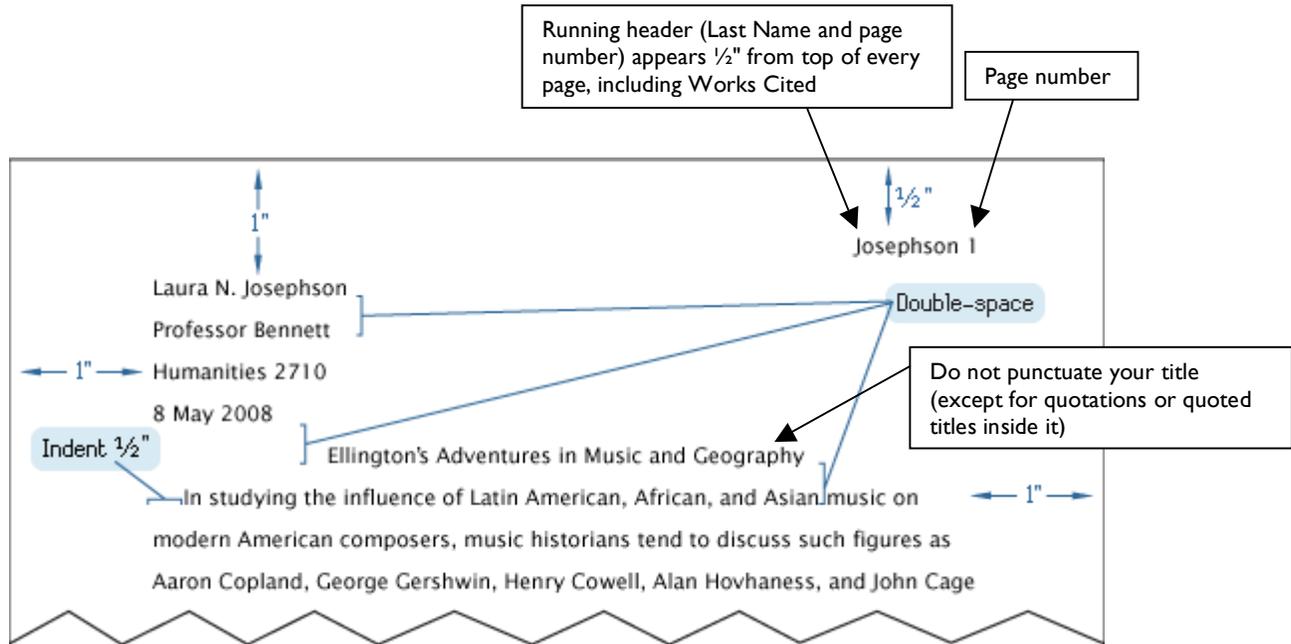# Basics of MLA Formatting (09-5a)

**Format the page correctly.** Use the diagram below as a guideline. Use a standard font (e.g., Arial, Times), 11- or 12-point, in black ink on white or off-white paper, with a 1 margin all around. Double-space the entire essay (although you may adjust the margins and spacing slightly to avoid wasting paper).

Running header (Last Name and page number) appears ½" from top of every page, including Works Cited

Page number

½ "

Josephson 1

1"

Laura N. Josephson

Professor Bennett

Double-space

1" → Humanities 2710

8 May 2008

Do not punctuate your title (except for quotations or quoted titles inside it)

Indent ½"

Ellington's Adventures in Music and Geography

In studying the influence of Latin American, African, and Asian music on 

1"

modern American composers, music historians tend to discuss such figures as

Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, Henry Cowell, Alan Hovhaness, and John Cage

**Create an original title for your paper.** Do not call it "William Shakespeare" (or whatever your subject is). Ideally, your title should at least give a hint as to what your main idea is. And do not underline it, italicize it, or put quotation marks around it (unless it contains a quotation or another title within it).

**Use appropriate sources.** This is a research assignment, not a "cut-and-paste-off-the-Internet" assignment. You should rely *at least* as much on printed sources as on online-only sources. Avoid amateur sites, promotional and/or commercial sites, "idiot's guide" sites like Sparknotes, and open-source sites like Wikipedia. Above all, do NOT use so-called "essay bank" sites which claim to do the research for you.

**Include source references in your text.** It is better to refer to your source openly in your text, rather than hide it away in a parenthesis. Include a *signal phrase* indicating the source of the reference (author, title, and <u>type</u> of document). Put the end punctuation *after* the parenthetical source reference.

end punctuation

**GOOD:**    President Reagan cut the housing budget from $30 billion in 1981 to $7.3 billion in 1987 (Matthews 58).

signal phrase

**BETTER:**   In his book <u>No Need for Hunger</u>, Robert Matthews reports that President Reagan cut the housing budget from $30 billion in 1981 to $7.3 billion in 1987 (58).

end punctuation

**Only quote material that is *worth* quoting**: Quote directly if the information is unique to that source, or the phrasing is especially articulate, vivid, or interesting. Otherwise, paraphrase the information in your own words – but be sure to cite the source either way!

