Whatever the major, college students encounter writing assignments spanning many disciplines, the majority of which follow a particular style guide. Disciplines within the humanities often use the MLA study guide in particular. The Modern Language Association (MLA) was founded in 1883 “to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literatures” (“About Us”). Scholars use the MLA’s style guide to ensure consistency in documentation and format in scholarly writing. When writing a paper, it is important for students not only to demonstrate an understanding of the topic, but also to write in a way that adds value to the discipline. Having strong arguments and analysis is requisite, but adherence to a style guide such as the MLA’s is equally important as it allows readers to both follow up on ideas and research of interest to them and focus on the ideas of the paper and it establishes the writer’s credibility.

Much of writing is about sharing ideas and prompting discussion. According to Nancy Sommers in the introduction to A Pocket Style Manual, “it is in the process of writing…that you discover what’s compelling to you and your audience” (1). However, without a clear guide on how to write an effective research paper, it would be difficult for writers to effect discourse with their audience. Even if someone were to read and find a paper interesting, if they could not understand the documentation they would not be able to continue their exploration. MLA standards provide “readers with cues they can use…to locate information of interest to them” (“MLA Overview”).

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Sources listed alphabetically


“MLA Overview and Workshop.” *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue University, 2017, https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/675/1/.

*Sample paper retrieved from Purdue OWL.*