



MLA (Modern Language Association) Style for Research Papers

Whenever you directly quote or paraphrase from one of your sources, follow the quotation or paraphrase with an **in-text citation**, also called a **parenthetical citation**.

According to MLA guidelines, the in-text citation includes the author's last name and the page number on which the quoted or paraphrased material appears in the source text. Example:

Linguists agree that "one thing we build with language is significance" (Gee 98).

However, you can also use a **signal phrase**, which includes the author's name and a present tense verb such as writes, suggests, and points out. A signal phrase can also take the form of "According to (author)." If you use a signal phrase, you only need to put the page number in the in-text citation. For more about signal phrases, see [Embedding Quotations](#). Examples:

Gee writes, "One thing we build with language is significance" (98).
According to Gee, "One thing we build with language is significance" (98).

What if my source doesn't have page numbers?

If the source has numbered sections or paragraphs, cite those instead of the page number. Examples:

Buford notes that language is constantly changing (sec. 8).
Daniels argues, "We would be wise to adapt our attitudes" (par. 6).

Otherwise, cite only the author's name. Example:

An article in The Guardian claims 1,000 new words appear in the dictionary each year (Bodle).

What if I want to use a quotation found in a source other than the original?

Cite the source you are using rather than the original, but add "qtd. in" (short for "quoted in") before the author's name and page number. Example:

John Buford once wrote, "Language is a living, breathing organism" (qtd. in Gee 136).

What if I have more than one author?

If you have two or three authors, include each author's name either in the sentence or the in-text citation. Examples:

Buford, Collins, and Holt claim that "the meanings of words constantly change" (36).
Linguists agree that "the meanings of words constantly change" (Buford, Collins, and Holt 36).



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If you have four or more authors, use the first author's name only and substitute "et al." (which means "and others") for the other authors. Examples:

O'Malley et al. assert that enforcing language use is a futile endeavor (22).
Enforcing language use is a futile endeavor (O'Malley et al. 22).

What if I don't know my author's name?

Use the title of the source instead. If the title is quite long, use a shortened version of it (e.g., a source titled "Examining the Process of Language Evolution" could be shortened to "Examining the Process").
Example:

No one knows what English will look like in a thousand years ("Examining the Process" 58).

Note: Put book titles in italics; put article titles in quotation marks.

What if I use more than one source by the same author?

Use the title of the source (or a shortened version of it) instead of the author's name. See above.

What if I use a very long quotation?

It is generally better to paraphrase than to directly quote a long stretch of text. However, for any quotation which requires more than four lines of your text, treat it as a **block quotation**. Block quotations are not placed in quotation marks. Instead, they are set off from the rest of your text and indented. Unlike with other quotations, the final punctuation mark comes *before* the in-text citation.
Example:

Gee examines the ongoing debate over the "official English" movement, summarizing each side's perspective:

In several states in the United States, bilingual education has become controversial. Some people argue that immigrant children should be allowed to learn school content (such as science and math) in their native language while they are also learning English. Others argue that immigrant children should learn English immediately and quickly and then be exposed to school content only in English. (Gee 146)

In other words, the debate seems to center on the question of whether immigrants to the United States have a duty to acclimate themselves to the dominant language or the United States has a duty to accommodate the immigrants.

What if I want to omit some text from a quotation?

To indicate that you have omitted text from the middle of a quotation, use ellipses (...). You do not have to use ellipses if you omit text from the beginning or end of a quotation—only if you have taken text out between words. Example:



Original quotation: *Buford writes, "In the debate between prescriptivism and descriptivism, we must remember that language is changing, and the rules for how language is used are changing" (38).*

Text omitted from beginning: *Buford writes, "Language is changing, and the rules for how language is used are changing" (38).*

Text omitted from end: *Buford writes, "In the debate between prescriptivism and descriptivism, we must remember that language is changing" (38).*

Text omitted from middle: *Buford writes, "In the debate between prescriptivism and descriptivism...the rules for how language is used are changing" (38).*

Note: It is unethical to use ellipses to misrepresent the quotation's intended meaning. Example:

Original quotation: *Daniels believed that "language is not a static entity."*

Text omitted to misrepresent quotation: *Daniels believed that "language is...a static entity."*

What if I need to change the wording of a quotation of make sense?

Sometimes, you may need to change how a quotation is worded or even add text to it in order for the quotation to make sense to your readers. In that case, use brackets to indicate text that you have added to or changed from the original quotation. Example:

Original quotation: *"It is the more logical way of approaching language use" (Mullins 17).*

Altered quotation to eliminate the ambiguous pronoun "it": *"It [descriptivism] is the more logical way of approaching language use" (Mullins 17).*