# MLA Documentation

The Modern Language Association (MLA) created the following guidelines for documenting your ethical use of sources in research papers. The guidelines presented here are adapted from the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Seventh Edition, and updates to their style guide may be found at www.mla.org.

## Incorporating Sources

The types of supporting information you'll find when doing research might include brief or extended examples as well as expert observations and testimony, research studies, factual information, and so forth. Once you've found sources and evaluated them for their usefulness and credibility, you'll need to decide how to incorporate them into your own writing. First, you'll need to decide whether your source information should be summarized, paraphrased, quoted directly, or incorporated as factual statements (data such as statistics, figures, etc.).

- When you ***summarize*** a source, you put the source's main ideas into your own words. Your summary should be significantly shorter than the original source and focus simply on the main points the author conveyed. For example, you might read a 10-page article and within that article find several paragraphs that address one main idea. If you want to incorporate that main idea into your paper to help reinforce a point you've made, you'll need to take those several paragraphs and condense them into a short paragraph or less (a summary).

- When you ***paraphrase*** a source, you focus on putting a particular passage of the original source in your own words, being careful not to change the intent of the author's original

work while still presenting it in a condensed form. Incorporating source information using paraphrase is an option when the author's stated idea is especially important but the language the author uses is not. If you can convey the statement effectively using your own words, do so. The same point applies when the author has used language so specific to a field that the reader wouldn't easily follow the meaning. Again, write the statement in your own words to make the meaning clear for your reader. Note that a paraphrase is roughly the same length as the author's sentence or passage. It captures the full idea, including any details the author includes, and maintains the same tone and intent. Paraphrases are generally brief in that you shouldn't paraphrase long sections of the original document.

*Caution:* Be careful to avoid "patch-writing" which means using sections of the author's original words within your sentence(s). This can be avoided by first reading the author's words, then putting the source text aside and writing your own version of it, and then rechecking the source text to make sure you've captured the full idea.

- When you *quote* a source, you use the author's exact words and emphasize that with quotation marks (if the passage being quoted is four lines or less) or block quotations (if more than four lines are being quoted). Use a direct quote when the author expresses ideas in a manner that is highly effective or thought provoking as written. While you might sometimes paraphrase an author's statement because it has been written in a manner too complex for your readers, at other times you need to offer a direct quotation *because* the expression is precise or reflects the authority and credibility of the author and would be best included exactly as the author stated it.

# SEPI: A System for Incorporating Sources

**S** = Signal Phrase (identify the author [or source title when you do not know the author's name] and include some information to put the source in context)

**E** = Evidence (summary, paraphrase, direct quotation, factual information)

**P** = Parenthetical Citation (page number or numbers) from which your evidence was taken must be placed in parentheses following your evidence*

**I** = Interpretation of the evidence or inferences you draw between your ideas and the source materials

*Exception: If you have an electronic document which does not show page numbers and you have already stated the author's name (or title of the article if no known author) in the Signal Phrase, you will not have information to include in parentheses. Only in this circumstance should you skip this step.*

## SEPI

It's important to synthesize your evidence with your own voice smoothly and ethically. That means you do not just randomly drop in quotations. Follow the SEPI format: Use a *Signal Phrase*, present your *Evidence*, cite that evidence with a *Parenthetical in-text citation*, and *Interpret* that evidence for the reader.

You must use an introductory phrase, usually called a signal phrase, to let your reader know that you are about to use someone else's ideas or words. A signal phrase can include information about the author (credentials) or source of the publication to provide context.

Academic papers are written in the historical present tense, so signal phrases should be too. See the example below:

> According to the Loyola University New Orleans website, "Very often a signal phrase will also name the author of the quoted material, thus serving at once to include the quotation smoothly and to attribute the idea to its source" ("Writing Across the Curriculum").

> In this example, "According to" is the signal phrase and "Loyola University New Orleans" is the author of the quotation that follows. The evidence is the words within the quotation marks.

> Here's another example:

> In the Introduction to *Chess for Dummies*, James Eade argues that a successful player uses both scientific-like analytical skills and artistic-like creative skills (1).

> In this example, "James Eade" is the author who "argues." You might also notice that even though this example is a paraphrase of the evidence and not a quote from the author, it too must include a parenthetical in-text citation.

