MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

Third Edition

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PREFACE FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

For nearly half a century, the style recommended by the Modern Language Association of America for scholarly manuscripts and student research papers has been widely adopted not only by journals and university presses but also by graduate schools, college departments, and individual instructors. The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, incorporating MLA style guidelines, serves as a supplementary text in writing courses or as a reference book for students to use independently. The extraordinary publication success of the first two editions of the *Handbook* throughout the United States, Canada, and other countries (Japanese translations appeared in 1980 and 1984) testifies to the continuing need for such a teaching and research tool.

This new edition has given us the opportunity to incorporate suggestions received from instructors who have been using the *Handbook* for a decade or more. In our revision, we have tried to clarify any ambiguities, to amplify matters only touched on previously, and to offer additional, and updated, examples when needed. We include more detail on the ways that computer technology can assist students in preparing research papers, and we fully cover the problem of documenting nonprint sources (films, television programs, recordings, performances, computer software, information from a computer service). Once again, to help students with spacing and indentation, we reproduce examples in typescript.

For the instructor who wishes to use the *MLA Handbook* as a class text, chapter 1 provides an expanded discussion of research and writing procedures: approaching the research paper, selecting a topic, using the library, compiling a working bibliography, taking notes, avoiding plagiarism, outlining, and writing the paper. This edition, like its predecessors, has chapters on the mechanics of writing (spelling, punctuation, names of persons, numbers, titles in the text, and quotations), on the format of the research paper (typing, paper, margins, spacing), and on abbreviations and reference words. The chapters "Preparing the List of Works Cited" and "Documenting Sources" contain comprehensive instructions on the MLA documentation style. (For the convenience of instructors who prefer a different system, we also explain alternative methods of citation.)

Aimed specifically at writers of research papers, the *MLA Handbook* pays only minimal attention to the problems that these writers share with all other writers. Questions of usage and writing style have been left, for the most part, to the many excellent manuals in that field.

Similarly, we have again resisted the temptation to include a complete research paper as an example, although we do provide a sample first page and a sample bibliography page at the end of the book, just before the comprehensive subject index. The response we have received from instructors suggests that their conceptions of the "ideal" research paper vary widely. Few teachers seem to agree on such basic questions as how the paper should be organized and developed, what its length should be, how many sources are necessary, and how much quotation and documentation it should include. Indeed, requirements often vary with different courses, assignments, and types of students. Many teachers report that they supply sample papers geared to specific classes and assignments or provide handouts offering supplementary comments on specific sections of the *Handbook*—for instance, relating the general discussion of research to the resources and services available in the school library, calling attention to material of particular relevance to the assignment, or stating the instructor's preferences on matters of form. We invite teachers who have found other helpful ways of using the *Handbook* in their classrooms to share this information with their colleagues.

Although it would be impossible to acknowledge everyone who assisted us with this project, we would like to express our gratitude to a number of persons who read and commented on drafts of the various editions of the *Handbook* and who offered us valuable advice and practical suggestions: John Algeo, Judith H. Altreuter, R. Neil Beshers, Richard Bjornson, Richard I. Brod, Frank N. Carney, Eric J. Carpenter, Gaetano Cipolla, Susan Y. Clawson, Thomas Clayton, Robert A. Colby, Claire Cook, Elizabeth W. Cowan, Gregory Cowan, Richard H. Cracroft, Marianna Davis, Robert J. Di Pietro, Richard J. Dunn, Bertie E. Fearing, John H. Fisher, Ron Fortune, Jesse Gatlin, Mary W. George, John C. Gerber, Dixie Goswami, Judy Goulding, Barbara Q. Gray, Martin Green, Stephen Greenblatt, Sterling Haig, Hilda Hanze, Laurel T. Hatvary, Carla Hayes, Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Kristin Helmers, Elizabeth Holland, Jeffrey Howitt, Robert R. Hoyt, Cheryl Hurley, Randall L. Jones, Joanne G. Kashdan, Weldon A. Kefauver, Gwin J. Kolb, Lawrence D. Kritzman, Barbara S. LaBarba, Richard A. LaFleur, Richard L. Larson, Sarah

PREFACE FOR THE STUDENT

The *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* describes a set of conventions governing the written presentation of research. The recommendations on the mechanics and format of the research paper reflect the practices recommended by the Modern Language Association of America (a professional organization of some 25,000 instructors of English and other languages) and required by college teachers throughout the United States and Canada. Questions of writing style—choice of words, sentence structure, tone, and so on—are covered in other guides, such as those listed in section 1.11, and are not considered here.

