



This document provides guidance on formatting and writing an MLA research paper by reviewing material from EN 113 and presenting additional information on research papers. Mouse over each comment icon for more information. Please view this file in the latest version of Adobe's Acrobat Reader instead of a third party .pdf viewer.



First Last



Professor Last

EN 123

8 April 2013

Title 

After using the tab key to indent your first paragraph, begin your paper. Start your introduction by attempting to attract the reader's interest. Orient the reader to the topic by setting the context and providing any necessary background information. The introduction of a research paper may be expanded beyond the length of an ordinary essay because of the need to relate the content of the research to your topic. You may wish to set the context with historical or biographical research as long as you can show its relevance to the thesis. You might also wish to summarize critical opinions or to describe any particular critical problems that pertain to the topic. Lead your reader into the paper by providing the interesting and significant materials that you have uncovered during your research. The thesis statement is a one sentence summary of the paper's main points, and it should be the last sentence in your introductory paragraph. Try for a thesis that shows how the main points relate to each other.



If the assignment *does* ask you to use sources, support the topic sentence through the use of your ideas along with paraphrases, summaries, or brief quotations from professional sources that end with a parenthetical citation like this (Glenn and Gray 98). Your paper must have parenthetical documentation that shows where you obtained your information (Author page). You must indicate if you change pages, but not authors (101). If your source is an electronic source with no page numbers, then a parenthetical citation consists only of the author's last name.



Every sentence that uses information from a source needs a parenthetical citation. Be sure to



consult the chapters in your handbook on avoiding plagiarism, finding sources, using sources, and citing. Lindsey Hamlin and William Ryan recommend using [plagiarism.org](http://plagiarism.org) as an online resource on understanding and avoiding plagiarism (215). Distinguish directly copied material from your own. Always put quotation marks around every direct quotation copied verbatim from a source. If you quote three or more of someone's words verbatim and do not give them credit, you have plagiarized.

*Use quotations sparingly!* If you cannot express an idea in your own words, then you are learning very little about the subject that you are researching. Only use direct quotations if you cannot do a better job of presenting the material by summarizing and paraphrasing or if the wording in the source is necessary to communicate the point. However, even when you put someone else's ideas into your own words with paraphrasing or summarizing, you still must indicate the source of that information with MLA citations. See the paraphrasing guide later in this document for additional information. When you do choose to use quotations, and if you are writing about literature, "use present tense verbs" unless you are "discussing historical events," such as World War I or the The Great Depression (Kirszner and Mandell 28).

You must have a minimum of *four professional sources*. Each of the sources must be cited at least once with parenthetical citations in the paper, and all four must be listed on the Works Cited page. The maximum number of parenthetical references depends on how many times you use each source; however, you should be cautious about relying too much on any one source. You may use more than four secondary sources, but fewer than four sources will result in a failing grade. If you have a primary source for a literary paper, you must have at least *five* sources –the primary source and four secondary sources. If you have not used parenthetical

documentation *and* works cited entries for your sources, you have not written a research paper, and you *will fail the paper*.

When you are writing your paper, you may notice that some paragraphs get too lengthy. You will need to move beyond a basic five paragraph structure. Do not write paragraphs that last for one, two, or three pages. Look for natural thought breaks. Sometimes, you may be covering ideas that come in some type of logical or numerical order. See if you need to develop paragraphs from those breaks. It may also help to think of ideas in your thesis as being multi-paragraph *sections* instead of only one paragraph per main point.

The NMJC English Department knows you can write well, and we expect your best efforts in every paper. Read instructions carefully. Take time to --revise and edit. Everything counts in a college paper—neatness, spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence and paragraph construction, topic sentences, thesis sentence, organization, content—everything.

Sentence fragments, fused sentences, comma splices and subject-verb agreement issues are severe errors. If your professor alerts you to consistent problems with one or more of these errors, seek immediate help from your professor or the free tutoring offered by NMJC (see the course syllabus). Should you not take action to correct these severe errors, you can expect to receive failing grades.

Your paper needs a conclusion. It must be related to--grow out of--what has come before. Avoid introducing irrelevant ideas or merely summarizing the paper's main ideas. Good ways to conclude include referring to the paper's title or opening in a compelling way, speculating about the future, calling your reader to action, or ending with an anecdote to show the importance of your thesis. The words of your conclusion are the last ones your reader will see, and they ought to be good work.





  
Works Cited

 Glenn, Cheryl and Loretta Gray. *Harbrace Essentials*. 2nd ed. Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2015. Print.

 Hamlin, Lindsey S., and William T. Ryan. "Probing for Plagiarism in the Virtual

 Classroom." *The iDeal Reader*. Comp. Linda Connell, Dallas Hulsey, Pete Mladinic, and Susan Waters. New York: McGraw-Hill Create, 2012. 214-17. Print.

 Kirszner, Laurie G. and Stephen R. Mandell. *Lit*. New York: Wadsworth, 2011. Print.



