In-Text Citations: MLA

A research paper is a collaboration with the scholars and writers who have made contributions to the body of knowledge concerning a topic. Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines help writers document the sources from which they obtained the evidence they are using to support their arguments. In-text citations are a key component of this documentation.

Placement and Format of In-text Citations

An in-text citation appears at the end of the sentence in which a quote or paraphrase appears. The citation information appears in parentheses. The data contained in in-text citations serve as pointers to the corresponding listings on the Works Cited page. For detailed information about how to use signal phrases with in-text citations, refer to *A Writer's Reference*, pp. 154-56.

Examples:

1. This segment from a research paper **uses a signal phrase** to introduce the quotation:

   Similarly, Judith K. Powers emphasizes, "Because collaborative techniques depend so heavily on shared basic assumptions or patterns, conferences that attempt merely to take the techniques we use with native-speaking writers and apply them to ESL writers may fail to assist the writers we intend to help" (41). *[Note that because a signal phrase is used, only the page number is shown in the in-text citation.]*

2. This sentence uses **no signal phrase** to introduce the quote; therefore, the author's name must appear in the in-text citation along with the page number:

   Writing tutors must serve as "informant[s] of rhetoric and culture for ESL writers" (Ganguly 11).

3. When the source has **two authors**, do one of the following: (a) Mention both of them in the signal phrase and put only the page number(s) in the in-text citation, or (b) put both authors' names in the in-text citation followed by the page number(s). Example: (Collins and Lucas 227).

4. When the source has **three or more authors**, you may list the first author followed by the abbreviation "et al." Example: (Austen et al. 332). *[Note that there is a period after "et al." Use the same form in the in-text citation as in the works cited list.]*

5. There may occasionally be **multiple quotes or paraphrases by the same author but from different sources**. In this case, distinguish which source the quote or paraphrase refers to in the in-text citation.

Example:

Muriel Harris describes collaborative learning as an opportunity for students to "shake off their passive classroom stance and assume some responsibility for getting involved with their own learning" ("What's Up" 32). *[Note that the author is already mentioned in the signal phrase, so her name is not needed in the in-text citation.]*

Writing center tutorials play a key role in improving college students' writing skills because "collaboratively learning about writing involves interaction between writer and reader to help the writer improve her own abilities and produce her own text . . ." (Harris, "Collaboration" 273). *[Note that because there is no signal phrase, the author's name must be included in the in-text citation.]*

Here are the corresponding listings on the Works Cited page:

Harris, Muriel. "Collaboration Is Not Collaboration Is Not Collaboration: Writing Center Tutorials vs. Peer-Response Groups." *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*. Edited by Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blumner, Allyn, 2001, pp. 272-87.

Harris, Muriel. "What's Up and What's In: Trends and Traditions in Writing Centers." *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers*. Edited by Christina Murphy and Joe Law, Hermagoras, 1995, pp. 27-36.

6. In rare instances, your paper may have **two paraphrases from different authors in a single sentence**. In this case, place both in-text citations at the end of the sentence. List them in alphabetical order and use a semicolon to separate them.
   Example:

   It was not until the mid-1990s that training regarding diversity and multicultural issues in writing conferences was available for college writing faculty and peer tutors in writing centers (Edlund 203; Kilborn 394).

7. If the **original text for a quote or paraphrase can be found on more than one page**, put the page range in the in-text citation. Examples: (Harris 274-75); (O'Connor 399-400).

8. If you use an **indirect source** (a source quoted by another source) without using any of the surrounding material, show where you found the quote by using the abbreviation "**qtd. in**" as part of the in-text citation.

   Example:

   Judith K. Powers says that "the principle difference in the two conferencing situations appears to be the increased emphasis on our role as informant" (qtd. in Ganguly 11).

Print vs. Online Sources

The rules for writing in-text citations for online sources are the same as the ones for print sources. There are two exceptions:

1. There may be **no author listed** for a source. Use the first one of these items that is available: (a) article title; or (b) organization name. For example:

   Writing centers are becoming more and more common at all levels of public education. "[W]riting centers are no longer only . . . post-secondary phenomena. Increasingly they have become a part of school culture in high schools, middle schools, and even some elementary schools" ("Writing Center Resources").

Here is the corresponding listing on the Works Cited page:

"Writing Center Resources." *National Writing Project.* National Writing Project, 6 June 2011,
www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/3584.

2. There may be **no page or paragraph numbers** on the website to serve as a pointer for a quote or paraphrase. Use the first one of these items that is available: (a) author's name; (b) article title; or (c) organization name. **Do not include the page numbers from a website printout.**

   Example:

   The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina recommends that when working with ESL students, writing tutors should "provide several choices for rephrasing instead of a single alternative" ("Ten Tips"). *[Note that because the article does not provide an author's name, the first few identifying words of the title are used instead.]*

   Here is the corresponding listing on the Works Cited page:

   "Ten Tips for ESL Tutorials." *The Writing Center*. U of North Carolina, 15 July 2013,
   writingcenter.unc.edu/esl/teaching-resources/tips-for-writing-tutors/.

Punctuating In-text Citations

Use the table below to determine how to punctuate in-text citations.

Punctuation Mark	Use for:	Do NOT use for:	Placement
Period **(.)**	• All cited material	• To end a sentence prior to an in-text citation	• After in-text citations for quotes and paraphrases • Before in-text citations for block quotes • After the abbreviation "et al."
Semicolon **(;)**	• Citing more than one source in parentheses	• Any other type of in-text citation	• List authors' names in alphabetical order and separate with a semicolon. Ex.: (Bingley 32; Gardiner 129).
Question mark **(?)** or exclamation point **(!)** in a quote	• When part of original quoted material		• Include it exactly as it is in the original source. • Follow with closing double quotation mark. • Follow with the in-text citation. • Follow with a period.

For more information about in-text citations and relevant examples, see *A Writer's Reference*, pp. 154-56.