**Weave in quotations.** When you quote, rather than paraphrase, a source of information, make sure the quotation fits grammatically into your own sentence. If you don't know how to *integrate,* or "weave in," quotations, learn now. (All three examples below integrate the quotations correctly.)

**Do not use a URL (Internet address) as the name of your source reference**.

**WRONG:**   Alice Walker preserved "her sense of rootedness in the South" (http://voices. cla.umn.edu).

**BETTER:**   Alice Walker preserved "her sense of rootedness in the South" (McNaron).

**BEST:**   Toni McNaron, on the website <u>Voices from the Gap: Women Writers of Color</u>, notes Alice Walker's ability to preserve "her sense of rootedness in the South."

signal phrase

**Punctuate quotations correctly.** In the U.S., we use double quotation marks (" ") for the first level of quoted material (even if the quotation consists of a single word). To indicate "nested" quotations (quotations within quotations), alternate pairs of double and single quotation marks:

> According to Steven Ledbetter in his essay "Songs of Love and Death," music students in the Renaissance had to "produce a book of madrigals as a 'graduation piece' to demonstrate their mastery" (8).

**Use "block indentation."** If a quotation runs to more than three lines in your paper, set it off from your text by beginning a new line, indenting one inch from the left margin. Do NOT put quotation marks around a block-indented quotation. (You may single-space the quotation if you wish.) A colon usually introduces a block-indented quotation. If quoting a passage including dialogue or lines of poetry, preserve the original text's paragraph breaks (for dialogue) or line breaks (of poetry).

**Punctuate titles correctly.** Titles of longer or major works are either underlined or *italicized* (just be consistent throughout your essay); titles of shorter works are indicated with "quotation marks." Novels, multi-act plays, book-length poems, movies, television series, music albums, and paintings are major works; stories, essays, songs, and chapters are shorter works.

> Bob Dylan's song "Like a Rolling Stone," from the album *Highway 61 Revisited,* was rumored to be about the debutante and Warhol hanger-on Edie Sedgwick.

> Picasso created his anti-war painting *Guernica* to arouse resistance to the Spanish Fascist forces.

**Format your Works Cited page correctly.** If you do not include a Works Cited page, you will not receive a grade for the assignment. If your Works Cited page includes any works which you have *not* actually cited by *author* or *title* **in the text of your essay**, they will be crossed off your Works Cited page. In order to receive a passing grade, your essay must have a *minimum* number (set by your teacher) of different, legitimate sources.
  • Center the title - Works Cited - one inch from the top. Double space before the first entry.
  • Use a hanging indent for each entry (i.e., begin each entry at the left margin, and indent additional lines 1/2-inch).
  • Double-space each entry; also double-space between entries.
  • List each entry **alphabetically** by the author's last name. If there is no author, use the first word of the title (disregarding *A, An, The*).
  • Identify the medium of the work: `Print` (at the end of the entry for printed works); `Web` (just before the date of access and the URL for online sources); or other applicable term (`DVD, Radio broadcast, Interview,` etc.) at the end of the entry.
  • Do *not* number Works Cited entries.

FORMAT TO USE FOR BOOKS: Author's last name, author's first name. Title of book. City of publication, State (if necessary): Publisher's

name, year of publication. Print.

Gilson, Edith, and Susan Kane. Unnecessary Choices: The Hidden Life of the Executive

Woman. New York: Morrow, 1987. Print.

FORMAT TO USE FOR PERIODICAL ARTICLES: Author's last name, author's first name. "Title of article." Name of Periodical date of

publication (in DD MMM YYYY format): page numbers of article. Print

Updike, John. "Poet On the Fault Line." Review of Robert Frost: A Life, by Jay Parini.

The New Yorker 15 Mar. 1999: 84-91. Print.

FORMAT TO USE FOR INTERNET SITES: Author's last name, author's first name (if given). "Title of Web Page or Article" (if part of a larger

website). Title of Website. Parent site, institutional affiliation, etc. (if available). Date created (if given); date last modified or

revised (if given). Web. Date visited <url> (website address).

McNaron, Toni. "Alice Walker: Biography — Criticism." Voices from the Gap: Women Artists

and Writers of Color. University of Minnesota. 08 July 1996; revised 20 Sep. 2004.

Web. 20 Mar. 2005 <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/walker_alice.html#bio>.

**Note:** If a website contains a database version of a printed source, include all the information for a traditional print-media source as well as Internet site information (parent site or institution; date created, date modified, date visited; url; etc.)

Wilford, John Noble. "Fossils Found in Spain Seen as Last Link to Great Apes." New York

Times 19 Nov. 2004. Web. 20 Mar. 2005 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/19/science/

19ape.html>.

For accepted format of other forms of publication (newspaper articles, works with multiple authors: unsigned works; CD-ROMs; etc.), see *Writers, Inc.;* the *MLA Handbook; The Chicago Manual of Style*; any one of dozens of websites which include guides to MLA bibliography format (several are listed on the Research Writing Guide); or talk to a librarian or your English teacher.