



MLA Parenthetical Citation

MLA's simplicity lies in its parenthetical citation system, which is designed "to avoid interrupting the flow of your writing" (Modern Language Association [MLA] 217). Only minimal information is required within the parentheses: the author's name, the page number(s), and sometimes the title of the work. Because the name of the author is often either included in the text or obvious from the context, many citations have only the page numbers.

Here is a simple example:

Modern art can be explained as a result of "the energy of its revolt against the tyranny of the representational fallacy" (Frye 132).

The citation tells the reader that the quoted material is by an author named Frye and that this quotation is taken from page 132 of a work. In order to find out more information, the reader can turn to the Works Cited list at the end of the document. Of course, there are many variations from this simple example, and chapter 6 of the *MLA Handbook* covers practically all of them. Below are some common instances along with examples of how they are cited.

The author's name has been mentioned in the essay or is obvious from the context:

Frye explains that modern art is a result of "the energy of its revolt against the tyranny of the representational fallacy" (132).

The quotation extends over more than one page:

"A good deal of the freakishness of experimental movements in painting during the last half century or so," Frye writes, "has been due to the energy of its revolt against the tyranny of the representational fallacy" (131-32).

Note: Only the last two numbers ("32") are used to indicate page 132. See section 3.5.6 of the *MLA Handbook* for more precise rules about inclusive numbers.

Two or more of Frye's books are included in the Works Cited list:

Modern art can be explained as a result of "the energy of its revolt against the tyranny of the representational fallacy" (Frye, *Anatomy* 132).

Specific lines of a poem are cited:

The speaker greets “the black-hatted undertaker / who, passing, saw my heart beating in the grass . . .” (Layton 5-6).

Note: Because this is a quotation from verse, the "5-6" is assumed to refer to line numbers rather than page numbers (see below for verse plays).

Citing Shakespeare, the Bible, or other classic works:

Decretas explains the nature of servitude: “He was my Master, and I wore my life / To spend upon his haters” (*Ant.* 5.1.8-9).

Note: This means "*Antony and Cleopatra*, act 5, scene 1, lines 8 to 9." See 6.4.8. of the *MLA Handbook* for more about citing common literature.

Citing works with more than three authors:

In fiction, remember that “[n]o character in a book is a real person” (Scholes et al. 8).

Note: Although the abbreviation "et al." does not have to be used here, its use is certainly in keeping with MLA's preference to keep parenthetical information to a minimum. The order of the author names in the citation should correspond to the order of the names as listed in the publication, which is not necessarily in alphabetical order.

Citing a work with an institution as author:

Academic writers must acknowledge that “all research builds on previous research” (MLA 126).

Note: If this were the first citation by this author, the institution's name would be spelled out with only common words abbreviated and the acronym given in square brackets. However, this is the second use of this author (it is used above), so now the acronym may be used.

Citing a work without an author:

This version of the play begins with the tapster threatening the “dronken slaue” to “be gone, / And empty your droonken panch some where else” (*Taming* 1.1.1-2).

Note: The name "anonymous" is not listed as the author unless the author is designated as such (as it was for the book *Primary Colors* about the Clinton presidency). This work is instead listed by a shortened version of its full title, *The Taming of a Shrew*, which shows up in the Works Cited list alphabetized according to its first word, *Taming* (*the* is ignored). Note also that the form for citing verse lines (act I, scene 1, line 1-2) is used just as it is with Shakespeare above.