

The `mla` class*

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Abstract

Whilst the T_EX family of programs is widely used in the sciences and academia overall, there seems to be a lack of support for the humanities, which commonly adhere to MLA format for student papers and reports.

Though there *are* MLA-style packages available, none met the expectations of the author (who was mostly just nit-picky about elegance in code). So *voilà*, there now exists a proper `mla.cls`: a simple, straightforward class for composing papers almost perfectly adherent to the MLA style guide.

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1 Initial code

The mla class is based off the article class, so common macros such as `\textit` or `\figure` are useable as expected. Not to say we won't be re-defining a lot of macros, though.

```

1 \LoadClass[letterpaper,12pt]{article}

\mladate MLA requires use of day month year dates, not TeX's standard month, day year.
Here we'll define our own \mladate to give correct output.
2 \newcommand{\mladate}{%
3   \the\day\
4   \ifcase\the\month
5     \or January
6     \or February
7     \or March
8     \or April
9     \or May
10    \or June
11    \or July
12    \or September
13    \or October
14    \or November
15    \or December
16  \fi
17  \the\year
18 }
```

2 Options

Some instructors will still require usage of the seventh edition of MLA. MLA 8e is the default for this class, but either can be explicitly specified with the `mla8` or `mla7` options. All this actually does is change the edition specified to the `biblatex` package when loaded in in section 3.

```

19 \DeclareOption{mla7}{%
20   \def\blopts{style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,showmedium=true}
21 }
22 \DeclareOption{mla8}{%
23   \def\blopts{style=mla-new,noremoteinfo=false,showmedium=false}
24 }
```

2.1 Processing

The default is to use the eighth edition of MLA. Just in case something changes, however, it's wise to explicitly specify `mla8` in `\documentclass`.

```
25 \ExecuteOptions{mla8}
26 \ProcessOptions\relax
```

3 Loading packages

The `mla` class requires the following packages to work:

```
27 \RequirePackage{enotez}
28 \RequirePackage{fancyhdr}
29 \RequirePackage{fullpage}
30 \RequirePackage{indentfirst}
31 \RequirePackage{ragged2e}
32 \RequirePackage{times}
33 \RequirePackage{titlesec}
34 \RequirePackage{xstring}
```

And after all that, we finally load `biblatex` for the bibliography. The other packages here are prerequisites for `biblatex-mla`.

```
35 \RequirePackage[american]{babel}
36 \RequirePackage{csquotes}
37 \RequirePackage{hanging}
38 \RequirePackage[hidelinks,pdfusetitle]{hyperref}
39 \RequirePackage[\blopts,backend=biber]{biblatex}
```

4 Document Layout

Now for the difficult part. A lot of professors are *really* strict when it comes to laying out the paper right, so we can't take any chances here.

4.1 Font

The `times` package was already loaded in section 3, and the font size was set to 12pt when loading the `article` class in section 1. This should be metric-compatible with the infamous Times New Roman, the *de facto* standard of the MLA format.

4.2 Line spacing and breaking

The MLA prescribes perfect double-spacing, but L^AT_EX does it a little *too* perfect, putting one less line of text on the paper than expected from the “industry standard”, Microsoft Word. We'll compensate by setting the line spacing to *just enough*.

```
40 \linespread{1.99}
```

To further adhere to the MLA style guide, we'll forego all hyphenation and allow weird line breaks and uncanny whitespace.

```
41 \hyphenpenalty 10000
42 \pretolerance 10000
```

4.3 Paragraphing

MLA prescribes half-inch indents on the first line of each paragraph with no spaces in between. (Some professors will request you separate sections of lengthy papers, however; just put a paragraph in between the two consisting of “\par”.)

```
43 \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}
44 \setlength{\RaggedRightParindent}{\parindent}
45 \setlength{\parskip}{0em}
46 \setlength{\topsep}{0em}
```

MLA also cares more about consistent page count than beautiful typesetting. So, we'll accept our fate and allow orphans and widows for the sake of uniform line count.

```
47 \widowpenalty 0
48 \clubpenalty 0
49 \interlinepenalty 0
```

We also want flush-left ragged lines. (This is achieved with the `ragged2e` package.)

```
50 \RaggedRight
```

`noindent` The `noindent` environment works a little wonky when working with the `ragged2e` package, so we'll re-define it.

```
51 \renewenvironment{noindent}{%
52   \edef\tmpind{\parindent}
53   \setlength{\parindent}{0pt}
54 }{%
55   \setlength{\parindent}{\tmpind}
56   \undef\tmpind
57 }
```

4.4 Page layout

The MLA uses standard “letter-size” paper, and that's almost all we have in America anyway. The paper size was already set to letter when loading the `article` class in section 1.

