

# Mechanics of Writing – MLA (Chapter 3)

- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Italics
- Names of Persons
- Numbers
- Titles of works in research papers
- Quotations
- Capitalization

# MLA: THE MECHANICS OF ACADEMIC WRITING

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# Spelling

- Consistency
  - Quotes retain native spelling
  - Use a single dictionary.
- Word division
  - Do not use automatic hyphenation
  - Do not divide words between lines

# Italics

- *Style of type in which characters slant to the right.*
- Why use it? – More visually pleasing than underlining.
- Usage
  - To indicate words and letters referred to as words and letters
    - Shaw spelled *Shakespeare* without the final *e*.
    - The words *albatross* probably derives from the Spanish and Portuguese word *alcatraz*.
  - Foreign words in an English Text
    - The Renaissance courtier was expected to display *sprezzatura*, or nonchalance, in the face of adversity.
    - Exceptions – eg, a quotation entirely in another (Caesar said, “*Veni, vidi, vici*”).
    - Common latin phrases like *ad hoc*, *etc*, *et al* are not italicized.  
non English titles of works
  - Emphasis
    - *We must* conclude that the text...
    - The work *does* include instances of...

# Names of Persons

- First and subsequent uses of names
  - The first instance should be the name in full without any change from the source.
  - Subsequent instances can be shortened to the last name only.
  - In casual references/references to very famous people, the first name can be used in isolation eg Shakespeare, Mozart etc.
- Titles of persons
  - Do not use formal titles (Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr., Prof. etc)
- Names of authors and fictional characters
  - Simplified names permitted (Vergil for Publius Vergilius Maro)
  - Pseudonyms are acceptable
  - Fictional characters referred to in the same way as they appear in the work. Dr. Jekyll etc.

# Numbers

- The convention is to use only arabic numerals. Roman numbers are not used.
- Spell out if numbers are used infrequently otherwise use numerals. Eg: In the ten years covered by the study, the number of participating institutions in the United States doubled, reaching 90, and membership in the six-state region rose from 4 to 15.
- For dates, use either the day-month-year style (22 July 2008) or the month-day-year style (July 22, 2008).

# Punctuation

- Purpose: to ensure clarity and readability
- Commas
  - Used before coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, for, not, or, so, or yet*)  
Eg: The poem is ironic, for the poet's meaning contrasts with her words.
  - Can be omitted if the sentence is short. Eg: Wallace sings and Armstrong plays the piano.
  - Commas are used to separate items (words, phrases or clauses) in a series.
  - Used between coordinate adjectives. Eg: Critics praise the novel's unadorned, unaffected style.
  - Used to set off a comment or an aside from main sentence. Eg: The Tudors , for example, ruled for over a century..
  - Used to set off non-restrictive modifiers. Eg: Isabel Allende, the Chilean novelist, will appear at the arts forum tonight

# Punctuation continued... Commas

- Used to set off alternative or contrasting phrases. Eg: It is Julio, not his mother, who set the plot in motion.
- Do not use a comma between subject and verb. Eg: Many characters that are initially significant and then disappear [no comma] are portraits of the author's friends.
- Do not use a comma between the parts of compound subjects, objects or verbs.
- Use comma in a date whose format is month, day and year. Eg: He was born on January 15, 1929, and died on April 4, 1968.
- Don't use a comma if the date format is day, month and year. Eg: He was born on 15 January 1929 and died on 4 April 1968.
- No commas between a month or a season and a year. Eg: I passed the exam in spring 2007. I passed the exam in April 2007.

# Punctuation continued...

- Semicolons

- A) Between independent clauses not linked by a conjunction.

Eg: The coat is tattered beyond repair; still, Akaky hopes the tailor can mend it.

- B) between items in a series when the items contain commas.

Eg: Present at the symposium were Henri Guillaume, the art critic; Sam Brown, the Daily Tribune reporter; and Maria Rosa, the conceptual artist.

- Colons

- Used when the first part of a sentence creates a sense of anticipation about the part that follows.
- Always type a space after a colon.
- When introducing a list, elaborating a point already made, making the formal expression of a rule or principle.

Eg:

The reading list includes three Latin American novels: The Death of Artemio Cruz, One Hundred Years of Solitude, and The Green House.

The plot is founded on deception: the three main characters have secret identities.

Many books would be briefer if their authors followed the logical principle known as Occam's razor: Explanations should not be multiplied unnecessarily. (A rule or principle after a colon should begin with a capital letter.)

# Punctuation continued...

- Dashes and Parentheses:
  - Dashes indicate a sharper break in continuity than commas. Parentheses make a still sharper one.

## Commas < Dashes < Parentheses

- Use sparingly
- To enclose a sentence element that interrupts the train of thought.

