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HOW TO FORMAT AN ESSAY OR TERM PAPER

Title and Submission Information
You do not need to create a title page for your research paper (unless otherwise specified by your professor). Instead, on the first page of your paper, one inch from the top of the first page and flush with the left margin, type the following information (double-spaced):

- your name
- the course number
- your instructor’s name
- the date

Double-space again and centre the title.

The title of the paper should be short but descriptive (i.e., “Essay #1” would not be acceptable). It does not have to be witty or catchy, but it must give the reader a general idea of the topic to be discussed. See the title on the first page of the sample essay near the end of this guide.

Spacing and Margins
The paper should be double-spaced throughout. Margins should be one inch from the top, bottom, and sides of the page. Justify the left margin only.

Printing
Papers should be printed on standard white 8½” x 11” paper.

Please check with your professor to see if double-sided printing is acceptable.

Pagination
Every page of your paper, excluding the title page (if you include one), must be numbered. Page numbers should be placed in the top right-hand corner of the page and preceded by your last name. Note the following example (assuming that the text box represents the top of the page):

Page numbers should not be embellished with periods, parentheses, or other punctuation.

Indentation
Indent paragraphs five spaces from the left-hand margin. Note that long prose quotations and verse quotations should be indented ten spaces (hit the “tab” button twice).

PLAGIARISM

What is Plagiarism?
According to Saint Mary’s Academic Calendar, plagiarism is the “presentation of words, ideas or techniques of another as one’s own. Plagiarism is not restricted to literary works and applies to all forms of information or ideas that belong to another (e.g., computer programs, mathematical solutions, scientific experiments, graphical images, or data)” (Saint Mary's University, 2009, pp.22-23).
Therefore, plagiarism includes taking someone else’s words, sentences, or paragraphs and using them in your own paper without explaining where you got them from. However, this is not the only form of plagiarism. Plagiarism also involves taking someone else’s ideas or arguments, putting them into your own words, and then not citing the source. In addition, keep in mind that when you paraphrase an idea or argument from someone else, you need to change the structure of the sentence and put it into your own words as well as include a citation. Simply changing or rearranging a few words is not sufficient and is considered a form of plagiarism. Academic writing is all about ideas and arguments, so if you get information (or specific sentences or groups of words) from somewhere else, then you have to show where you got it from.

Avoiding Plagiarism
To avoid plagiarism, make sure that you cite all sources that you use in your paper. If you include information word-for-word from a source, then you need to put quotation marks around it (see the Quotation section in this booklet) and include it in your text and in your reference list. If you take someone’s idea/argument but put it into your own words, then you don’t need quotation marks, but you still need to cite it in your text and in your reference list.

Common Knowledge and Plagiarism
Some students have heard that “common knowledge” doesn’t need to be cited, so they wonder when something is considered common knowledge. After all, something might be common knowledge to researchers in a field but be new information for a student. Basically, there’s no set rule for whether something is considered common knowledge or not, but if you ask yourself the question “would everyone who studies Author A, Topic B, or Subject C know this?” and if your answer is “yes,” then you should be okay. Another way to look at it is that if the same information can be found in five or more sources (which are completely independent and not referring to one person or to one another), then it’s probably common knowledge.

Example of something that does not need to be cited:
William Shakespeare is considered to be one of the greatest writers in the Western canon.

Example of something that must be cited:
As for his characters, “Shakespeare manages to give them impression that they possess autonomous interior life and that they are constituted as subjects in the same way that we are constituted” (Cohen 212).

If you are unsure whether or not a source is common knowledge, then it is always better to cite it than not to cite it. Also, keep in mind that if you are using a specific person’s study or idea, even if it is common knowledge, then you should cite it.

Here is an example:
Plays are compositions that are specifically designed to be performed by actors who take on the characters’ roles both in terms of actions and dialogue (Abrams 69).

While the idea of what constitutes a play can usually be considered common knowledge, in this example, it is one person’s specific definition, so it needs to be cited.
HOW TO REFERENCE SOURCES AND CREATE A WORKS CITED LIST
MLA style requires both in-text citations and a Works Cited list. For every in-text citation there should be a full citation in the Works Cited list and vice versa. You must provide an in-text citation indicating the last name of the author and the page number when you do any of the following:

1. Quote directly from another author
2. Paraphrase or summarize material you used from a source
3. State a fact that is not common knowledge*

*If you are in doubt as to whether something is common knowledge or not, then you should probably document it.

