

## MLA Documentation Basics

### ***Part I: Background Information***

Lesson Title: MLA Documentation Basics

Discipline: ESL

Course Name: English AX: Writing the College Essay

Names of Authors: Jenny Simon, Debra Mochidome

Rationale: One of the goals of the course is to give students a background in research methods which will carry over into the next course (transfer-level composition); this lesson works to accomplish this goal. Also, this lesson is of a technical nature, which seems to be a very compatible format for this type of lesson structure, particularly for the first time an instructor designs a lesson using the format. Thus, we chose this lesson for these reasons.

Abstract: This lesson is for the English AX course, an advanced writing course for ESL students, and was tested in two sections of the course (henceforth “Section 1” and “Section 2”). The lesson taught was on MLA documentation basics, the format that students must use to document and cite their sources in a research paper. In Section 1, the lesson included segments on the works cited page, in-text parenthetical citations, and avoiding plagiarism. In Section 2, the works cited page (Phase 2, Point #2 below) was the only portion of the lesson that was covered (the other portions of the lesson having been covered earlier on in the semester; thus, most of the documentation below refers to Section 1). The results of the lesson were quite satisfactory, with half or more of the students in Section 1 understanding the concepts and being able to apply them to their research paper. About a third of the students understood the concept, but applied the technicalities incorrectly. The rest of the students neither understood the concepts nor applied the technicalities in their research paper—MLA documentation was totally absent. In Section 2, most of the students understood the concept of listing their in-text sources on a works cited page, but only about a third of the students were immediately able to apply the mechanics of listing in-text sources on a works cited page successfully. These results suggest that this lesson needs to occur earlier in the semester, particularly when the students begin to write their research papers. It should be reinforced throughout this process, if not throughout the semester, perhaps within the context of essay writing.

### ***Part II: The Lesson***

		<b>Preliminary Preparation Phase</b>
<b>Course</b>		English AX
<b>Topic</b>		MLA Documentation Basics
<b>Content Type</b>	<b>Concept</b>	Procedure
	<b>Procedure</b>	
	<b>Law/Principle</b>	
<b>Essential Question</b> ( <i>Question is answered in phase 4</i> )		If you were a writing tutor and had to advise a student how to use MLA documentation to document your sources, how would you advise this student?
<b>Learning Outcome</b> <i>Statement describing</i>		Given an essay or a research paper task and several outside sources, students will write the essay or the research paper

<p><i>specific task by which students will transfer their understanding to a new context near the end of the lesson. (Task is completed in phase 3 below.)</i></p>	<p>with correct MLA in-text citations and works cited page.</p>	
<p><b>Lesson Phases with Students</b></p>		
<p><b>Phase 1: Introduction</b> <i>Contextualize new content and activate prior knowledge, give purpose to content</i></p>	<p><b>Strategy to contextualize new content and activate prior knowledge:</b> Show a few basic citations (with authors and page numbers) and ask the students where the information/quote came from.</p>	
<p><b>Phase 2: Presentation</b>  <i>a. Explain/demonstrate each new content element to be learned</i>  <i>b. Provide sufficient examples</i>  <i>c. Insert “Quick-Thinks” that function both as checks for understanding and as brief student engagement tasks</i></p>	<p><b>Point #1</b></p>	<p>a. In-text citations=points way to sources listed in the works cited list          -Use first piece of information in works cited entry and page number, if available, in the in-text citations          -If author or title of article is in the lead-in phrase for a quote/paraphrase, it is not necessary to repeat it in the in-text citation          --If the same piece of information is listed first in the works cited page (e.g. two articles written by the same author, two articles with no author with the same title) the in-text citation needs to have an extra piece of information</p> <p>b. Examples: in-text citation with author and page number, in-text citation with article title and page number, in-text citation with article title and no page number (electronic source); in-text citation with lead-in phrase; in-text citation which refers to a source with the same author or title as another source</p> <p>c. Quiz (quick-think): give a quote, and a works-cited entry--how to cite?</p>
	<p><b>Point #2</b></p>	<p>a. Works cited page:          -in alphabetical order          -"Works Cited" listed at the top of page          -information/format of works cited entry depends on type of source (refer to Rules for Writers or Works Cited Guidelines handout)</p> <p>b. Look at example of Works Cited page</p> <p>c. Short quiz (quick-think): provide information about different types of sources, have students make a works cited entry for each source</p>

	<b>Point #3</b>	a. Using information from sources properly --paraphrase or quote, don't use same words and phrasing as the author
		b. Show examples of original passages and student use of passage--talk about whether it's acceptable or not
		c. Give students examples of original passages and students use of passage--is it acceptable or not?
	<b>Point #4</b>	a.
		b.
		c.
<b>Phase 3: Independent Practice</b> <i>Students practice in order to transfer their understanding to a new context (Matches learning outcome.)</i>	<b>Independent practice task:</b> Look at own research papers/essays --insert citations, correct works cited page, make sure sources are used properly.	
<b>Phase 4: Consolidation</b> <i>(Students answer the Essential Question posed at the start of the lesson)</i>	<b>Strategy for answering the essential question:</b> Exchange papers with classmate to check and explain errors if there are any.	
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<b>Phase 1:</b> Overhead slides/powerpoint	
	<b>Phase 2:</b> Overhead slides/powerpoint; handouts	
	<b>Phase 3:</b> Students bring almost-finished research papers;	
	<b>Phase 4:</b> Students bring almost-finished research papers;	

