

Sample Essay Structure (MLA)

Do you have an essay or writing assignment but are not sure how an essay should look? Many students who are new to university writing often lose marks unnecessarily due to improper formatting or an unclear writing structure. This handout will help you to visualize a typical essay written in MLA format, as well how to organize your ideas effectively.

Formatting Style

When assigning an essay, instructors usually specify to students that they should format their paper in a certain way. While there are many commonly assigned formats, such as APA and Chicago Style, this handout will focus on the MLA (Modern Language Association) Style. Formatting an essay according to a certain style affects the way your assignment looks physically and to how you format your citations.

How to Format your paper in MLA

The guidelines below are the general MLA formatting guidelines; however, make sure to prioritize following any specific formatting instructions that your instructor has assigned.

1. Font type: **Times New Roman** Example: Kwantlen Polytechnic University
2. Font Size: **12** pt. font size
3. Spacing: Maintain **double** spacing throughout your entire essay, **including between paragraphs**
4. **Indent** the first line of every paragraph
5. Set your **margins** (the spaces above, below, to the right of, and to the left of your writing and the edge of the page) to **1 inch** (2.54 cm) all around.
6. Your "Works Cited" page should list your citation entries in **alphabetical order**
7. You must provide an in-text citation and a corresponding Works Cited entry for every time you use any ideas or information from another source. Refer to the library's "MLA Citation Guide" for specific instructions on how to format your citations.
8. Titles of large works, such as books, albums, or movies are written in italics, whereas titles of smaller works, such as songs, short stories, or Journal Articles, should be placed in italics.
Example: *Titanic* / "O Canada"
9. Commas and periods are placed within the closing double quotations; colons and semicolons are placed on the outside.
Example: "surprise," & "surprise." / "surprise": & "Surprise";
10. Only use the double quotation marks to identify the title of a work, a direct quote, or a specific word or term that you want to discuss or analyze. Avoid using the double quotations to indicate sarcasm, emphasize a term that you don't intend on analyzing or discussing, or to distance yourself from an idea or statement. Example: "Someone might think that Michael is **smart**," but he really isn't."

How to use this Handout

The sample essay portion of the handout provides you with basic suggestions for how you should organize your thoughts in order to write an effective essay. Always keep in mind that your instructors may have given you specific instructions on where to place certain ideas and statements, so be sure to follow their instructions primarily.

John Smith (<-Your first name and Last Name)

Your last name and the page number

Dr. Jane Doe (<- Your instructor's name)

Your course (Example: ENGL #####)

March 8, 2018 (<-Date)

Your Essay Title

Indent the first line

—▶ This is your **first paragraph**, which is also called your **introduction** paragraph. Here, you will **introduce the topic or issue** you will be exploring in your paper, as well as identify why this topic is relevant. Also, you will **introduce any key texts and authors** that you will be focusing on in this essay. Finally, you will **state your thesis statement** (the main point of which you want to convince the reader, as well as the **3-4 ways you will prove this point** (these 3-4 points will each be the topics of your individual body paragraphs).

Double space between lines

This is your **first body paragraph**. Your **topic sentence** (the first sentence of your paragraph) should **state the main idea** (one of the 3-4 ways stated above in your thesis) that you will be exploring in order to prove your main point/argument stated in your thesis statement. Make your **first claim**; put forward an original idea that you came up with. **Provide evidence** from a scholarly source; this can be a quote or paraphrased idea from a book or journal article (**provide in-text citation**). **Explain and discuss** how the evidence that you provided supports your claim. Make a **second claim** and **repeat** the evidence-interpretation process. **Conclude** your paragraph by restating the main point that you discussed in this paragraph, as well as relate it back to the thesis statement.

Double space between paragraphs

Use a **transition** like “in addition,” “moreover,” and “consequently,” to introduce your **second body paragraph**. **Repeat** the structure of your first body paragraph to discuss **one of the other 3-4** ways that you identified in your introduction.

Repeat the body-paragraph process to create as many body paragraphs as you need to prove your point (if you **identified 3 ways** in your thesis, then **write three body paragraphs**).

This is your conclusion. Your **conclusion aims to summarize the argument** that you made, as well as to emphasize the main ideas or the main subtopics that you discussed in order to **prove your main argument.**

Works Cited

Here, you will provide a citation entry for all of the **sources that you used to support** your ideas. Refer to the Library's **MLA Citation Style** guide for information on how to properly format each source. Remember to list the entries in alphabetical order.

Here is an example of a citation entry for a book and a journal article:

Last name, First name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, year of publication.

Last name, First name. "Title of Journal Article." *Name of Journal*, vol. 34, no.7, 2016, pp. 27

47. Ebsco, doi:XXXXXXXXX.

Additional Resources:

KPU Library "MLA Style Guide": http://libguides.kpu.ca/ld.php?content_id=33914842