In-Text Citations
In MLA style, parenthetical in-text references are used to document sources used in a paper. Sources are briefly identified within the text of the paper, using the author’s surname and the page number of the specific material being used in the paper.

Quotations
All quotations should correspond exactly with the original text in wording, spelling, capitalization, and interior punctuation.

Also, be sure to introduce quotations in such a way that they are grammatically correct and make sense with your own prose. In other words, don’t just leave a quotation standing as a sentence on its own (see the examples below).

Short Quotations
A short quotation is used when quoting a passage that is four lines or less. The quotation should be surrounded by quotation marks, and the punctuation for the sentence should follow the citation.

Here is an example:
Hlongwane explains that “quote quote quote” (850).

OR
“quote quote quote” (Hlongwane 850).

The punctuation goes after the citation.

Long Quotations
A long (or block) quotation is used when quoting a passage that is four lines or longer. Set the quotation off from the rest of the text by indenting it ten spaces, and keep it double-spaced (like the rest of your paper). No quotation marks are used. The citation should be placed at the end of the quotation following the final punctuation mark.
Here is an example:

Barr theorizes the reason:

…the mechanism for the exemption Blake posits in Urizen is not merely textual instability (an instability institutionally
minimized but still found, after all, in the Bible itself) but a device to remove the prophetic text and the inspiration it carries
from the legal realm that threatened to co-opt and silence it. This mechanism is nothing short of a representation of the
prophet and text as insane. (742)

In long quotations, the punctuation
goes before the citation.

Prose Quotations

Prose quotations (text that is not poetry or in verse) of not more than four lines should be placed in quotation marks and
incorporated into your text:

Note that if you need to modify the quotation in any way, e.g. to include extra words/letters to
ensure grammatical correctness, then place those in square brackets.

Here is an example:

In his critical essay, Lawrence suggests that “[t]he suffering which constitutes Lear’s grandeur and grants his existence a certain
tragic weight is largely voluntary” (40).

In short quotations, the punctuation
goes after the citation.

Verse Quotations

A single line of quoted verse appears within quotation marks as part of the text. Two or three lines may also be treated
this way, with a slash with a space on each side (/ ) to highlight the separation of lines:

Here is an example:

“Frost at Midnight” begins with a personification of the frost: “The Frost performs its secret ministry, / Unhelped by any wind…”
(Coleridge 1-2).

When citing poetry (and plays that have line numbers), cite the line numbers instead of page numbers. Use arabic
numerals (1,2,3) rather than roman numerals (I,II,III)
unless your professor specifies otherwise. For plays with Acts and Scenes, include these before the line numbers
(i.e., “Act 1, Scene 5, Lines 3 to 4” would look like
(1.5.3-4).

The slash mark indicates the start of a
new line in the original text.

A verse quotation of more than three lines should begin on a new line and be indented. In this case, place each line of the
verse in the same way as it appears in the original. Do not use quotation marks.
**Adding Information to a Quotation**

If it is absolutely necessary to include words or letters of your own within the quotation, such material should be enclosed in square brackets, not parentheses.

**Here is an example:**

William Allingham’s “Invitation to a Painter, Sent from the West of Ireland” is rich in descriptive detail:

All by turn, in slow procession, pace the venerable bounds,

Barefoot, barehead, seven times duly kneeling in th' accustom'd rounds;

Thrice among the hoary ruins, once before the wasted shrine,

Once at each great carven cross, and once to form the Mystic Sign,

Dipping reverential finger in the Well, on brow and breast. (169-173)

**Removing Information from a Quotation**

If you need to remove words from a direct quotation, you must indicate this by using an ellipsis (three spaced periods) in place of the missing words. For an ellipsis within a sentence, use three periods with a space before each and a space after the last. If you omit words at the end of a sentence, use four periods, with no space before the first. Four periods may also be used to indicate the omission of an entire sentence or paragraph. Keep in mind that the quotation must still embody the original idea; the author you are using must be represented fairly.