Chapter 1 discusses the logical steps in research and writing—selecting a topic, using the library, preparing a working bibliography, taking notes, avoiding plagiarism, outlining, and writing drafts. Chapter 2 concerns the mechanics of writing (e.g., punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and the treatment of quotations and titles in the text), and chapter 3 deals with the formal preparation of the manuscript—typing (or, if you are using a word processor, printing) and binding the paper. Chapter 4, on preparing the list of works cited, provides well over two hundred examples illustrating bibliographic forms for both printed and other sources often referred to in research papers (e.g., films, recordings, and computer materials), and chapter 5 explains how to document such sources in the text. Following chapter 6, on abbreviations and reference words, the book concludes with sample pages from a research paper and a subject index.

The *MLA Handbook* is intended as both a classroom text and a reference tool. If you read it through first from cover to cover, you may find it easier to use later when you consult it for specific recommendations. The chapters are divided into numbered sections and subsections, and by citing these, rather than page numbers, the index makes it easy to find the information you need.

CONTENTS

1. RESEARCH AND WRITING

1.1. The research paper

A research paper is, first and foremost, a form of written communication. Like other forms of nonfiction writing—letters, memos, reports, essays, articles, books—it should present information and ideas clearly and effectively. But when students are asked to write research papers, they often become so preoccupied with gathering material, taking notes, compiling bibliographies, and documenting sources that they forget to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired through previous writing experiences. This discussion, therefore, begins with a brief review of the steps often outlined for expository writing. Although few writers follow such formal steps, keeping them in mind can suggest ways to proceed as you write:

If given a choice, select a subject that interests you and that you can treat within the assigned limits of time and space.

Determine your purpose in writing the paper. For example, do you want to describe something, explain something, argue for a certain point of view, or persuade your reader to think or do something?

Consider the type of audience you are writing for. For example, is your reader a specialist or a nonspecialist on the subject, someone likely to agree or disagree with you, someone likely to be interested or uninterested in the subject?

Develop a thesis statement expressing the central idea of your paper.

Gather your ideas and information in a preliminary list, eliminating anything that would weaken your paper.

Arrange materials in an order appropriate to the aims of the paper and decide on the method or methods you will use in developing your ideas (e.g., definition, classification, analysis, comparison and contrast, example).

Make a detailed outline to help you keep to your plan as you write.

Write a preliminary draft, making sure that you have a clear-cut introduction, body, and conclusion.

Read your preliminary draft critically and try to improve it, revising, rearranging, adding, and eliminating words, phrases, and sentences to make the writing more effective. Follow the same procedure with each subsequent draft.

Proofread the final draft, making all final corrections.

As you prepare and write research papers, always remember that no set of conventions for preparing a manuscript can replace lively and intelligent writing and that no amount of research and documentation can compensate for a poor presentation.

Although the research paper has much in common with other forms of writing, it differs from many of them in relying on sources of information other than the writer's personal knowledge and experience. It is based on primary research, secondary research, or a combination of the two. Primary research involves the study of a subject through firsthand observation and investigation, such as conducting a survey or carrying out a laboratory experiment; secondary research entails the examination of studies that others have made of the subject. Many academic papers, as well as many reports and proposals required in business, government, and other professions, depend on secondary research.

Research will increase your knowledge and understanding of a subject and will often lend authority to your ideas and opinions. The paper based on research is not a collection of other persons' thoughts and words but a carefully constructed presentation of ideas that relies on research sources for clarification and verification. While you must fully document the facts and opinions you draw from your research, the documentation should do no more than support your statements and provide concise information about the research cited; it should never overshadow the paper or distract the reader from the ideas you present.

1.2.   Selecting a topic

All writing begins with a topic. If you have some freedom in choosing what to write about, look for a subject that interests you and that will maintain your interest throughout the various stages of research and writing. Some preliminary reading in the library will help you determine the extent of your interest. A library visit can also reveal whether enough serious work has been done on the subject to permit adequate research and whether the pertinent source materials are readily available.