### ***Part III: Results of the Lesson***

#### Results:

In Section 1, there was fairly good success with this lesson. The most difficult part of the lesson for the students was the first part on in-text citations. It was most difficult because much of the material was new. Throughout the semester, the students had learned to cite the author and page number (or put the author's name in a lead-in phrase); however, learning how to use parenthetical citations of sources without an author proved challenging. The students asked a lot of questions during this part of the lesson. In their research papers, about a third correctly used parenthetical citations; another half of the class used parenthetical citations but got some of the specific technicalities wrong; the rest (about a fifth of the class) used parenthetical citations completely incorrectly or not at all.

Another difficult part was the works cited page for both Sections. Again, the students had a lot of questions about this during the lesson. However, it helped that this wasn't the first time they had heard of this concept. The students were asked the week before to do a draft of their works cited page without much instruction. The instructors had looked

at these drafts and made comments; then, when the students got this lesson, it wasn't a totally new concept, but some of the technicalities were new. The questions were good because the questions were informed about their own particular works cited pages rather than general questions. As for the resulting research papers in Section 1, over half of the students got the works cited page mostly correct; many had a works cited page, but it had a lot of information missing; about 10% of the class had missing works cited pages. In Section 2, two-thirds of the students had mostly correct works cited pages for their essays, but one-third either had many errors in their works cited pages or omitted them altogether.

The smoothest part of the lesson for the Section 1 students was the third section on avoiding plagiarism. For the most part, with the exception of about 20% of the class, the students succeeded in avoiding plagiarism, using effective paraphrases and quotes of their sources. This is partially due to the lesson itself, but also due to the fact that the students had been taught how to paraphrase at the beginning of the semester, and this concept was reinforced throughout the semester. So, this lesson was not their first time that the students had heard this; rather, it served as an additional reinforcement. In addition to being taught how to paraphrase, in the research paper conferences that took place the week before the lesson, many students were told that their research papers contained text from sources that looked too close to the original. All of these things combined served to make students succeed in this regard.

#### Recommendations:

For Section 1, the most successful parts of the lesson, avoiding plagiarism and the works cited page, were successful because they were not new concepts. This points to the fact that reinforcement of a concept is key for students to learn. Presenting it once and then expecting students to automatically start applying it is not the way that most students succeed. Thus, it is important to carefully plan classes so that many of the important concepts are presented at the beginning of the semester and reinforced throughout the semester. This results in much deeper learning and gives students the opportunity to practice and ask questions.

. In Section 1, regarding the results of the in-text citation, again timing was the key to this concept not being as successful. This concept was not taught until right before the students needed to apply it (i.e. right before the research paper was due), and many students did not understand how to apply what was taught. These observations apply to Section 2's difficulties with the works cited page, as well. Teaching these skills earlier would have been more effective.

As for the format of the lesson itself, this was very effective. Planning the lesson sections and planning "quick-thinks" to reinforce the concepts was a great way to teach. Both instructors plan on using this method more in the future.

**Part IV: Appendices:**

IA: Worksheet used during the lesson (contains the “quick-thinks”) in Section 1 of course

**MLA Documentation Worksheet**

Warm-Up

*Directions:* Determine where the information comes from based on the parenthetical citation. (e.g. Is it an internet source or a print source? Is it from a newspaper, book, or some other type of source? What else can you determine from the citation?)

1. Morgan’s mother, Patti Pena, reports that the driver “ran a stop sign at 45 mph, broadsided my vehicle and killed Morgan as she sat in her car seat.” A week later, corrections officer Shannon Smith, who was guarding prisoners by the side of the road, was killed by a woman distracted by a phone call (Besthoff).
2. As of 2001, at least three hundred towns and municipalities had considered legislation regulating use of cell phones while driving (“Lawmakers” 2).
3. According to police reports, there were no skid marks indicating that the distracted driver who killed John and Carole Hall had even tried to stop (Stockwell, “Man” B4).

Creating an in-text citation:

*Instructions:* Create an in-text citation for the following:

On Good Friday, April 14, 1865, Lincoln was assassinated at Ford's Theatre in Washington by John Wilkes Booth, an actor, who somehow thought he was helping the South. The opposite was the result, for with Lincoln's death, the possibility of peace with magnanimity died.

“Abraham Lincoln.” The White House. 2 Dec. 2007.  
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/al16.html>>.