**Here is an example:**

One explanation is that “[b]ecause of her preconceived ideas, [Emma] makes blunders in trying to arrange a match between Harriet and Mr. Elton” (Amano 24).

**Here is an example:**

“The critical success of these writers . . . helped to lay the foundation for another astonishing trend of the last 30 years: the rise in Black commercial fiction, especially that written by women” (Griffin 169).
**Paraphrased Material**  
When you paraphrase (use another author’s ideas but rewrite them in your own words), then you still need to cite where you got the information from.

**Here is an example:**

Deborah Kennedy argues that this praise shows solidarity between female poets (31).

**OR**

However, this praise can also show solidarity between female poets (Kennedy 31).

---

**Citing a Source with One Author**  
For a source that has one author, cite the author’s last name and the page, paragraph, or section number from which you got the information.

**Here is an example:**

“quote quote quote” (VanderBurgh 41).

**OR**

As VanderBurgh states, “quote quote quote” (41).

---

**Citing a Source with Two or Three Authors**  
To cite a work by two or three authors, include all the authors’ last names separated by commas, and include “and” before the final author.

**Here is an example:**

Paraphrase of material (Asp, Song, and Rockwood 41).

**OR**

As Asp, Song, and Rockwood explain, paraphrase of material (107).

---

**Citing a Source with More than Three Authors**  
For three or more authors, you can either include every name, or you can simply include the first author’s name followed by “et al.,” which means “and others.”

**Here is an example:**

“Quote quote quote” (Heckerl et al. 292).

**OR**

“Quote quote quote” (Heckerl, Larsen, MacLeod, and Morley 292).
Citing a Source with No Authors
If a source does not identify an author, then use the title of the poem, short story, or article (in quotation marks) or book (in italics) in place of an author’s name. If the title is long, then use a shortened version that will still point the reader to the correct location of the source in your Works Cited page.

**Here is an example:**

(\textit{The Battle of Maldon} can be shortened to \textit{The Battle}, but it cannot be shortened to \textit{Maldon}, since you need to point the reader to “B,” not to “M,” in your Works Cited list.)

Citing a Dictionary or Encyclopedia Entry
If the author’s name is provided in the source, then include the author’s last name followed by the page number. However, if there is no author listed for the entry, then simply cite the name of the entry in quotation marks along with the definition number if there is more than one. You do not need to include a page number.

**Here is an example:**

If the form is supposed to be “any of various styles, concepts, or points of view involving a conscious departure from modernism, esp. when characterized by a rejection of ideology and theory in favour of a plurality of values and techniques” (\textit{“Postmodernism,”} def. 2).

In a reference entry that does not have multiple definitions, you only need to cite the name of the entry. However, if there are multiple definitions, then include the one that you used.

Citing the Bible
When citing from the Bible, cite the title of the edition used as well as the title of the book that the specific quote is from. Additionally, the books of the Bible are often abbreviated. For example, “Ezekiel” becomes “Ezek.” The line numbers are cited in the same way that classical plays are cited.

**Here is an example:**

Ezekial sees what seems to be “four living creatures” that have the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (\textit{\textit{New Jerusalem Bible}}, Ezek. 1.5-10).

For citations from the Bible, cite line numbers instead of page numbers. Use arabic numerals (1,2,3).

Indirect Quotations (Citing a Source within a Source)
On occasion, you may come across a citation within a text that you would like to incorporate into your work. If this is the case, \textit{you should always} attempt to find the original source of the quotation and quote it directly. However, sometimes you will need to quote a source that quotes another source (for example, if Saint Mary’s does not have access to the original source through its databases or through Novanet).
If this is the case, then after you paraphrase or quote the original source, use “qtd. in” followed by the source that you found the information in. **Do not** include the original source in your Works Cited list; just include the source in which you found the information.

**Here is an example:**

This “multiplicity also creates the uncanny sensation that the text is deeply monologic, the product of a singular, though divided, self” (Urban qtd. in Watson 192).

**Citing a Source without Page Numbers**

If the source being cited does not contain page numbers, then there are several different ways to cite it, depending on the information available.

If the source numbers specific sections (i.e., chapters), then you can cite those, including a comma after the author’s name. The proper abbreviations include the following:

- Book: bk.
- Chapter: ch.
- Note: n
- Number: no.
- Paragraph: par.
- Section: sec. or sect.
- Volume: vol.