The "hero" of the play (the townspeople see him as heroic, but he is the focus of the author's satire) introduces himself as a veteran of the war.
- To set off a parenthetical element that might be misread if set off with commas.

The colors of the costume-blue, scarlet, and yellow-acquire symbolic meaning in the story.

- To introduce words that summarize a preceding series.

Ruthlessness and acute sensitivity, greed and compassion-the main character's contradictory qualities prevent any simple interpretation of the film.

# Punctuation continued...

- Hyphens.
  - Hyphens are shorter than dashes. Used most commonly with compound words.
  - Compounds
    - hard-and-fast
    - hard-boiled
    - Early-thirteenth-century art
    - Sports-loving crowd
    - Fear-inspired loyalty
    - Scholar-athlete
    - better-prepared ambassador
    - best-known work
    - ill-informed reporter
    - lower-priced tickets
    - well-dressed announcer
  - Many exceptions. Always consult a dictionary.

# Punctuations continued...

- Apostrophes (')
  - Used to indicate possession (firefighters' trucks), contractions (can't, won't) and plurals of alphabets (p's and q's, three A's).
- Quotation Marks
  - Used around a word or a phrase given in someone else's sense or in a special sense or purposefully misused. Examples:
    - A silver dome concealed the robot's "brain."
    - Their "friend" brought about their downfall.
  - Used around translations of foreign words or phrases. Example:
    - The word text derives from the Latin verb texere 'to weave.'
- Periods, Question Marks and Exclamation Points
  - End punctuations. Avoid exclamation points in research writing except while directly quoting a source.
- Use a single space after a concluding punctuation.

# Titles of Works in the Research Paper

- Capitalization and Punctuation
  - Always take the title from the title page, not the cover or inner pages.
  - Omit special typographic characteristics

MODERNISM & NEGRITUDE

READING SITES  
Social Difference and Reader Response

Turner's early sketchbooks

These titles should appear in a research paper as follows:

*Modernism and Negritude*

*Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response*

*Turner's Early Sketchbooks*

# Titles continued...

- Capitalize the first word, last word and all principal words.
- Titles of works must be italicized
- Use quotation marks for titles of articles, essays, stories, poems published within larger works, web sites, lectures, unpublished works etc.
- Names of scriptural works, religious documents etc are not italicized. Eg Koran, Bible, Upanishads, Genesis, Gospels etc.
- Specific laws, acts, political documents, musical compositions, buildings and monuments, seminars, workshops, courses etc are not italicized or put within quotes.

# Quotation Marks

- Effective when used selectively.
- Quote only parts that are particularly interesting, vivid, unusual, or apt, and keep all quotations as brief as possible.
- Over quotation can bore your readers and indicates lack of original thought.
- Accuracy of quotations in research writing is extremely important.
- Any changes to the original must be indicated clearly.
- You must construct a clear, grammatically correct sentence that allows you to introduce or incorporate a quotation with complete accuracy.
- Or you may paraphrase the original and quote only fragments, which may be easier to integrate into the text.

# Quotation Marks continued...

## Quoting Prose

- If a prose quotation is less than four lines in length, it requires no special emphasis, put it in quotation marks and incorporate it into the text. Eg: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," wrote Charles Dickens of the eighteenth century.
- Individual words or phrases can be quoted. Eg: For Charles Dickens the eighteenth century was both "the best of times" and "the worst of times."
- Quotations can be placed anywhere in a sentence. Eg:  
Joseph Conrad writes of the company manager in Heart of Darkness, "He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect."  
  
"He was obeyed," writes Joseph Conrad of the company manager in Heart of Darkness, "yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect."
- If a quotation ending a sentence requires a parenthetical reference, place the sentence period after the reference.  
Eg: For Charles Dickens the eighteenth century was both "the best of times" and "the worst of times" (35).
- For quotes of more than four lines, set it off from your text by beginning a new line, indenting one inch from the left margin, and typing it without adding quotation marks. Such a quote is usually introduced by a colon.
- If you quote only a single paragraph or part of one, do not indent the first line more than the rest. Eg:  
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. (186)

# Quoting prose contd...

- If you need to quote two or more paragraphs, indent the first line of each paragraph an additional quarter inch.
- Indent only the first lines of the successive paragraphs. Eg:  
In *Moll Flanders* Defoe maintains the pseudo-autobiographical narration typical of the picaresque tradition:

My true name is so well known in the records, or registers, at Newgate and in the Old Bailey, and there are some things of such consequence still depending there relating to my particular conduct, that it is not to be expected I should set my name or the account of my family to this work....

It is enough to tell you, that ... some of my worst comrades, who are out of the way of doing me harm ... know me by the name of Moll Flanders.... (I)

# Quoting Poetry and Drama

# Ellipsis

# Capitalization of Names