

the Writing Centers at Saint Mary's

Winona and Minneapolis

MLA Style: FAQs for In-text Citations

Why do I have to cite?

We cite for a few different reasons:

- Honesty and fairness require us to let readers know whose words or ideas we have borrowed.
- We must establish credibility and provide context for our ideas.
- Our responsibility is to provide sufficient documentation in a systematic way so that our reader can retrieve the information we used (so your in-text citations lead your reader to the Works Cited page entry for that source).

How do I cite within my essay?

You can cite either in a running text citation or in a parenthetical citation. To cite in running text means to place the author's name in the sentence without parentheses: Ewan uses a variety of images in this section like "knifing through the silky air" and "the steely coil of the hard ground under her feet" (147).

To cite parenthetically means to place the author's name inside parentheses along with the date (and page number, if used), as follows: The images include "knifing through the silky air" and "the steely coil of the hard ground under her feet" (Ewan 147).

Note that the end punctuation goes after the citation.

How often do I have to cite?

It's best practice to cite the name and page number in each sentence in which you are using an idea, a paraphrase, or original words (an exact quotation) from a source. In addition, you should cite all information that isn't "common knowledge" even if this is information you learned previously. For more information on this, see pages 124-126 of the *MLA Handbook*.

How can I vary the way I introduce sources?

Remember that you must integrate all quotations. You can do this with a signal phrase like this:

The narrator explains, "Within the half hour Briony would commit her crime" (Ewan 146).

Be sure to differentiate between the author and characters.

Note the comma after the attribution and that the quotation is capitalized.

Or the quotation can "flow" as part of the grammar of your sentence:

Ballenger says that notetaking can be a little like watching tennis" (125).

Use present tense when referring to what sources have said.

There is no comma here, and the quotation isn't capitalized because there is no attribution.

How do I use *et al.*?

Et al. is the abbreviation for the Latin phrase *et alia*, which means "and others." We use it to avoid having to type out multiple names for sources with three or more authors. If a source has three or more authors, write the last name of the first author and then use "et al." in place of the other names like this (Smith et al. 231).

What if there is no author?

If a source has no named author, you should use the title of the work for your in-text citations. You should spell out the title if you mention it within your sentence and shorten it if it appears within a parenthetical citation like this:

"Symbols and Images" gives several examples of unreliable narrators (23).

There are several examples of unreliable narrators ("Symbols" 23).

Be sure to put the title in quotation marks or italics per MLA Style rules.

