confused when citing Internet sources in-text, the rules are basically the same. Remember to follow the process of elimination discussed earlier: if there is an author, use the last name. If there is no author, use the article title. If there is no article title, use the website name. Please note that you will not have, generally speaking, any page or paragraph number in the citation since it does not usually exist with online sources.

Author

One online film critic stated that *Fitzcarraldo* is "a beautiful and terrifying critique of obsession and colonialism" (Garcia).

No Author, Article Title

Devastation rocked thousands as "the worst earthquake in 200 years—7.0 in magnitude—struck less than ten miles from the Caribbean city of Port-au-Prince, Haiti" ("Earthquake in Haiti").

No Author and No Article Title

At Mt. SAC, "The Writing Center helps all students who want to improve their writing abilities" (Mt. SAC Writing Center).

> **Please note that if you use the author, article title, or website name in your text, you will not have a parenthesis following the source.*

Multimedia Sources

As with Internet sources, multimedia sources usually do have page or paragraph numbers. Sometimes, though, they will contain act or scene numbers. Also, if you cite the author, title, or director in your sentence, you will not have a parenthesis (see film below).

An Entire Work without Page Numbers (Film)

Kurosawa's *Rashomon* was one of the first Japanese films to attract a Western audience.

An Entire Work without Page Numbers (Song)

"Strange Fruit" brought attention to the ever-increasing number of lynchings in the South (Holiday).

An Entire Work without Page Numbers (TV Show)

Internal espionage was as prevalent as ever in the 1990s ("Decade of the Spy").

A few tips to keep in mind:

1. Do not "drop" quotations into your writing without using a signal phrase.
2. Longer quotations have specific formatting issues, depending on the style citation you are using.
3. To indicate you have left a portion of a quotation out, indicate this by using an ellipsis mark (. . .).
4. Use brackets to indicate a change in the original source.

Source: Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. *The Bedford Handbook 11th Edition*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2020.