

Understanding Core Elements, MLA 9th Edition

When citing a source in for your Works Cited page, MLA has created a single process/formula for citing all types of sources. The citation will include information based on 9 Core Elements.

CORE ELEMENTS

1. Author.
2. Title.
3. Title of Container,
4. Contributor,
5. Version,
6. Number,
7. Publisher,
8. Publication Date,
9. Location.

Everything that is included in a Works Cited entry will be one of the **nine core elements**. This basic list can get you through citations for simple things like novels and websites.

This handout is designed to help you understand what each element is asking for, where you might find the information, whether or not you need to include it, and what it should look like in your citation.

Understanding and Identifying Core Elements:

- 1. Author:** You are looking for the author of the specific article, book, or material that you are citing. If you are using a government document, always list the governmental department in the author's spot. An author can be an organization or corporation, **but do not cite a corporate author if it is the same as the publisher**; in this instance, skip the author and move straight to the title. This is usually a person or persons. If the source has no author, skip item one and move on to the title. Begin with the author's last name, followed by a comma and the rest of the name as presented in the work. Omit prefixes (Dr. Fr. Mrs.) and suffixes (Jr. Sr. M.D.).

Author Formatting:

One Author	Last Name, First Name.	Truss, Lynne.
Two Authors	Last Name, First Name, and First Name Last Name.	Yousafzai, Malala, and Christina Lamb.
Three or More Authors	Last Name, First Name, et al.	Smith, Megan, et al.
Governmental or Corporate Author	Name of Corporation/Govt. (if it's different from the publisher)	Department of Homeland Security.
No Author	"Title of Article." OR <i>Title of Source/Container.</i>	"Complementary and Alternative Medicine."

- 2. Title of Source:** The title of your source should be given in its entirety in the Works Cited entry using upper case to capitalize the major words. Small titles that are "contained" within something else (articles, songs, stories, poems) go in quotation marks, and titles of large works (books, anthologies, overall websites, television series, movies) go in italics.

Title Formatting:

Title of Article on a Website.	"Title in Title Case and in Quotation Marks"	"The Backwaters Prize."
Title of a Book.	<i>Title in Title Case and in Italics</i>	<i>Non-Designer's Design Book</i>
Title of Article in a Journal.	"Title in Title Case and in Quotation Marks"	"Closed-loop Training of Attention with Real-Time Brain Imaging."
Title of a Journal.	<i>Title in Title Case and in Italics</i>	<i>Nature Neuroscience.</i>



3. **Title of Container:** Some sources stand alone, but most of the time we are using research that is “contained” within something larger. An article might be contained on a website or contained in a newspaper or magazine. A short story might be contained within an anthology. A television episode might be contained in a television series. We list this container as element 3.

It is possible for a single source to have more than one container, for example, an article might be contained first within a journal, but the journal is then contained within a database. A television episode is contained within a series, but the version you watched was contained within a streaming service like Netflix.

For your container, begin by listing the first container in title case and then include all elements 3-9 that are relevant to that particular container, separating elements with a comma and placing a period after element 9. If your source has a second or even third container, list the next container after element 9 from the previous container and follow it with element 3-9 for the new container.

Title of Source	1st Container for the Source	2nd Container for the Source
“Article on a Website”	<i>Title of Overall Website</i>	
“Title of Short Story”	<i>Title of Anthology</i>	
“Newspaper or Magazine Article Found on a Website”	<i>Title of Newspaper or Magazine</i>	
“Newspaper or Magazine Article Found in a Database”	<i>Title of Newspaper or Magazine</i>	<i>Title of Database Where you Found the Source</i>
“Television Episode Title”	<i>Television Series</i>	<i>Streaming Service You Used to View the Episode</i>
“Journal Article Title”	<i>Name of Journal</i>	<i>Title of Database Where you Found the Source</i>

Example with Two Containers: The article “Closed Loop Training” was published in the journal *Nature Neuroscience* and is housed in the database *Academic Search Premier*. Each container has been highlighted.

deBettencourt, Megan, et al. “Closed-loop Training of Attention with Real-Time Brain Imaging.” *Nature Neuroscience*, vol. 18, no. 3, Mar. 2015, pp. 470-475. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1038/nn.3940.

4. **Contributor:** Not all sources will have contributors. These include other people who contribute to the work AND whose participation is important to either a.) your research or b.) locating the work. **Editors** and **Translators** are almost always included because they are so important to the work. Additionally, if the content of your paper directs you to list someone besides the author in the author’s spot, the writer, director, or other important individuals may be listed here.