In selecting a topic, keep in mind the time allotted to you and the expected length of the research paper. "Twentieth-Century World Pol-

itics" would obviously be too broad a subject for a ten-page term paper. Students commonly begin with fairly general topics and then refine them, by research and thought, into more specific ones. Here again, preliminary reading will be helpful. Consult books and articles as well as some general reference works, such as encyclopedias, and try to narrow your topic by focusing on a particular aspect or a particular approach. A student initially interested in writing on Shakespeare's imagery, for instance, might decide, after some careful thought and reading, to focus on the blood imagery in *Macbeth*; the topic "Modern Technology and Human Procreation" could likewise be narrowed to "The Future of Surrogate Motherhood."

Before beginning the project, make sure you understand the amount and depth of research required, the degree of subjectivity permitted, and the type of paper expected. Confer with your instructor if you need help in understanding the assignment or in choosing an appropriate topic.

1.3. Using the library

1.3.1. Introduction to the library

Since most of your research papers will draw on the works of experts and scholars, you should become thoroughly acquainted with the libraries to which you have access. Many academic libraries offer programs of orientation and instruction to meet the needs of all students, the beginning researcher as well as the graduate student. There may be introductory pamphlets or handbooks, guided tours, and lectures or even courses on using the library.

Nearly all public and academic libraries have desks staffed by professional reference librarians who can tell you about the available instructional programs and help you locate information. For a comprehensive introduction to the library, consult such books as Jean Key Gates, *Guide to the Use of Libraries and Information Sources* (5th ed., New York: McGraw, 1983), and Margaret G. Cook, *New Library Key* (3rd ed., New York: Wilson, 1975). Useful for reference works in literary studies are Margaret C. Patterson, *Literary Research Guide* (2nd ed., New York: MLA, 1983), and Nancy L. Baker, *A Research Guide for Undergraduate Students: English and American Literature* (2nd ed., New York: MLA, 1985).

1.3.2.   The central catalog

The first step in getting to know your library is learning to use the central card catalog or, if the files are stored in a computer, the on-line catalog. Books are usually listed in the catalog by author, title, and subject. In some libraries, author cards, title cards, and subject cards are arranged alphabetically in a single catalog. Most libraries, however, divide the cards into two catalogs (author and title cards in one, subject cards in the other) or, more rarely, into three catalogs (one each for authors, titles, and subjects).

Next, become familiar with the two systems of classification most frequently used in American libraries: the Dewey decimal system and the Library of Congress system. The Dewey decimal system classifies books under 10 major headings:

000	General works
100	Philosophy
200	Religion
300	Social sciences
400	Language
500	Natural sciences
600	Technology and applied sciences
700	Fine arts
800	Literature
900	History and geography

The Library of Congress system divides books into 20 major groups:

A	General works
B	Philosophy and religion
C	General history
D	Foreign history
E-F	American history
G	Geography and anthropology
H	Social sciences
J	Political science
K	Law
L	Education
M	Music
N	Fine arts
P	Language and literature

Q	Science
R	Medicine
S	Agriculture
T	Technology
U	Military science
V	Naval science
Z	Bibliography and library science

If you know the author of a book, you can locate it by consulting the author card. The combination of letters and numbers in the upper left-hand corner of the card (PS3521.A7255Z462 in the accompanying figure) is the designation by which the book is shelved in the library. The top few lines of the card contain the author's name and date of birth (Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-), the full title of the book (*Albums of Early Life*), and complete publication information (published by Ticknor & Fields in the city of New Haven in the year 1980). The next few lines, in smaller print, describe the physical characteristics of the book (229 pages of text, 22 centimeters in height) and give the International Standard Book Number (0-89919-015-4). The lower half of the card shows the subject entries under which the book is also cataloged (Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-   —Biography; Authors, American—20th century—Biography; Critics—United States—Biography), the Library of Congress classification number (PS3521.A7255Z462), the Dewey decimal number (818.5203), the alternative Dewey classification (B, for biography), and the Library of Congress catalog card number (80-14481).