**Here is an example:**

(Malton, ch. 3)

**OR**

As Malton explains, “quote quote quote” (ch. 3).

If the source does not have any numbered parts or sections, then do not include anything after the author’s name. **Do not** count paragraph numbers for a non-numbered source.

**Here is an example:**

“quote quote quote” (Morley)

**OR**

Morley suggests that “quote quote quote”.

Watson is the author of the source in which Urban’s quotation was found. This source **does** get added to the Works Cited list.

Urban is the author of the information being quoted. This source **does not** get put into the Works Cited list.
**The Works Cited List**

A Works Cited list is a detailed list of all the sources (journal articles, books, primary sources, documents from websites, interviews, etc.) used in preparing a paper. It appears at the end of an essay on a new page. Here are some things to note about the Works Cited list:

- **Alphabetically Organize the List:** Entries should be arranged in alphabetical order by authors’ last names. If you have a source without an author, arrange it alphabetically by title within the same list. In this case, ignore any initial A, An, or The.

- **Authors:** If the work has only one author, the entry should include the author’s last name, followed by the first name and separated with a comma (e.g. Watson, Ariel). If there is more than one author, the second author’s name will appear in the regular form. Use the word "and" when listing multiple authors of a single work (e.g. MacLeod, Alexander, and Jennifer VanderBurgh).

- **Hanging Indent:** The first line of the entry is flush with the left margin, and all subsequent lines are indented (5 to 7 spaces) to form a "hanging indent."

- **Double-spaced:** Similar to the body of the paper, the Works Cited list should be double-spaced, both between and within entries.

- **Web Publications:** The date of retrieval must be recorded, as Web sources are subject to frequent updates and alterations. Inclusion of URLs is not necessary unless otherwise specified by your professor. If you are required to cite the URL, place the complete address within angle brackets, at the end of the entry and followed by a period.

- **Cross-Referencing an Anthology:** When listing multiple works contained within one anthology, it is not necessary to include the full publication details for each entry. Include a complete entry for the anthology, then add separate cross-reference entries for each individual piece. Cross-reference entries include the author’s name and the title of the piece in quotation marks, followed by the anthology editor’s name and the page numbers of the piece.

**SAMPLE WORKS CITED ENTRIES**

**Books**

**Book with one author**


**Book with an editor**

Book with two or three authors or editors


Book with more than three authors or editors


Book with no author or editor


Entry in an anthology (no author)


Entry in an anthology (with an author)


Entire anthology

**Introduction, preface, or foreword to a book**


**Entry in a reference source (dictionary, encyclopedia, etc.)**


**Entry in a reference source (dictionary, encyclopedia, etc.) with an author**


**The Bible**


**Translation**


**Plays**

**Original play**

Play in an anthology


Classical Play (Shakespeare, Ancient Greek play, etc.)


Journal Articles

Article in a scholarly journal (print source)


Article from an electronic database

Websites and Internet Sources

Document on a website


Title of the overall website

Publisher or sponsor of the site. If one is not listed, then write N.p.

Document title - if there is no title, then identify the type of page (i.e. “Homepage”, “Online posting”, “Introduction”, etc.)

Retrieval date

Website


If the website is being cited as a whole, then list the title first. If particular information from the website is being cited, then list the editor first (as you would normally list an author or editor).

Publisher or sponsor of the site. If one is not listed, then write N.p.

Date retrieved

Electronic or digital book


Include the name of the database or website where the book was retrieved.

Other Types of Sources

Entry in a course pack


Title of the coursepack

Editor’s name (will usually be the professor of the course)

Always shorten “University” to “U” when listing a publisher.

Lecture


Title of lecture

Name/title of the course or conference, if applicable

Sponsoring organization, if applicable

Location of the lecture (city)

Date of lecture
**Article in a newsletter**


If no volume or issue is provided, include the month or season and year of the newsletter immediately after the title (i.e., *Teaching & Learning* Fall 2007).

Volume and issue number (if applicable)

Page number(s) of the article

**Thesis or dissertation**


Diss. Saint Mary’s University, 2006. Print.

Write “Thesis” if it is a Master’s or Undergraduate thesis and “Diss.” if it is a PhD dissertation.