Example of a Movie Listed by Writer:

Here, the citation for the movie *Captain America: Civil War* begins with the writers of the film, like most sources, but lists the director as well since directors are typically important when discussing films.

Markus, Christopher, et al. *Captain America: Civil War*. Directed by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, Marvel Studios, 2016.

Example of a Movie Listed by Director:

Russo, Anthony, and Joe Russo, directors. *Captain America: Civil War*. Written by Christopher Markus, et al., Marvel Studios, 2016.

Formatting Contributors:

Before each contributor's name, include a brief description of their role. The description is not capitalized unless no container precedes it.

- edited by
- created by
- illustrated by
- narrated by
- performance by
- translated by

5. **Version:** Not all sources will have a version. Version indicates that the source was released in more than one version; there is something different about the content from one version to the next.

Examples of Version:

Use ed. as the abbreviation for edition.

- 8th ed.
- updated ed.
- expanded ed.
- unabridged version
- director's cut

6. **Number:** Not all sources will have a number. Others, however, will have more than one number. This indicates that the source is part of a numbered sequence. This might include both volume and issue numbers, volume letters, and season and episode numbers. Numbers are most common with periodicals.

Examples of Numbers:

Use vol. to abbreviate volume and no. to abbreviate issue/number. If you have two numbers, separate the two with a comma.

- vol. 4
- vol. 18, no. 3
- vol. A
- season 22, episode 3

Example of Volume and Issue Number for a Journal Article

deBettencourt, Megan, et al. "Closed-loop Training of Attention with Real-Time Brain Imaging." *Nature Neuroscience*, vol. 18, no. 3, Mar. 2015, pp. 470-475. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1038/nn.3940.

7. **Publisher:** Most sources will have a publisher, though periodicals do not. The publisher is the organization responsible for producing the work or making it available. For websites, this information can usually be found at the bottom of the page near the copyright or on the "about" page. MLA allows for publishers to be omitted in some instances when it simply isn't useful to include (it's repetitive or obvious) or when it isn't available.

Examples of Publishers:

When talking about university presses, use U to abbreviate University, P for Press, and UP for University Press.

- Backwaters Press
- Hatchet Audio
- Harper Collins
- NPR

Publishers May Be Omitted From:

- Periodicals (journals, magazines, newspapers)
- Works published by the author or editor
- Websites whose title and publisher are essentially the same
- Websites that act as hosts but are not actually responsible for producing the content they provide: *YouTube, WordPress.com, JSTORE*. These may be containers, but not publishers.

8. Publication Date: Most sources have a publication date. If a source has more than one date of publication listed, use the one that is most meaningful to your writing. An article on a website, for example, may have a date for the publication of that particular article, while the website as a whole has a copyright date at the bottom. In most instances, the article date will provide the reader more accurate information. However, if the article had no date attributed to it, the copyright date at the bottom of the page may be used.

Formatting Dates:

- MLA uses an inverted format of the date: **day month year** without any commas.
- Names of months that are longer than four letters are abbreviated by the first three letters followed by a period (Jan. Feb.) with the exception of September (Sept.).
- In general, provide the full day/date or as much of the date as is available.
- If you are citing an entire website or work that was developed over a range of years, cite the range: 2014-2016

9. Location: Many sources will contain location information. This tells the reader either a.) how to get back to the information you used *within* your source or container, b.) or how to get back *to the source/container*. Location information varies depending on the type of source you are citing.

Type of Source	Type of Location	Example
Print Sources	Page Numbers (abbreviate <i>p.</i> for page or <i>pp.</i> for pages)	p. 24 OR pp. 24-29
Website	Best Option: Digital Object Identifier (doi) Second Best: Permalink or “Stable” Link Third Best: Specific URL (omit http://)	www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130896102
Database Source	Best Option: Digital Object Identifier (precede with https://doi.org/) Second Best: Permalink or Database URL	https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.3940 .
Physical Objects like a Piece of Art in a Museum or Gallery	Name of the Place, City, State (Omit the city if it’s included in the place)	Durham Western Heritage Museum, Omaha

10. Supplemental Elements: On rare occasions, a write may include supplemental elements to clarify something important about the source. These are included after element 9 at the end of the citation. The two most common supplemental elements are:

- **Date of Access:** Include *only* if there is no other publication or copyright date included. Example: Accessed 7 July 2020.
- **Medium of Publication:** Include to clarify the type of source or version of source you looked at if more than one option is available at that location or if the entry might otherwise make it difficult to tell what kind of source you are citing. Example: Email. or Lecture. or PDF download.