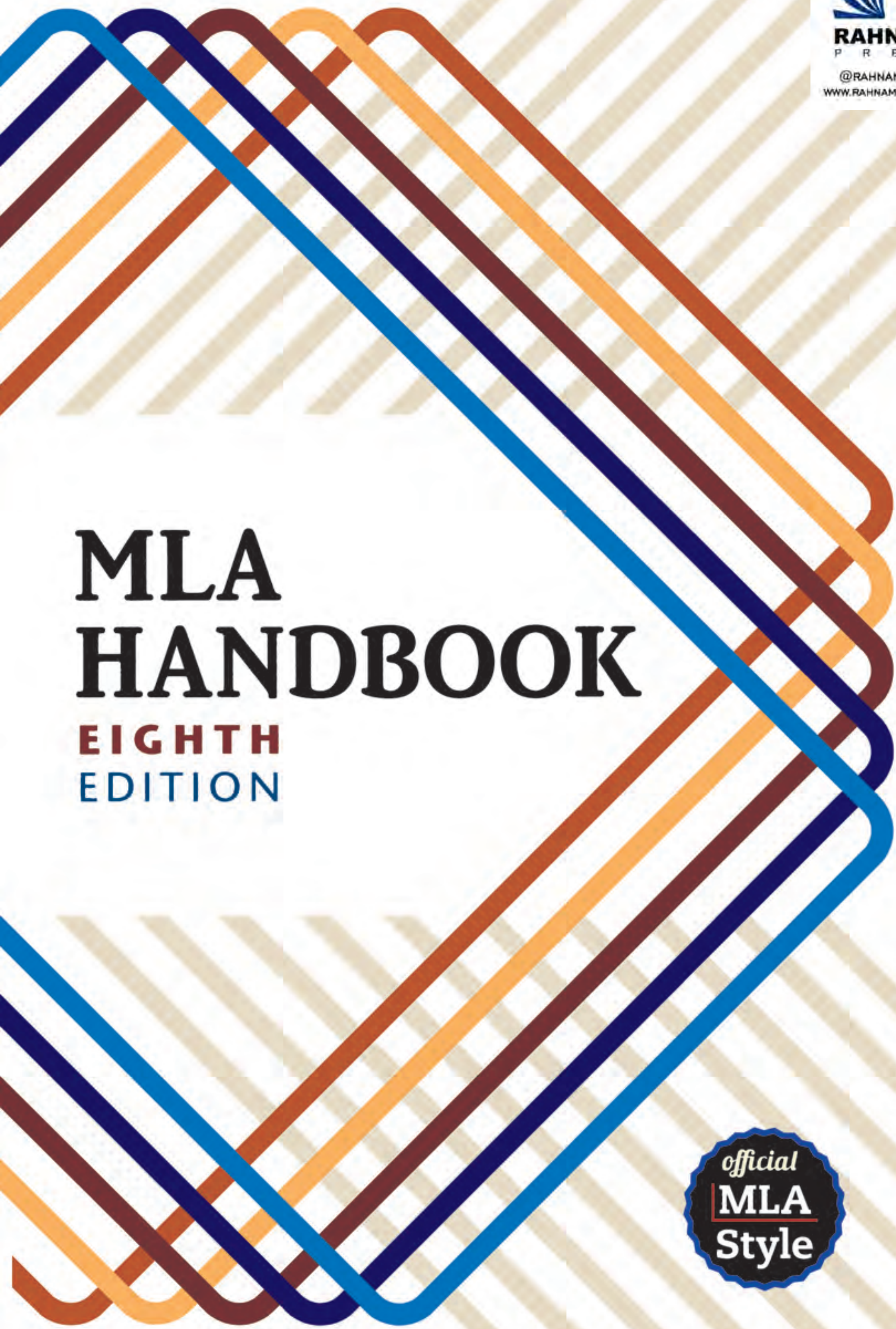

MLA HANDBOOK

EIGHTH EDITION

official
MLA
Style

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Foreword

In 1883 a small group of distinguished scholars came together with a radical idea: that modern languages deserved the same respect in higher education as classical languages (Greek and Latin). They decided to form an organization that would advocate language study, research, and the evolution of scholarship. The organization they founded is the Modern Language Association. Today the MLA has over 25,000 members in the United States, in Canada, and around the world.