Creating a Works-Cited Entry:

*Directions:* Create a works-cited entry for the following items:

1.  
*Source type:* Web page  
*Author:* Vandana Shiva  
*Title of Page:* “Bioethics: A Third World Issue  
*Title of Site:* NativeWeb  
*Date of publication:* Not available  
*Site Sponsor:* Not available  
*Date of access:* September 15, 2004  
*URL:*<<http://www.nativeweb.org/pages/legal/shiva.html>>

---

---

---

2. *Source type:* Article from Subscription Database

*Author:* Gina Kolata

*Title of Article:* "Scientists Debating Future of Hormone Replacement"

*Title of Publication:* New York Times

*Date of publication:* October 23, 2002

*Page Number:* A20

*Name of database:* Proquest

*Name of Subscriber:* Schauermen Library, El Camino College, Torrance, CA

*Date of Access:* November 26, 2002

*URL:*<<http://www.proquest.com>>

---

---

---

O.K. or Plagiarized?

*Directions:* Look at each of the examples from student papers and determine if the example is O.K. or plagiarized.

For many Southerners, it was psychological impossible to see a black man bearing arms as anything but an incipient slave uprising complete with arson, murder, pillage, and rapine.
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

From page 158 of <i>The Sable Arm</i> , a book by historian Dudley Taylor Cornish
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

1. Student Sample:

Civil War historian Dudley Taylor Cornish observes that many Southerners were so terrified of slave revolts that the sight of armed black men filled them with fear (158).

***O.K. or plagiarized?***

2. Student Sample:

For many Southerners it was psychologically impossible to see a black man bearing arms as anything but an incipient slave uprising complete with arson, murder, pillage, and rapine.

***O.K. or plagiarized?***

3. Student sample:

According to Civil War historian Dudley Taylor Cornish, "For many Southerners, it was psychological impossible to see a black man bearing arms as anything but an incipient slave uprising complete with arson, murder, pillage, and rapine" (158).

***O.K. or plagiarized?***

4. Student sample:

According to Civil War historian Dudley Taylor Cornish, for many Southerners it was psychologically difficult to see a black man bearing arms as anything but a potential slave revolt (158).

*O.K. or plagiarized?*

5. Student sample:

Civil War historian Dudley Taylor Cornish writes that for psychological reasons many Southerners couldn't help but view an armed black man as "an incipient slave uprising complete with arson, murder, pillage, and rapine" (158).

*O.K. or plagiarized?*

Examples come from: Hacker, Diana. "Documenting Sources." 2 Dec. 2007.  
<<http://www.dianahacker.com/Resdoc>>.

<i>IB</i> : Handout used in lesson in Section 2 of course
-----------------------------------------------------------

Additional example: cf. Anderson, Marilyn. Keys to Successful Writing: Unlocking the Writer Within. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

### Works Cited Guidelines

**A Works Cited list (or page) is a list of sources** whose information you have used in your essays (and/or research paper). It is commonly referred to as a "bibliography."

Depending on the format that your instructor prefers for you to use, the Works Cited list has to conform to the guidelines of that particular format. In our case, we have used **Modern Language Association (MLA)** guidelines for formatting citations within our essays (and research papers), and we will use the same source for formatting guidelines for our Works Cited page.

Here are a few, **VERY general guidelines**:

- If your Works Cited list is **for an essay**, it is placed **below the last line of your Conclusion**. **Single-space** the lines.
- If the Works Cited list is **for a research paper**, it should be **on a separate sheet**. **Your Works Cited page is always the last page of your research paper**. **Double-space** the lines.
- **Start with a title** at the top of the page: Works Cited
- **Start the first line at the left margin, and indent the second, third, etc. lines** after that.
- **List your sources in alphabetical order** according to the **last name of each author**. If there is **no author**, use the **first word of the title** of the source.
- Titles of **books and other long works are capitalized and Underlined**. Sometimes, you will see these titles in *Italics*. If you aren't sure which of these title indicators to use, ask your instructor for her preference since both types are acceptable (according to the MLA).

- Titles of **shorter works like periodical articles, webpages, etc. are capitalized and put within “Quotation Marks.”**
- **Web addresses (URLs) are usually NOT capitalized; list them as they are. These URLs are put into angled brackets as in <<http://www.chowhound.com>>.** You will also need to **change the color of the URL to black and take out the underlining** because MS Word will stubbornly try to convert the URL to a hyperlink.
- In addition, **internet sources require two dates: the date that the information was posted (preferably the most recent update’s date) and the access date** (the date you visited the site and/or printed it out). If there is no posting/update date, use the access date.

**SAMPLE for an ESSAY:**

Works Cited

Anderson, Marilyn. Keys to Successful Writing: Unlocking the Writer Within. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

Klass, Perri. “Ambition.” Keys to Successful Writing: Unlocking the Writer Within. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Marilyn Anderson. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008: 348-351.

“Planning Trips through the Net.” Los Angeles Times 23 Apr. 2002. 12 May 2002. <<http://www.latimes/travel.com>>.

Wolfe, Matthew. “Reaching My Goal of Having No Life Plan.” Newsweek 25 June 2007: 18-19.

2: Powerpoint Used During Lesson in Section 1
-----------------------------------------------

(See accompanying file).