**See the attached MLA Template.docx file for a template you can use for your papers in Microsoft Word.**

## Topic Selection

*Topics should be appropriate to the theme of your class* (American Literature, World Literature, etc.). Check with your professor for additional guidance on topics. To write an *analytical research paper*, you will *first* need to read the short-story, poem, play, essay, or novel you have chosen. Next, you will need to decide upon the approach to employ.

Here are some examples of approaches that you might want to use:

1. A paper on a particular work. You might treat character (e.g., Huck Finn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), tone, form, allegory, symbolism, imagery, or irony to establish the theme in a particular work.
2. A paper on an idea frequently used by a particular author. The paper could be about an idea, or some specific facet of style, imagery, tone, or humor of the author. It could trace the origins and development of the topic through a number of different works by the same author. An example might be “the use of the tragic mode in Shakespearean plays,” or “Edgar Allan Poe’s use of premature burial.”
3. A paper showing the influence of an idea, a philosophy, a political situation, or an artistic movement on a specific literary work. A paper on influences can be rather cut-and-dried, as in “the influence of Queen Elizabeth upon the reigning playwrights of her day” or “the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis on Flannery O’Connor’s story ‘A Good Man is Hard to Find.’”
4. A paper on the origins of a particular work or type of work. You would need to read the piece of literature and examine the historical and cultural context of the work. For example, you might write a paper on “how the political atmosphere in Ireland led to Jonathan Swift’s publication of ‘A Modest Proposal’” or on “how Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* critiques the excesses of the 1920s.”
5. A paper that contrasts a written version of a work with an adaptation in another medium. You would need to read a piece of literature and contrast it with another version of the story. For instance, you might write a paper on how the film version of *I am Legend* reverses the meaning in Richard Matheson’s original novel.
6. Other areas are possible. Consult with your professor about selecting a topic.

## Guide to paraphrasing

**Paraphrase or summarize as you take notes from your sources.** A **paraphrase** is a restatement of a source in about the same number of words. Restating thoughts and ideas in your own words, while taking notes, will make composing your final paper much easier. You will have already done the hard part!

**To ensure you are paraphrasing, do the following:**

- A. Read and reread the passage.
- B. Turn the material over and write about what you have read.
- C. Look at the material again. Did you use the author's same words? If so, try again.
- D. If you did succeed in using your own language, check to see that you kept the same idea or original intent of the author. If not, try again.

Paraphrasing enables you to demonstrate that you have understood your reading; it also enables you to help your audience understand the results of your reading. Paraphrase to clarify poor writing in your source or to restate difficult material more simply. **Your restatement of someone else's words should honor some important principles:**

- A. Your version should be almost entirely in your own words, and
- B. Your words should accurately convey the content of the original passage.
- C. If you only changed a few words in a passage, you have not adequately restated it.
- D. **If you are in doubt** about whether to cite a source or not, the best policy is to **cite it**.
- E. **Start your entry by giving credit to the author whom you are paraphrasing and end with the parenthetical information:**

### EXAMPLE:

Kenneth Shropshire has argued that corruption in college sports could be reduced if college athletes received stipends from the schools that they play for, or if necessary, from the NCAA. Athletes should have at least as much spending money as their fellow students do (106).

The citation begins with the author's name: Kenneth Shropshire. It ends with the page number (106). **HEREAFTER** when referring to the author within the body of a sentence, you would use only the last name Shropshire to refer to the author, unless you have two or more authors with the same last name.

## Recommended Writing and Research Resources:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBJD28b9E38> is a video tutorial on MLA format.

<http://www.roadtogrammar.com/> is a site with self-grading grammar exercises. These are great for practicing.

<http://www.chompchomp.com/> is another site with self-grading grammar exercises.

<http://www.mrgunnar.net/ap.cfm?subpage=348270> is a classic essay titled “How to Say Nothing in 500 Words” by Paul Roberts on how to write a great essay.

<http://pathosethoslogos.com/> explores the classic concepts of rhetoric.

<http://plagiarism.org/> will answer all of your questions about how to avoid plagiarism.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> is a comprehensive writing handbook online.

 <http://www.nmjc.edu/assets/documents/Library%20Skills%20Comic2012.pdf> is a guide to the services offered by Pannell library. This guide is tremendously helpful when working on a research paper. Be sure to read it.

<http://webcat.elinlib.org/uhtbin/webcat> is the library catalog for Pannell library. This is a good place to start your research, especially if you are looking for print books.

<http://www.nmjc.edu/library/inforesources2.asp> is the index of the online databases available to NMJC students. Some databases offer "Citation Tools" that include a citation in MLA format that you can copy and paste into your paper. Besides being easy to cite, these databases include professional sources. The advantages of database sources are why the paper for this class requires you to use databases and other professional sources over search engines like Google.

<http://scholar.google.com/> is the Google Scholar search page. Do not use Google. If you need to go outside of what the library offers, try Google Scholar.

**This lesson was written by Linda Connell and edited by Dallas Hulsey.**