Since its founding, the organization has been committed to sharing ideas and research. Its notable publications include the *MLA International Bibliography*, a major resource for researchers in literature and language, and *PMLA*, one of the most respected journals of literary studies. But the publication best known to the wider public is surely the *MLA Handbook*, which has served as the "style bible" for generations of students. Like the association, it has evolved in response to changing needs over the years.

I am especially pleased to present the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*, because it embodies so many of the values that define the association: a commitment to sharing ideas, a belief in scholarship as the work of a broad community, and a recognition that, while methods and media may change, basic principles of research stay the same. Designed in consultation with students, teachers, and researchers, this edition gives users more freedom to create references to fit their audiences. The recommendations continue to represent the consensus of teachers and scholars but offer a greater flexibility that will better accommodate new media and new ways of doing research.

We release new editions of the *MLA Handbook* when developments in scholarly research and writing call for changes in MLA style. The eighth edition brings one of our greatest shifts ever and, we believe, will serve the needs of students, teachers, and scholars today and in coming years. As always, we will be happy to hear from readers of this edition so that we can improve future iterations of MLA style.

Rosemary G. Feal
Executive Director
Modern Language Association

Preface

"Has an element of fetishism perhaps crept into what was once a necessary academic practice?" So asks the writer and translator Tim Parks as he expresses his frustration with the process of creating the source documentation to be included in his forthcoming book—not least because he wonders whether the Internet has rendered that information superfluous. I am certain that many writers today experience similar frustration and raise similar doubts when detailing the sources with which they work. Given that this is the preface to the new edition of the authoritative guide to MLA documentation practice, you might expect that I intend to refute Parks's question. I do take issue with it, but for reasons perhaps different from the ones you might assume. The author is right to note that scholarly documentation has over decades acquired increasingly complex rules and formats, as well as to suggest that some of the information traditionally included in citations may be dispensed with today. He's not right, however, that documentation was "once" a necessity and is now obsolete thanks to search engines and full-text databases. If anything, the increasing use of such tools and resources by students and scholars makes the inclusion of a reliable data trail for future searchers even more important.

The problem, let me hasten to add, does not arise from the supposed ephemerality of digital tools and databases. Nor does this preface or the following guide assume that paper is secure and that bits, networks, and screens are fragile. The problem, rather, is the increasing mobility of texts. The sources with which we work are often discovered in locations and formats different from those in which they were originally published, and we have no way of knowing today where those sources might end up tomorrow. Moreover, for all the wonders of Internet search engines, they cannot be counted on to yield the right references every time we issue a query, because the algorithms used by search engines often base the presentation of results on popularity or even sponsorship. If a quotation in a text lacks documentation, an Internet search may be the only way to locate the original source, but the search may yield irrelevant works that contain the same passage. And even if the search locates a copy of the source, readers can't be certain that it's a faithful copy and thus that they'll see the same thing in it that the author who quoted from the original saw. All this is to say that the reasons for documenting sources in academic writing extend beyond simply giving a generic credit to the work from which a quotation or other borrowing was derived. Documentation is the means through which scholarly conversations are recorded, and the specifics of those conversations matter.

This edition of the *MLA Handbook* works to foreground those conversations among authors and between writer and reader. Before we get to the goals and strategies of the volume you hold in your hands (or see on your screen or encounter in some way I haven't yet imagined), it's worth rehearsing the history of documentation practices and, in particular, the development of MLA style.

In 1951 William Riley Parker, then the executive director of the Modern Language Association, published *The MLA Style Sheet*, a thirty-one-page pamphlet that sought to be a "more or less official" guide to the writing conventions then in use at more than eighty scholarly journals. The call issued by the style sheet for consistency in academic expression was tempered by an acknowledgment that "many problems of style cannot be reduced to rules even if everyone could agree" (3). The release of this document expanded the consensus, however; more journal and book publishers adopted

MLA style for their publications, and numerous universities required it for student papers.

