



THE UNIVERSITY  
WRITING CENTER  
3211 MHRA

## USING MLA (6<sup>TH</sup> edition) FORMAT

Writers have an obligation to give credit to the source of any opinions, interpretations, or specific facts that were the result of another person's research when they "borrow" that information and incorporate it into their writing—*whether they quote the exact words of the source or restate it in their own words, and whether the source is in print or online.* (The only exception to this rule would be using basic information that appears without citation in many sources because it is understood and accepted as "common knowledge" within the field.)

There are three reasons for student writers to cite their sources properly: 1) to maintain academic integrity by acknowledging the intellectual property of other writers; 2) to lend credibility to the information they are using; 3) to enable their readers to find and learn more from the source material.

The system for citing sources that is used in many Humanities courses is the **MLA** (Modern Language Association) system. It consists of two steps: 1) parenthetical citations within the text, which give an abbreviated reference to the author and page number of the borrowed material; and 2) an alphabetical listing of all Works Cited, which appears at the end of the paper and gives full bibliographical information.

### **IN-TEXT (PARENTHETICAL) REFERENCES IN MLA**

*Choices for short quotations or paraphrases* - and please note punctuation!

Identify the source's author by name in introducing the material, and follow it with a page number in parentheses:

Smitherman explains, "The ebonics spoken in the US is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, reflecting the combination of African languages (Niger-Congo) and Euro American English" (19).

In explaining the origins of ebonics, Smitherman points to both English and African influences on the oral language of Black Americans (19).

If you don't identify the author by name in your text, you must include the last name as well as the page number in your parentheses:

"The ebonics spoken in the US is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, reflecting the combination of African languages (Niger-Congo) and Euro American English" (Smitherman 19).

In explaining the origins of ebonics, one expert points to both English and African influences on the oral language of Black Americans (Smitherman 19).

If the text has no author, use a shortened version of the title and the page number to identify it:

Linguists have not reached consensus on the pedagogical value of the politically controversial "dialect readers" introduced in Oakland in the 1970s ("Dialect Readers" 4).

**Direct quotations of 4 lines or more -- block quotations:**

Introduce the quote with a sentence of your own that previews or summarizes it. Then indent the entire quote 1 inch from the left margin. Double space it, just like the rest of your text. And don't use quotation marks. If you don't name the author in introducing the quote, be sure to include his or her last name in the parentheses – such as (Smitherman 19).

Smitherman sees a continuum between the historical origins and the present use of ebonics:

The ebonics spoken in the US is rooted in the Black American Oral Tradition, reflecting the combination of African languages (Niger-Congo) and Euro American English. It is a language forged in the crucible of enslavement, US-style apartheid, and the struggle to survive and thrive in the face of domination. It is no wonder, then, that ebonics has political and social implications. (19)

Do not overuse block quotations. When possible, paraphrase the material (citing the source in the same way), using direct quotations of just those phrases that seem essential to preserve.

Smitherman sees a continuum between the historical origins of ebonics, including both African and English linguistic influences, and the present socially and politically controversial use of the dialect, which she describes as “a language forged in the crucible” of oppression of Black Americans (19).

**Citing indirect sources:**

When you read a source that uses material (which you want to use) originally published in some other source (which you have not read), you should identify the original author in your text, but use the abbreviation “qtd. in” with the author's name and page number of the secondary source—the one that you actually read--in your parenthetical citation. Here's an example:

Donald Larsson writes of Kate Chopin's “consistently. . . strong-willed, independent heroines. . .[who] cast a skeptical eye on the institution of marriage” (qtd. in Hicks 1).

**Altering a quotation:**

In the example just given, note the use of *ellipses* . . . to indicate that you left out some words of the original quotation, and the use of *brackets* [ ] to indicate that the form of a word has been changed to make it fit into the sentence, or to add an explanatory word or phrase that was not in the original.