

Brad Hughes, Nancy Linh Karls, Mikey Shapiro  
Podcast 1: MLA, short introduction  
Draft 5  
1 May 2007

- 0:00 [Screen image: UW-Madison Writing Center / Podcast 1: MLA Documentation] [Music intro]
- 0:05 [As music fades out] I'm Nancy Linh Karls from the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, welcoming you to this Writing Center podcast! This podcast series tackles issues of writing in and out of the university. Today, we're going to be talking about the essentials of MLA documentation. [Pause.]
- 0:20 So let's say you're writing a paper for your comparative literature class, and you use an idea that comes from a famous critic whose book you just read. You want your reader to know where that idea came from, but how? Or let's say you paraphrase an idea that came up in lecture for a paper for your English class. How can you let your reader know where you got that quotation?
- 0:37 Fifty years ago, the Modern Language Association put together a manual to answer these questions, standardizing how writers document where their ideas and quotations come from. The most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, published in 2003, is 378 pages long. In this podcast, I'm going to talk about the essentials on which those 378 pages are built: if you get these basics, it'll be a snap for you to pick up the details.
- 1:05 [Screen image: Author → (Kundera 71) ← Page number] Let's go back to our first example: in your comp lit essay, you quote a critic whose book you read. What information does your reader need in order to know exactly what page of what book that quotation came from? MLA keeps it simple: all you need is the last name of the author and the page number in parentheses right after the quotation.
- 1:27 As a general rule, when you are citing paraphrased or quoted sources that are books or other texts, the rules of MLA documentation require you to give the last name of the author and the page number. This information is put in parentheses at the end of the sentence to which it refers. This is called a parenthetical citation. That's right! No more footnotes!
- 1:50 [Screen image: (Ortiz-Robles 28 Feb. 07)] What about our second example? In your English essay, you mention an idea that came up in lecture. What's the information your reader needs to figure out exactly where that idea came from? Because there aren't any page numbers in a lecture, MLA says you need the last name of the lecturer and the date of the lecture.
- 2:08 [Screen image: (Kundera 71) / (Ortiz-Robles 28 Feb. 07)] Of course, for the reader citations like "Kundera 71" or "Ortiz-Robles 28 February 2007" are only so helpful. Parenthetical citations like these act as pointers, helping your reader look up the full information on a Work Cited page.
- 2:22 [Screen image: Kundera, Milan. *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts*. Trans. Linda Asher. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.] On the Works Cited page, you can then list out the rest of the information your reader needs to track down your source. This is what those 378 pages of the handbook are all about: where to put the publisher, whether to use a period or a colon between details – that sort of thing. This information varies for

- different kinds of sources: journal, magazine, and newspaper articles; dictionary definitions; television shows and movies; websites and a dozen other electronic sources.
- 2:38 Does this sound like a lot of details? It's nothing compared to the amount of detail you need if you quote a source from a scholarly journal, or from the internet. But don't panic! You know the basics: in the text of your essay, you parenthetically cite the minimum amount of information your reader needs to find the exact source of your quotation or paraphrase – almost always the author's last name and the page number on which the idea or quotation appears – and on your Works Cited page you give much fuller documentation of where that source can be found.
- 3:08 [Screen image: [wisc.edu/writing / 263-1992](http://wisc.edu/writing/263-1992)] No one memorizes all the details, and writers use that 378-page *Handbook* only when they have to. To learn more without drowning in the details, visit our website at [wisc.edu/writing](http://wisc.edu/writing) to look at our quick guide to citing commonly-used sources. Also, keep your ears out for forthcoming podcasts on MLA documentation.
- 3:35 [Music fades in] Finally, if you are a currently-enrolled UW-Madison student you can call us at 263-1992 to schedule an appointment to meet with a Writing Center instructor to discuss MLA citation or any other feature of writing!
- 3:38 I'm Nancy Linh Karls for the UW-Madison Writing Center, wishing you happy writing!
- 3:40 [Music fades out]