**Published interview**


Print.

Person being interviewed

Interviewer’s name (if known and pertinent)

Title of the work in which the interview is published (cite it according to the type of source it is – i.e. journal, magazine, etc.)

**Unpublished interview**

MacLeod, Alexander. Personal interview. 10 Jan. 2010.

Person being interviewed

Type of interview (i.e., Personal or Telephone)

Date the interview was conducted

**Personal communications (letters, emails, memos, etc.)**


Author of the communication

Title or subject line of the message (if applicable)

Description of the message including the recipient

Date of the message

Medium of delivery
Works Cited


In the essay “Close-Ups,” Adam Phillips declares that any “coherent account a person can give of their history is, by definition, a defensive account,” because a “modern person distances themselves from their history through narrative coherence and plausibility” (149). It is this exact idea that “[a] good story is bad history” which Samuel Beckett responds to in Endgame. As Phillips explains, it is impossible to write a “coherent, intelligible narrative about events that rendered people vague, incoherent, numbed and hurried” (148). How can one write a true history of events like the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, the American slave trade, or the Irish famine without communicating the very absurdity of them? Beckett is a playwright who was motivated by some form of this question; accordingly, his works express “the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach” (Theatre of the Absurd 17).

In Endgame, Beckett does not allude to historical events; rather, he evokes the incoherence and absurdity of having experienced them purely through the formal elements of the play. These formal elements include the use of repetition, the failure of language to convey meaning, and the use of questions.

Beckett begins Endgame with a repetitive speech that immediately communicates the notion of absurdity to the reader:

CLOV (fixed gaze, tonelessly):

Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.

(Pause)

Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s

A heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. (1)

In these lines, the word that starts each sentence also appears in the middle and the end. Clov’s multiple repetitions make his speech seem almost circular in nature and, therefore, unintelligible to the reader.…. [section continues]
Beckett continues to evoke incoherence by revealing how language continually fails witnesses of catastrophic events. For example, Hamm struggles to find the words to discuss the post-apocalyptic world that he inhabits:

   HAMM: Do you not think this has gone on long enough?

   CLOV: Yes!

   (Pause.)

   What?

   HAMM: This…this…thing. (45, emphasis added)

Hamm’s inability to identify the world he lives in as anything more than “this” or “thing” is indicative of the problem of translating the true spirit of traumatic events into words… [section continues]

Phillips concludes “Close-Ups” by leaving the reader with the question of “how to historicize too-closeness” (149). In Endgame, Beckett seems to propose that the key to telling the truth about the traumatic events we experience is to communicate the absolute absurdity of them.

He evokes the true feelings of events like the Holocaust and the Irish Famine not by attempting to situate them in a coherent and plausible narrative, but by writing a babbling, vague, disconnected, and repetitive play about people who experienced some unknown tragedy and are left unable to explain it or even name it. Ultimately, one is left to wonder whether or not Endgame, and not Steven Spielberg’s Schindler’s List or Roméo Dallaire’s Shake Hands with the Devil, should be revered as the most authentic account of every atrocity in human history.
Works Cited


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- **Alphabetically organize the list**: Entries should be arranged in alphabetical order by authors' last names. If you have multiple sources by one author, arrange them alphabetically by title within the same list. In this case, ignore any initial *A*, *An*, or *The*.

- **Hanging Indent**: The first line of the entry is flush with the left margin, and all subsequent lines are indented (5 to 7 spaces) to form a "hanging indent."

- **Double-spaced**: Similar to the body of the paper, the Works Cited list should be double-spaced, both between and within entries.

- **Web Publications**: The date of retrieval must be recorded, as Web sources are subject to frequent updates and alterations. Inclusion of URLs is not necessary unless otherwise specified by your professor. If you are required to cite the URL, place the complete address within angle brackets.
Further Guides to MLA Style and Writing Assistance


The Writing Centre, in Room 115 of the Burke Building on Saint Mary’s campus, has many writing guides and style manuals to help students. In addition, we offer tutoring services for help with English essays and all other types of writing assignments. Online Writing guides are also available. To book an appointment or for more information, please contact us:

The Writing Centre  
Burke 115  
Tel: (902) 491-6202  
writing@smu.ca  
http://www.smu.ca/academic/writingcentre/