In addition to recommendations on the preparation of documents ("In general, TYPE your manuscript to meet the very practical needs of your editor and printer" [4]) and on conventional aspects of writing, including spelling and the use of quotations and numerals, *The MLA Style Sheet* proposed a coherent system for documenting sources. That system relied primarily on footnotes, examples of which were included in the style sheet and supported by a long accompanying list of abbreviations designed to keep the footnotes brief.

A revised and expanded edition of *The MLA Style Sheet* was published in 1970, updating MLA style to reduce the use of roman numerals and to add publishers' names to bibliographic citations. It maintained a focus on the needs of scholars who intended to publish the results of their research. In 1977 the first edition of the *MLA Handbook* gave its attention to the needs of students. This 163-page guide adopted the expressly pedagogical aim of helping student writers of research papers understand and implement the conventions of academic prose. The second edition of the handbook (221 pages) was released in 1984 and was accompanied the following year by the first edition of the *MLA Style Manual*, which took established scholars and graduate students as its audience, sharpening the handbook's focus on undergraduate writing.

This history suggests that while there is a temptation to think of MLA style as an unchanging monolith—a singular way of doing things—the style has in fact evolved, and it has at moments undergone radical transformation (such as the shift, in 1984, from footnotes to the list of works cited and corresponding in-text references). Modifications came about in response to developments in literary studies, as well as to the changing needs of students. Over the years, however, the handbook gained what some felt was a forbidding level of detail (the seventh edition was 292 pages long). It gradually became a reference work, which users consulted at need, rather than a guide that taught the principles underlying documentation.

In publishing the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*, we aim to better meet the needs of students today by offering a quick but thorough introduction to the hows and whys of using sources in academic writing. We hope that this reorientation will convey what we believe to be the most important aspect of academic writing: its engagement with the reader, which obligates the author to ensure that the reader has all the information necessary to understand the text at hand without being distracted from it by the citations.

In a citation-by-citation comparison, this new version of MLA style may appear to differ only slightly from established practice, but the approach we take in this volume foregrounds principles. While the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook* described the style it presented as "flexible" and "modular," providing "several sequences of elements that can be combined to form entries" (129), the style was nonetheless based on defining a citation format for each kind of source. Thus, until now the handbook presented separate rules for citing a book, a journal article, a newspaper article, a personal letter, and all the rest in the ever-expanding range of sources that writers use in their work. As a result, with the emergence of each new media platform would come a new query: How do you cite a *YouTube* video? a blog post? a tweet?

With the eighth edition, we shift our focus from a prescriptive list of formats to the overarching purpose of source documentation: enabling readers to participate fully in the conversations between writers and their sources. Such participation requires the presentation of reliable information in a clear, consistent structure, but we believe that if we concentrate on the principles undergirding MLA style and on the ways they can be applied in a broad range of cases, we can craft a truly flexible documentation practice that will continue to serve writers well in a changing environment. Moreover, this edition recognizes that different kinds of scholarly conversations require different kinds of documentation and thus that the application of principles might vary according to context. It therefore focuses on the writer's decision making. It offers a new approach to thinking about MLA style, one centered not on a source's publication format but rather on the elements common to most sources and on the means of flexibly combining those elements to create appropriate documentation for any source.

Change is perhaps the one constant of contemporary academic life. The first edition of the *MLA Style Manual* noted "numerous innovations affecting scholarly publication," including "the widespread use of word processors" (Achtert and Gibaldi vii), and change has only accelerated in recent years, making flexibility and openness increasingly important. In the eighth edition, we therefore embrace the fact that student research and writing today take many forms other than the research paper, and so we begin what we expect to be an ongoing exploration of the best means of documenting sources in new modes of academic writing. Just as research sources have become mobile, so too have the works that a researcher creates: they appear in print but are also projected on screens and displayed on reading devices. The citations a researcher today produces are appended to traditional, linear texts, but they are also attached to weblike texts and even to projects that aren't texts at all. If this edition of the *MLA Handbook* lets go of some of what Parks called an "element of fetishism" in scholarly documentation practices, it nonetheless argues that documentation remains a core academic principle, one that can be adapted to new circumstances.