*Verbs commonly used in Signal Phrases*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| acknowledges | comments | identifies | relates |
| addresses | contends | infers | reveals |
| admits | conveys | maintains | says |
| advocates | declares | makes known | states |
| affirms | describes | notes | suggests |
| alleges | discloses | outlines | summarizes |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| analyzes | discusses | posits | writes |
| announces | divulges | presents | |
| argues | emphasizes | professes | |
| asserts | examines | proclaims | |
| believes | explains | recounts | |
| claims | expresses | reports | |

After you have presented your evidence (giving a Signal phrase, then your Evidence, then the Parenthetical in-text Citation for the source), you must close it out with your interpretation (I) of that evidence. The reader needs to be guided to see the point you are making by presenting that evidence. In addition, you need to reestablish yourself as the authority or persuasive agent of your essay. Don't let the sources speak for you. Instead, see them simply as support for your argument.

## SEPI: Example in Action

The following example shows SEPI at work in a paragraph from an essay. The essay's topic is the differences between print and web-enhanced writing.

Alan Rea and Doug White describe the difference: "When writing and evaluating in the medium [computer-enhanced], issues such as audience and purpose, design, and function all remain important. New issues, however, come to the forefront: contextualized hyperlinks, navigability, color schemes, and image, audio, and video integration become part of the writing task as well" (148). Visual design elements are expected in web-enhanced writing. These new issues of design mean new ways of teaching and assessment in addition to the new indications for writing.

S = Alan Rea and Doug White describe the difference:

E = "When writing and evaluating in the medium [computer-enhanced], issues such as audience

and purpose, design, and function all remain important. New issues, however, come to the

forefront: contextualized hyperlinks, navigability, color schemes, and image, audio, and

video integration become part of the writing task as well"

P = (148).

I = Visual design elements are expected in web-enhanced writing. These new issues of design

mean new ways of teaching and assessment in addition to the new indications for writing.



Regardless of *how* you use a source, you must cite the source! The general rule to remember when using MLA is that it requires two types of citations:

   1) the full citation entry on the Works Cited page (bibliography), and

   2) a parenthetical in-text citation which directs readers to the full citation on the Works
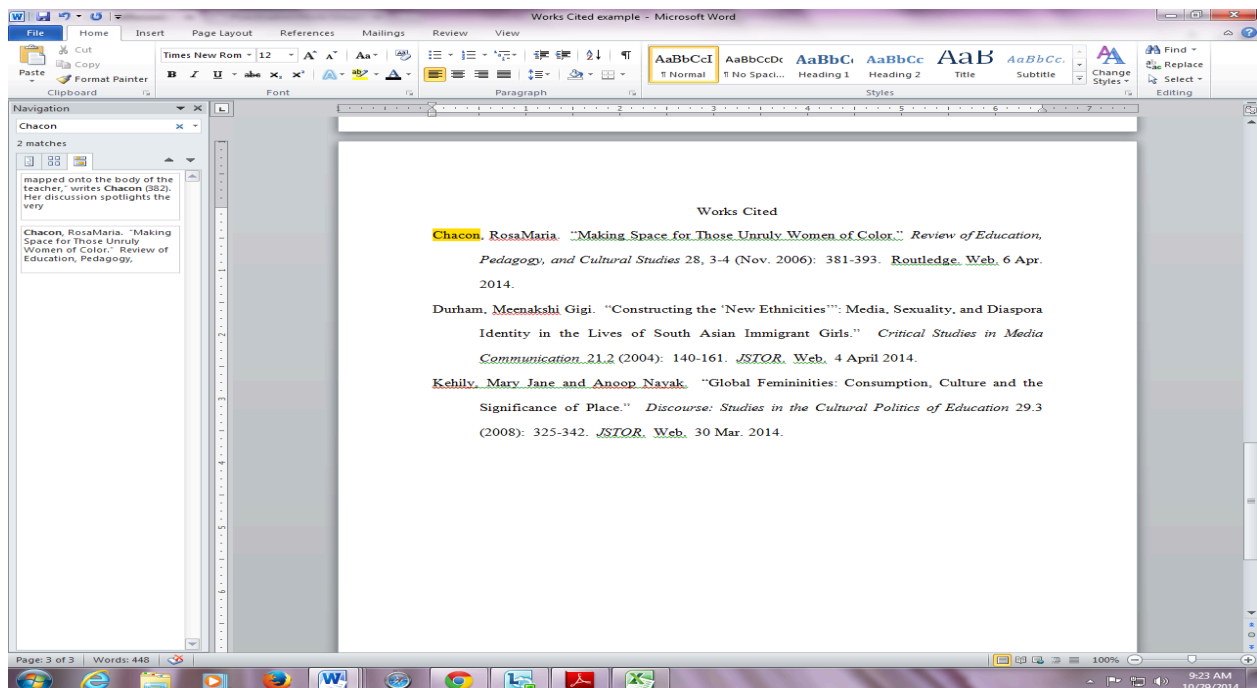
      Cited page.


