

THE RULES: AN *MLA* PRIMER

SOME COMMON IN-TEXT CITATION FORMATS, RULES & EXPLANATIONS

- 1) **Quote with** an author introduction (notice that the period goes outside the whole sentence):

Joe **Shmo**, the author of *When Things Go Wrong*, says, “**Blah blah, blah blah blah, blah blah blah blah – blah blah blah – blah blah blah**” (163).

- 2) **Two quotes, without** an author introduction (notice there is no comma between the author’s name and the first page number):

The author points out “**blah blah blah**” and then later goes on to clarify his position by saying that some people are “**blah blah blah**” (Shmo 163, 167).

- 3) **Two quotes, one inside the other:**

Joe Shmo, quoting from Chicken Little, explains that “**blah blah ‘Blah blah blah.’**” (163).

- 4) **Paraphrased quotation** (notice that no quotation marks are used in a paraphrase):

Joe Shmo disputes the fact that blah blah has a significant impact on blah and argues that when blah blah blah starts to blah then things really start to fall apart (163).

- 5) **Punctuation other than a period** at the end of the sentence:

Later in the essay, Shmo poses this question: “**Blah blah blah blah blah?**” (163).

- 6) **Poetry:** lines of poetry should be copied exactly as they appear in the actual poem. Use forward slashes (/) to indicate line breaks. Subsequent references to other lines from the same poem do not need the word “line” in the parenthetical reference.

A bad poet once wrote, “**Roses are red / Violets are blue / My socks stink / and so do you**” (lines 1-4).

For Shakespeare and other verse plays, notate the act, scene and line numbers. Use numbers, not roman numerals, and separate the numbers with periods.

In Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, the king’s friend Gloucester learns a profound lesson from his tragic experience out on the heath: “**A man may see how this world goes / with no eyes**” (4.2.148-49).

- 7) **Block quotes** (4 or more typed lines of prose, or 3 or more lines of poetry): Introduce the block quote with a colon, indent it 10 spaces from the left margin, double space it, and do not use quotation marks, as in:

In “The Sky is Falling” Joe Shmo explains at some length that if the sky actually were to fall, it would probably cause a lot of damage:

**Blah blah blabbity blah blah blah blabbity blah blabbity blah blah blah
blah blah blabbity blah blah blabbity blah blah blah blah blabbity
blah blah blah blah blah blabbity blah blah blabbity blah blah blabbity
blah blah blabbity blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blabbity
blah blabbity blah blah blah blabbity blah blabbity blah blah! (163)**

Shmo notes here that we can easily prevent the sky from falling if we could only figure out how to tie the sky to the moon and the stars.

- 8) **WORKS CITED LISTS:** Standard entry for a **work in an anthology**:

Kincaid, Jamaica. “Girl.” *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. Ed. Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, Bonnie Lisle. 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004. 421-423.

9) **WORKS CITED LISTS:** Standard entry for a **full-length work**:

Atwood, Margaret. The Handmaid's Tale. New York: Anchor, 1998.

10) **WORKS CITED LISTS:** Standard entry for a **selection from a website** (site author, site name, sponsoring institution, access date, web address):

Pirates Net. Modesto Junior College. 8 Jan. 2007 <<https://piratesnet.yosemite.cc.ca.us/>>

DO'S AND DON'TS

- Never let textual evidence speak for itself. When building body paragraphs in support of your own arguments, the pattern you should always follow is this: first, **announce** the controlling idea of your paragraph, then **introduce** a relevant quoted selection that demonstrates your point about the text, then **insert** the actual quote or paraphrased selection, then **explain** completely what that selection means, and then make the selection relevant by **tying** it to back to your topic sentence with specific, detailed analysis and explanation.

- Introduce the **full name** of the author *just once* at the beginning of your essay (**Joe Shmo**). Thereafter, refer to the author only by **last name only** (**Shmo**) or by “he” / “she,” “the author,” etc.

Never refer to the author as Mr./Ms./Mrs. or by first name only.

Introduce the name of your source (book, essay, article, etc.) **once** at the beginning of your essay. Thereafter, refer to it as **the story**, **the essay**, etc. or by a shortened version of the full title.

- Names of full-length works, things like novels, encyclopedias, poetry collections, dictionaries, magazines, newspapers and music albums are always italicized (i.e. *When Things Go Wrong*) in the body of your work. Smaller works like essays, articles, chapters, stories, poems or any other kind of individual selection which is taken from within a full-length work are always placed within quotation marks (i.e. “**The Sky is Falling**”).

Nothing gets underlined unless it is in a Works Cited list, and then only titles of full-length works.

- Never begin quoted selections with ellipsis points (...): a lower-case letter at the beginning of the quoted selection (“**blah blah blah**”) is the signal that your quoted selection does not come from the beginning of a sentence.

Three Ellipsis points should be used **in the middle** of quoted selections (“**Blah blah...blah blah**”) to indicate words left out of the quoted selection. Add an extra period to the ellipsis points (“**Blah blah...blah blah**”) if you are omitting an entire sentence or more of original source material. Use ellipsis points **at the end** of your quoted selection (“**Blah blah blah...**”) **only** when you omit a word or words **from the end of the sentence** you are quoting from.

- Brackets [] are used to insert your own clarifying language into quoted selections: “Blah explained that they [**purple explosions in the sky**] usually indicate an impending disaster.”

SOME REMINDERS

- Academic convention dictates that you always write in the **present tense** (even when speaking about things said or written in the past), write only from the **3rd person** point of view (he, she, it), and **refrain from using contractions** (don't, isn't, can't, etc.) in formal written work.
- **Commas and periods go inside quotation marks** (except when adding an in-text MLA page citation for direct quotations, as outlined above). Colons, semicolons, question marks and exclamation points *only* go inside if they are actually part of the title, term, etc. being quoted. Otherwise, they go **outside**.
- Label the **Works Cited** (*not* “Bibliography”) list as such at the top of the page.
- Proofread for spelling and grammar. Put page numbers on *every* page and staple them together. Be sure the formatting is correct: 1.25” margins all the way around, 12 pt. Times font, black ink, “ragged right” text alignment, double-spaced with no additional spacing between paragraphs.