PS3521
.A7255
Z462   **Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-**
               Albums of early life / Stanley Kauffmann. — New Haven :
         Ticknor & Fields, 1980.
               229 p. ; 22 cm.
               ISBN 0-89919-015-4

               1. Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-   —Biography. 2. Authors, American—
         20th century—Biography. 3. Critics—United States—Biography.   I. Title.
         PS3521.A7255Z462   818'.5203   80-14481
                                           ₁B₁   MARC

         Library of Congress

If you know only the title of a book, you can locate it by consulting the title card, which differs from the author card only in that the title of the book appears at the top of the card.

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              Albums of early life
PS3521
 .A7255      Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-
  Z462           Albums of early life / Stanley Kauffmann. — New Haven :
                 Ticknor & Fields, 1980.
                 229 p. ; 22 cm.
                 ISBN 0-89919-015-4




                 1. Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-        —Biography.  2. Authors, American—
                 20th century—Biography.  3. Critics—United States—Biography.   I. Title.
                 PS3521.A7255Z462              818'.5203                  80-14481
                                                 ₍B₎                          MARC

                 Library of Congress
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If you have no author or title in mind but wish to find a book or books on a particular topic, consult the subject card, which differs from the author card only in that the subject appears at the top of the card. (To find the appropriate headings, see *Library of Congress Subject Headings* or the list your library follows.)

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              Critics--United States--Biography
PS3521
 .A7255      Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-
  Z462           Albums of early life / Stanley Kauffmann. — New Haven :
                 Ticknor & Fields, 1980.
                 229 p. ; 22 cm.
                 ISBN 0-89919-015-4




                 1. Kauffmann, Stanley, 1916-        —Biography.  2. Authors, American—
                 20th century—Biography.  3. Critics—United States—Biography.   I. Title.
                 PS3521.A7255Z462              818'.5203                  80-14481
                                                 ₍B₎                          MARC

                 Library of Congress
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When using an online catalog, you can also locate books by author, title, and subject, but, instead of flipping through library cards and moving from one drawer to another, you conduct the search by typing appropriate information and commands on the keyboard of a computer terminal. If you enter the author's full name, the screen displays a list of all the books the library has by that author. When you select one that interests you, the screen shows the same bibliographic information for that book as a library card would. Entering the title produces a list of all the books the library has with that title. Again, when you select the appropriate one, the relevant bibliographic data appears. Entering a subject yields a list of books on that subject.

The online catalog can help you locate a book even if you lack some of the information you would ordinarily use for the search. If you know only the beginning part of the title—for example, only *Advertising, Competition*, instead of *Advertising, Competition, and Public Policy: A Simulation Study*—you can enter what you know, and the screen will display all titles that begin with those words. If you know only an author's last name, you can obtain a list of all authors with that last name. The computer-stored catalog will also allow you to initiate much more sophisticated searches. If, for instance, you know only a word in the middle of a title—let us say, using the above example, only *Competition*—you may call up a list of all titles containing that word. If you know only the publisher's name, you can usually get a list of that publisher's books by searching for the publisher's International Standard Book Number (ISBN) prefix.

Online catalog systems vary considerably in the assistance they offer. On command, some will even print out the bibliographic data displayed on the screen, thus not only saving you the time and effort of copying the information but also eliminating the possibility of transcription errors. Be sure to find out exactly what your library's system can do, and closely follow the directions for using it.

1.3.3.   Reference works

Besides knowing how to locate books on specific subjects, you should know the range of general reference works available to you, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, biographical works, yearbooks,

atlases, and gazetteers. The following are among the most widely used:

Dictionaries

Oxford English Dictionary
Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language

Encyclopedias

American Academic Encyclopedia
Collier's Encyclopedia
Columbia Encyclopedia
Encyclopedia Americana
Encyclopaedia Britannica

Biographical works for persons no longer living

Dictionary of American Biography (for the United States)
Dictionary of Canadian Biography
Dictionary of National Biography (for Great Britain)
Webster's Biographical Dictionary (also includes persons still living)

Biographical works for persons still living

Contemporary Authors
Current Biography
International Who's Who
Webster's Biographical Dictionary (also includes persons no longer living)
Who's Who in America

Yearbooks

Americana Annual
Britannica Book of the Year
Europa Year Book