## MLA Cross-Referencing Using Microsoft Word

When writing research essays, the process of documenting sources begins with a Works Cited page. Once you have a Works Cited page with accurate entries, you'll have an easier task of correctly incorporating sources. After incorporating sources, a writer can check the accuracy

of the in-text citations by using the *Find* feature in the *Editing* box in Microsoft Word (upper

right corner on the tool bar).
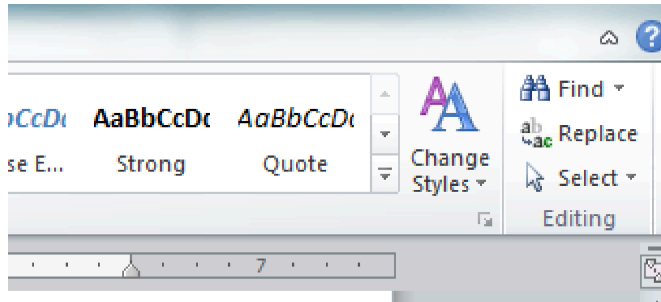


Beginning with the Works Cited page on screen, click Find. In the Navigation column

which pops up on the left, type the name of the first author on the Works Cited page. In the

Navigation column, you'll find a list of matches within the paper, one of which will be the Works

Cited entry.

You should have at least one more match—the use of the author's name in the in-text citation. If you do not see at least two matches for each Works Cited entry (one on the Works Cited page and one in the body of the text) then you have not cited that source correctly in-text.
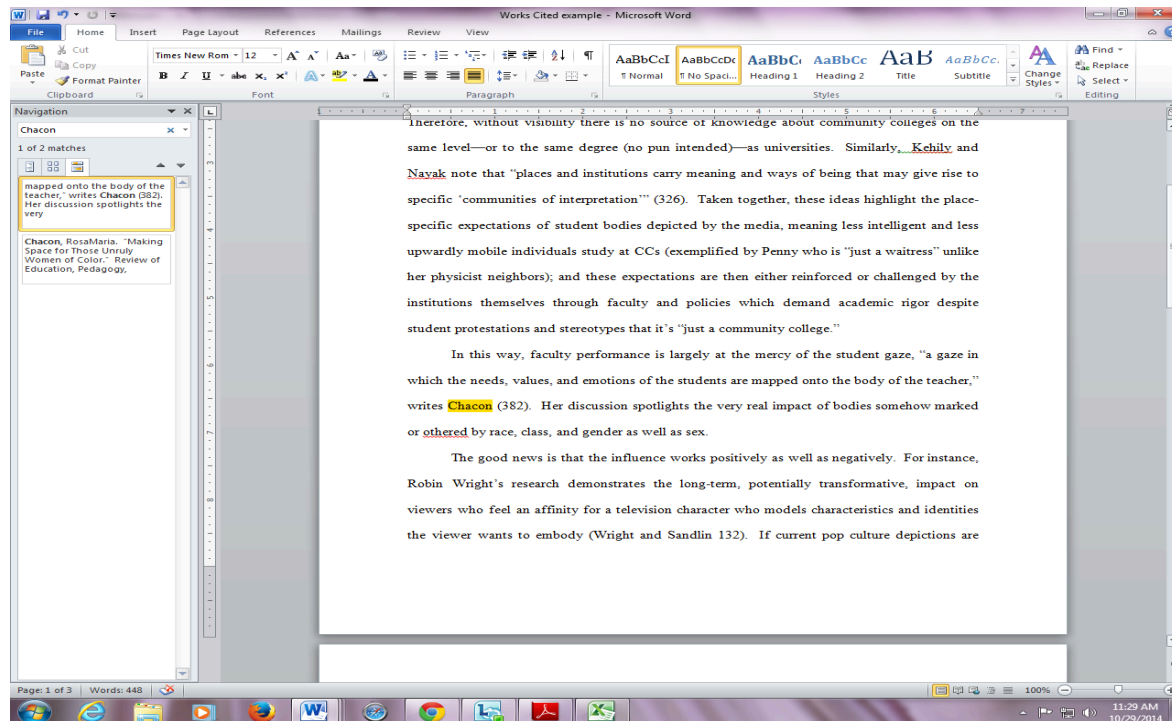


Use this same technique to check in-text citations for sources that have no named author. For those entries, you'll use the first word of the article title. Using the same approach as above, highlight the first word of the article title from that Works Cited entry. It will highlight the Works Cited entry but will also show matches for the use of the article title anywhere in the paper. If you don't have an exact match where you used that source in the paper then you haven't cited that source correctly.