Developing this edition and the new understanding of MLA style that it conveys required the energy and attention of many scholars, instructors, editors, and librarians. The edition builds on the work done before me, including the important contributions of William Riley Parker, Walter S. Achtert, Joseph Gibaldi, and David G. Nicholls. Though I was primarily responsible for writing the text that follows, I could not have managed it without the efforts and wisdom of the MLA staff members who work most closely with MLA style day in and day out: Angela Gibson, Judy Goulding, James Hatch, Margit Longbrake, Sara Pastel, and Eric Wirth, who together rethought the principles of MLA style for the twenty-first century. We consulted along the way with a wide range of MLA members, including members of the Committee on Information Technology, the Publications Committee, and the Executive Council. Many experts read early drafts of the manuscript; among this group we particularly thank Andi Adkins-Pogue, Carolyn Ayers, Rebecca Babcock, Delores Carlito, Brooke Carlson, Kelly Diamond, Keri Donovan, Michael Elam, Lindsay Hansen, Nicki Lerczak, Sara Marcus, Debra Ryals, Thomas Smith, Jeanne Swedo, Araceli Tinajero, and Belinda Wheeler.

Transforming the manuscript into a finished publication was also the work of many hands. The design, typesetting, electronic processing, and printing were handled by David F. Cope, Tom Lewek, Pamela Roller, Laurie Russell, and Patrice Sheridan, under the supervision of Judith Altreuter.

This edition of the *MLA Handbook* is accompanied by online resources (see style.mla.org). We hope that you will explore these resources and let us know what else you would find useful.

Finally, thanks are due to Rosemary G. Feal, the executive director of the MLA, and to the members of the MLA Executive Council for their vision and leadership in shaping the future of scholarly communication in the humanities.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick
Associate Executive Director and
Director of Scholarly Communication
Modern Language Association

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PART 1

Principles of MLA Style

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, forms of communication proliferate, and publications migrate readily from one medium to another. An article published in a print journal may be discovered and read online, through one of many databases; an episode of a television series may be watched through a service like *Hulu*; a blog post may be republished as a book chapter. Even as we developed this edition of the *MLA Handbook*, new publication formats and platforms emerged.

As a result, now more than ever we need a system for documenting sources that begins with a few principles rather than a long list of rules. Rules remain important, and we will get to them in due course, but in this section we emphasize commonsense guidelines aimed at helping writers at various levels conduct research and provide their audiences with useful information about their sources.

Your use of MLA style should be guided by these principles:

Cite simple traits shared by most works.

In previous editions of the *MLA Handbook*, an entry in the works-cited list was based on the source's publication format (e.g., book, film, magazine article, Web publication). The writer first determined the format of the source and then collected the publication facts associated with the format. A consequence of that approach was that works in a new medium could not be documented until the MLA created instructions for it. This edition, by contrast, is not centered on publication formats. It deals instead with facts common to most works—author, title, and so on. The writer examines the source and records its visible features, attending to the work itself and a set of universal guidelines. A work in a new medium thus can be documented without new instructions.

Remember that there is often more than one correct way to document a source.

Different situations call for different solutions. A writer whose primary purpose is to give credit for borrowed material may need to provide less information than a writer who is examining the distinguishing features of particular editions (or even specific copies) of source texts. Similarly, scholars working in specialized fields may need to cite details about their sources that other scholars making more general use of the same resources do not.

Make your documentation useful to readers.

Good writers understand why they create citations. The reasons include demonstrating the thoroughness of the writer's research, giving credit to original sources, and ensuring that readers can find the sources consulted in order to draw their own conclusions about the writer's argument. Writers achieve the goals of documentation by providing sufficient information in a comprehensible, consistent structure.

This edition of the *MLA Handbook* is designed to help writers *think* about the sources they are documenting, *select* the information about the sources that is appropriate to the project they are creating, and *organize* it logically and without complication. Armed with a few rules and an understanding of the basic principles, a writer can generate useful documentation of any work, in any publication format.

Think
Select
Organize

Why Document Sources?

Documenting sources is an aspect of writing common to all academic fields. Across the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities, authors use standard techniques to refer to the works that influenced or otherwise contributed to their research. Why?

Academic writing is at its root a conversation among scholars about a topic or question. Scholars write for their peers, communicating the results of their research through books, journal articles, and other forms of published work. In the course of a project, they seek out relevant publications, to learn from and build on earlier research. Through their own published work, they incorporate, modify, respond to, and refute previous publications.

