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Citation practices, part two

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This is David Font-Navarrete, your disciplinary consultant for the humanities. In this video, I'll be talking about some issues related to citation in the humanities, with a focus on the MLA system.

So just to get an overview first of citation in the humanities. There are two most commonly used systems for citation in the humanities. The first is the MLA system. MLA is an acronym for the Modern Languages Association.

The other commonly used system is the Chicago or CMS system. I think it's kind of important to understand that we can't give a comprehensive account of any citation format in a few minutes. All of the systems are pretty subtle and complex.

In this video, I will try and cover some of the basics, though. I also offer some useful internet resources at the end of the video. One way to understand citation systems in general, I think, is as vehicles for types of epistemologies; that is, understandings of the nature of knowledge.

The very citation systems in that sense represent different ways to understand, develop, document, and disseminate knowledge in particular ways. As I mentioned, MLA is the system I'll be focusing on in this video.

It's by far the most common system for the study of English languages ~ English language ~ and literatures as well as other languages and literatures. It's also common to literary criticism, comparative literature, and the most recent related discipline, cultural studies.

So, some basic elements we'll be dealing with: Like any other system, MLA citation provides a standardized way for readers and writers to navigate academic texts. Once we become familiar with a citation system, it can become very efficient, comfortable even, as a way to exchange information.

In general, consistency and attention to detail are some of the primary goals when you're employing any citation system. So let's cover some of the basics of the MLA system.

First, formatting and page layout, some stylistic details, and ways to use citation of sources.

First, the document format. We begin with an eight and a half by eleven inch white sheet of paper. One-inch margins on all sides. And for each paragraph, a half-inch indentation at the very first line.

Typically double spaced, so equal space between every line of text. And we want to use a standard font. Times New Roman is, I think, the most common. After each punctuation mark, so a full stop, a period, a comma, a quotation mark, we want one space not two before the next letter.

And we always want a header in MLA format, with the last name of the author and consecutive page numbers for every page. In MLA format, like some of the others, we have longer works being specified by italics. So a book will be italicized ~ a book title, that is. An album of music will also be italicized, whereas shorter works, like an article, a poem, or in music, a song, will be, will have quotation marks around it.

Continuing with the formatting and sections of the document: The first page should begin with the name of the author. If it's for a course, the name of the professor or the instructor, the course name, and the date. Following that, centered, you'll have your title. That should be capitalized using title case, like the title of a book or an album of music. But not all capital letters, though.

Section headings, if you use them, should be organized with Arabic numerals followed by a period and a space. And at the end of the document, you'll have notes; that is, endnotes, and a list of works cited.

Endnotes and footnotes offer information outside of the body text. As their names suggest, endnotes are placed at the end of a document, while footnotes are placed at the bottom of pages. Both endnotes and footnotes are indicated in text by superscript Arabic numerals after the punctuation of the phrase or clause to which the note refers.

So in this example, like so. In MLA, footnotes are a bit less common than other systems and more complicated than endnotes. In fact, their use ~ that is, footnotes ~ is not even specified in the most recent edition of the MLA style guide. So, you should probably consult with your instructor for specific guidelines if you're using footnotes.

Another note is that in current word processing software, like Microsoft Word, endnotes and footnotes can be formatted and ordered with a variety of special functions. That are basically automated, so these can be quite convenient and are probably worth investigating.

Short quotations ~ fewer than four typed lines of prose or fewer than three lines of verse ~ should be enclosed within double quotation marks, such as these. The quotation is followed by parentheses that enclose the author's name and the page number on

which the quote appears. So here we have our author and the page number from the book it's citing. If the author is mentioned in the sentence, there's no need to mention, to include their name in the parentheses. Just the page number.

So here, in this example, I'm already specifying the name of the author, and so the only thing left to cite in the parentheses is the page number. This applies not just to complete sentences, but also ~ as in this final example ~ to phrases that are direct quotes from a source.

For quotations consisting of three or more lines of prose or four or more lines of verse ~ that is, poetry ~ we place quotations in a freestanding block of text, generally referred to as block quotations.

We start the quotation on a new line and the entire block quotation is indented one inch from the left margin, maintaining double spacing throughout it. The parenthetical citation here should come after the final punctuation end-marking the quotation itself.

There are two additional details that I'd like to point out in this example. The first is here with these brackets. If you add a word in a quotation, usually to provide some sort of context or fit a particular sentence structure, you put brackets around it to indicate that it's not part of the original text. So in this case, the words **in school** were added by me to the example.

Also, if you omit a word or words from a quotation, you should indicate that words were deleted with an ellipsis, which is this space period space period space period. This is done, again, to point out a change to the original quotation. Now, the last section of most documents is going to be the Works Cited. This is always beginning with flush left. And every line after the first [line for each entry] is indented a half-inch.

Really, the Works Cited section tends to be the most difficult aspect of any style of citation, any format. It's difficult to master these and they vary widely. There's a lot of detail involved here in citing secondary sources accurately. Just some notes, though. The medium of the Works Cited is really fundamentally important, so whether you are using a book as a source, an article, a periodical, a compact disc, a website, this is really very important in formatting the citation in the Works Cited.

Some details here to pay attention to: The general format for the book is last name, comma, first name. The title of the book, just like within the text, is italicized. We provide the city of publication followed by a colon. The publisher, comma, and the year of publication, and then a period. And the medium. Again, the medium is of primary importance in the Works Cited section of the MLA system.

Here's an example that I cited earlier. And just one out of any number of examples we could use. Here is an example of a work that was re-published, so an edition of a work originally published in 1990 and then reprinted in 1999.

Some other examples of different types of works cited. An entry from a dictionary. Here we see that the title of the entry is the primary unit, not the author.

A poem in an edited collection. So here we have the poet, the name of the poem, the name of the book in which it appears, including the editor. And, of course, the city, publisher, year of publication, and the page number in which the poem appears.

Here we have a film, Ed Wood, including some of the details of the performers, the director, and so forth. And also an example of how you might cite a personal communication with someone that you interview yourself. Their last name, first name. And just saying that it was a personal interview and providing the date.

And here are some of the very useful internet resources that you might want to consult as you make your way through the MLA or any of the other citation systems. You see the MLA, Chicago, and APA manuals own sites; that is MLA dot org, Chicago Manual of Style dot org, and APA style dot org.

And also some links to the Purdue Online Writing Lab's resources on research and citation. Thanks, and see you next time.