Writing in MLA Format: Some Quick Tips

When writing a paper in MLA format, there are important tips to keep in mind. The first paragraph of the paper is the introduction. This paragraph introduces the topic of the paper, often zeroing in on why the writer is writing about this topic or why the topic is important. The thesis statement typically appears as the last sentence of the introduction; this sentence will make a statement about the point you discuss and support through the text of the paper.

This basic format can also be applied to longer papers. The introduction may be several paragraphs in length, and the thesis statement then typically appears at the end of the extended introduction (often on page two). Using an introduction with a thesis statement provides your readers with a clear understanding of the organization of your ideas. Remember that your reader is interested in keeping up with your thought processes, so it is important to organize your paper for the reader. Using an introduction, a thesis statement, MLA formatting, topic sentences, citations from outside research, and a conclusion will allow your reader to understand your ideas. Please note that each of the items listed in the previous sentence will now be discussed in the body of the paper.

The Modern Language Association of America (MLA) provides specific guidelines on how to format the paper as well. The paper should be double-spaced throughout. To double space a paper, right click, select “Paragraph,” change “Line Spacing” to “Double,” and check the box that reads “Don’t add space.” If there is already typed text, highlight the text on the page and
follow the same steps. The standard font for MLA is Times New Roman, or something readable with a distinct italic font, meaning it is easy to tell regular and italic font apart. The writer should use 12-point font, and font settings can be changed using the “Home” tab.

Topic sentences lead the body paragraphs of the paper. A topic sentence is similar to a thesis for a single paragraph. It connects the paragraph back to the thesis and guides discussion within the paragraph. When writing in MLA format, personal pronouns (first person) like I, we, and us should usually be avoided, especially in research papers. However, in some writing, the personal narrative for example, these can be used. Additionally, it is often best to avoid using the second person “you.” It is best to remain in the third person (he, she, it).

Citations allow the writer to include another person’s words or research in a paper without plagiarizing. Plagiarism results from a writer using another person’s work, in part or in whole, without giving credit to the original author. This can be either intentional or unintentional, but either will result in disciplinary consequences. The Anti-Plagiarism Foundation reports, “this could include a zero on the assignment or the entire course” (“Plagiarism”). Learn more about this by visiting the Writing Center webpage and watching the video about avoiding plagiarism. Fortunately, it is relatively easy to avoid plagiarism. When using a quote, paraphrase, or summary, insert an in-text citation for the source, along with an entry on the Works Cited (Author 2). An in-text citation consists of “the author’s last name and the page number where the information can be found” (Read, Write, and Learn 12). MLA provides a guide on how to cite a variety of different sources, so check how to cite the specific type of source that is used.

The final section of the paper is the conclusion. Along with the introduction, a thesis statement, MLA formatting, topic sentences, and citations from outside research, a conclusion
allows readers to better understand the writer’s intent. The thesis is usually rephrased at the beginning of the conclusion. This section will often provide a summary of what was discussed in the paper. The conclusion should leave the reader with a sense of why the paper is important or how what has been discussed affects the reader. Sometimes it is a call to action and urges the readers to do something as a result of reading the essay. The conclusion should be strong because this is the last impression the reader will get of the author’s thoughts.
Works Cited


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