Given the importance of this conversation to research, authors must have comprehensible, verifiable means of referring to one another's work. Such references enable them to give credit to the precursors whose ideas they borrow, build on, or contradict and allow future researchers interested in the history of the conversation to trace it back to its beginning. The references are formatted in a standard way so that they can be quickly understood and used by all, like a common language.

Students are called on to learn documentation styles in a range of courses throughout their education, but not because it is expected that all students will take up such research practices in their professional lives. Rather, learning the conventions of a form of writing—those of the research essay, for instance—prepares the student to write not just in that form but in other ones as well.

Learning a documentation style, in other words, prepares a writer to be on the lookout for the conventions to which every professional field expects its members to adhere in their writing. Legal documents must refer to prior legal documents in a standard way to be acceptable in the legal profession. Reports on scientific research must refer to earlier research in the fashion expected in a particular scientific field. Business documents point to published information and use a language and format that are accepted in business. Journalists similarly obey conventions for identifying their sources, structuring their stories, and so on. The conventions differ from one profession to another, but their purpose is the same.

Learning good documentation practices is also a key component of academic integrity. However, avoiding charges of plagiarism is not the only reason that a student should learn to document sources. The proper use of a field's preferred documentation style is a sign of competence in a writer. Among other benefits, it shows that the writer knows the importance of giving credit where credit is due. It therefore helps the writer become part of a community of scholars and assures readers that the writer's work can be trusted.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

You may have heard or read about cases in which a politician, a journalist, or another public figure was accused of plagiarism. No doubt you have also had classroom conversations about plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Your school may have an honor code that addresses academic dishonesty; it almost certainly has disciplinary procedures meant to address cases of plagiarism. But you may nonetheless find yourself with questions: What is plagiarism? What makes it a serious offense? What does it look like? And how can scrupulous research and documentation practices help you avoid it?

What Is Plagiarism?

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines plagiarizing as committing "literary theft." Plagiarism is presenting another person's ideas, information, expressions, or entire work as one's own. It is thus a kind of fraud: deceiving others to gain something of value. While plagiarism only sometimes has legal repercussions (e.g., when it involves copyright infringement—violating an author's exclusive legal right to publication), it is always a serious moral and ethical offense.

What Makes Plagiarism a Serious Offense?

Plagiarists are seen not only as dishonest but also as incompetent, incapable of doing research and expressing original thoughts. When professional writers are exposed as plagiarists, they are likely to lose their jobs and are certain to suffer public embarrassment, diminished prestige, and loss of future credibility. The same is true of other professionals who write in connection with their jobs, even when they are not writing for publication. The charge of plagiarism is serious because it calls into question everything about the writer's work: if *this* piece of writing is misrepresented as being original, how can a reader trust any work by the writer? One instance of plagiarism can cast a shadow across an entire career.

Schools consider plagiarism a grave matter for the same reason. If a student fails to give credit for the work of others in one project, how can a teacher trust any of the student's work? Plagiarism undermines the relationship between teachers and students, turning teachers into detectives instead of mentors, fostering suspicion instead of trust, and making it difficult for learning to take place. Students who plagiarize deprive themselves of the knowledge they would have gained if they had done their own writing. Plagiarism also can undermine public trust in educational institutions, if students are routinely allowed to pass courses and receive diplomas without doing the required work.

What Does Plagiarism Look Like?

Plagiarism can take a number of forms, including buying papers from a service on the Internet, reusing work done by another student, and copying text from published sources

“This is the most succinct and sensible revision to MLA documentation style in my long career.”

—Andrea A. Lunsford, Stanford University

Rethinking Documentation
FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

In this groundbreaking new edition of its best-selling handbook, the Modern Language Association, the authority on research and writing, recommends one universal set of guidelines, which writers can apply to any type of source. The handbook provides guidance on evaluating sources and then explains the MLA’s system for documenting them.

DISCOVER MORE ONLINE
style.mla.org

The MLA Style Center, the only authorized Web site on MLA style, is the free online companion to the *MLA Handbook*.

- Guidelines on formatting research papers
- Ask the MLA
- Sample research papers
- Writing tips
- Downloadable practice template

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