Essay Formatting 101

What is the main thing I need to know about essay formatting?

The first thing you need to know is that whatever format your instructor has requested is the manner in which you should format your essay. If they have requested a title page, provide a title page. If they have requested single side printing and images in colour, then that is what your essay should be. Your ability to follow instructions is one of the first things your instructor will be looking at.

Should your instructor not have any specifics for what they are looking for in terms of format, then you can default to using the MLA 8 standard.

Remember that your essay should be clean and professional. You should use the same style and size of font throughout, and any formatting (**bolding**, *italics*, etc) should only be done to emphasize titles or other MLA specific things.

What is the MLA 8 Standard for formatting essays?

MLA does not use title pages, so these should only be provided at the request of your faculty.

On your first page, you will put your name, your instructor's name, the course name and section, and the date in the top left corner. Dates should be in a day, month, year format: 12 April 2016.

Your essay should be double spaced, have a one-inch margin, and use a reasonable sized (11 or 12 pt.) font.

How do I format my titles?

Titles for books, magazines, journals, films, and artwork should be in *italics*.

Titles for chapters, articles, essays, episodes of television shows, or pages of websites should be in "quotes."

How do I format my quotes?

Your quotes need to be well integrated into your sentences; you will use the same size and style of font as the rest of your essay.

Short quotations are shorter than four lines of prose. These quotes will be enclosed within double quotation marks, with your citation following the end quotes and before the closing punctuation. Your quote will look like this:

Weft-faced cloth is one where "the warp is often completely concealed by the weft, which packs down into the spaces between the widely spaced warp" (Sutton 9).

Long quotes are longer than four lines of prose. In these, quotes are put into a freestanding block of text, and you do not use quotation marks. Start the quotation on a new line, with the entire block indented an additional half inch from the left. Maintain double spacing throughout quote, as well as font, etc. In long quotes, your parenthetical citation will come after the closing punctuation (note this is different than the formatting of short quotes). Your quote will look like this: Spacing of yarns can greatly affect the structure of the cloth, as Ann Sutton discusses at length:

> When a plain weave structure, warp and/or weft, has bands of threads crammed closely together, followed by other threads spaced well apart (controlled by the reed in the warp, and by careful control of the beating in the weft) the openwork result is called 'cramming and spacing'. This is often used when an open structure is required without loss of weight or strength. It is also used when the effects of thin and dense areas are shown to advantage against light, for example in scarves and in curtains. (Sutton 43)

How do I format my images?

For many essays, you will need to include images. This is common with essays where you are writing about specific artwork.

There are no specific requirements for aligning or formatting images according to MLA standard; while this means that you as the author have the freedom to format however you see fit, there are some elements still required.

The first thing you will need to do when citing any image is give it a figure reference. This reference will appear on the first mention of your image, so your reader knows which image you are referring to in your corresponding image list. Introduce your images in chronological order – Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3 etc.— and if they are artworks provide their year of completion on the first mention. As such, your introduction of your images should look something like this:

> One of Pablo Picasso's most interesting paintings is *Three Musicians* (1921) (fig. 1).

From this point on in your essay, you only need to refer to the artwork by title.

When you are citing an artwork, you need to provide citation information for both the image itself, as well as the full citation for where you acquired that image. To cite the artwork itself, you need to identify the artist, title, date the artwork was made (date ranges or circa is fine for very old artwork), medium, size, the original location or country it was created in, and the style. From there, you will include a full citation for the source of your image.

Your image caption will look like this:

Fig. 1. Picasso, Pablo. *Three Musicians*. 1921, Oil on Canvas, 200.7 x 222.9 cm, France, Cubist. As reproduced at: "*Three Musicians*." *Museum of Modern Art*, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78630?locale=en.

Your image caption should be directly under the image, and you should use the same style and size of font you use throughout the entire essay. It is not recommended to use text boxes for image captions; this is because text boxes are often challenging to format, and they can create problems of alignment when you are printing your document. Be aware that while your text box may look perfect on the screen, they may not when you print. Ensure you look through your printed copy of your essay prior to handing it in.

Your instructor may have specific formatting things they want to see for image captions, such as the use of hanging indentations, or a specific manner in which they want the source cited. Primarily, ensure you are following those directions.

What is hanging indentation?

A hanging indent is when the first line of your entry is flush with the margin, and every subsequent line is indented (or hanging). A hanging indentation works cited entry looks like this:

Swann, Jennifer. "The Art Biennale Held on the Shores of a Toxic Lake." Vice, 20 Apr. 2017, https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/the-art-biennale-held-on-the-shores-of-a-toxic-lake

The purpose of a hanging indent is to provide your reader the ability to identify a Works Cited entry quickly and easily.

How do I create a hanging indentation?

Microsoft Word:
Select the text you want indented
Go to Paragraph > Indentation > Special
Select Hanging Indent

Google Docs:
Select the text you want indented
On the top ruler, identify the light blue inverted triangle; drag this to the right a half inch. You will notice that above the inverted triangle is a rectangle, and it will also move when you move the triangle. Now drag the rectangle back to your original margin on the left. Your first line of text will move back to the original margin, creating your hanging indent.

Pages on a Mac:
> Select the text you want indented
> Click View > Show Ruler
> Click on the left indent icon (inverted triangle) and drag it to the right a half inch.
> Click on first line indent icon (small rectangle above triangle) and drag it back to the original margin, creating your hanging indent

We do not recommend creating hanging indents manually; this can create issues with formatting and alignment, and should you need to change any information or make revisions, it can be more work to fix your formatting.

What if I have a question about formatting that isn't included here? Can someone look through my essay before I hand it in?

ACAD has numerous learning supports available, including the Writing Centre and Drop-in Tutoring. These services are available to you as a student for no additional charge. The Writing Centre is by appointment; please email writing.centre@acad.ca.

Drop-in Tutoring is available all semester long in the Luke Lindoe Library; please email tutoring@acad.ca for hours.

What if I need academic support or accommodations in my classes?

In-class accommodations and supports are available to students. This can include support services, assistive technologies, resources, and access to funding. For more information, contact the Learning Assistance Office: learning.assistance@acad.ca