Furthermore, the MLA prescribes uniform one-inch margins on said letter-size paper. This is taken care of with the `fullpage` package loaded in section 3. The `\textheight` and `\textwidth` definitions are here just for good measure.

```
58 \setlength{\textheight}{9in}
59 \setlength{\textwidth}{6.5in}
```

4.5 Running head

The running head in MLA style is simply the author’s surname followed by the page number, right-aligned. This is managed using the `fancyhdr` and `xstring` packages.

```
60 \fancypagestyle{norule}{%
61   \renewcommand{\headrulewidth}{0pt}
62   \renewcommand{\footrulewidth}{0pt}
63 }
64 \fancyhf{}
65 \pagestyle{headings}
66 \pagestyle{norule}
67 \fancyhead[R0]{\StrBehind{\@author}{ }[\last]\last} \thepage}
```

I have to fully admit I don’t know what the following code actually does, but I tweaked around the variables to get it all in the right place.

```
68 \setlength{\headheight}{18pt}
69 \setlength{\headsep}{12pt}
70 \setlength{\voffset}{-34pt}
```

5 Document Markup

5.1 The header

```
\title The \title, \author and \date macros are already defined in latex.dtx. Their
\author definitions are shown here for reference.
\date 71 % \newcommand*{\title}[1]{\gdef\@title{#1}}
72 % \newcommand*{\author}[1]{\gdef\@author{#1}}
73 % \newcommand*{\date}[1]{\gdef\@date{#1}}
```

The following, however, are unique to the `mla` class.

```
\professor The name of whoever assigned the paper, i.e. “Dr Marjorie Stewart”.
74 \newcommand*{\professor}[1]{\gdef\@professor{#1}}

\course The course for which this paper was assigned, i.e. “ENGL 101-02”.
75 \newcommand*{\course}[1]{\gdef\@course{#1}}
```

We make sure the internal macros used to store the above information are empty, lest something weird happen. `\date`, however, is generally set to the current date.

```
76 \title{}
77 \author{}
78 \professor{}
79 \course{}
80 \date{\today}
```

`\makemlaheader` This command prints out the standard five-line MLA header, including the centered title. (Note the use of `\mladate`; see section 1.)

```

81 \newcommand{\makemlaheader}{%
82   \begin{noindent}
83     \@author \\
84     \@professor \\
85     \@course \\
86     \mladate \\
87     \begin{center}\@title\end{center}
88   \end{noindent}
89 }

```

`\maketitle` And we'll just re-define `\maketitle` to execute `\makemlaheader`.

```

90 \renewcommand{\maketitle}{\makemlaheader}

```

5.2 Sectioning

`\section` Customary section headers are rather straightforward and only consist of the section number in Arabic numerals, a space and the section name, flush left. However, `\subsection` for the sake of clarity, we'll put ours in small-caps. `\subsubsection`

```

91 \renewcommand{\thesection}{\@arabic\c@section}
92 \renewcommand{\thesubsection}{\thesection.\@arabic\c@subsection}
93 \renewcommand{\thesubsubsection}{\thesubsection.\@arabic\c@subsubsection}

```

Un-fancifying the section headers is achieved using the `titlesec` package.

```

94 \titleformat*{\section}{\normalsize\sc}
95 \titleformat*{\subsection}{\normalsize\sc}
96 \titleformat*{\subsubsection}{\normalsize\sc}
97 \titlespacing*{\section}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
98 \titlespacing*{\subsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
99 \titlespacing*{\subsubsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
100 \titlelabel{\thetitle. }

```

TeX generally doesn't indent the first paragraph after a section header. Since this violates MLA style, we'll simply rely on the `indentfirst` package as loaded in section 3.

5.3 Block quotation

`blockquote` MLA dictates block quotes be set flush 0.5in from the left margin. We'll re-define the `blockquote` environment for this purpose. The following looks like a complete hack... because it is, honestly.

```

101 \renewenvironment{blockquote}{%
102   \list{}{\leftmargin 0.5in}
103   \item[]
104   \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}
105   \vspace{-\topsep}
106 }{%

```

```

107 \endlist
108 \vspace{-\topsep}
109 }

```

5.4 Paper sections

5.4.1 Paper

paper The main content; the body. Most everything you write will be in here.

```

110 \newenvironment{paper}{%
111 \makemlaheader
112 }{%
113 \newpage
114 }

```

5.4.2 Endnotes

notes If you have any endnotes, they can be put in the notes environment.

```

115 \newenvironment{notes}{%
116 \begin{noindent}
117 \pdfbookmark[0]{Notes}{notes}
118 \begin{center}Notes\end{center}
119 \end{noindent}
120 \vspace{-16pt} % XXX to counter unexplained space
121 }{%
122 \newpage
123 }

```

The MLA doesn't prescribe a strict set of rules for endnotes, so the following is just to clean it up and make it consistent. We're assuming the required **enotez** package is used; refer to its documentation for an explanation of the following.

```

124 \setenotez{list-name={}}
125 \DeclareInstance{enotez-list}{mla}{list}{%
126 heading = {},
127 format = \normalsize\normalfont,
128 list-type = description
129 }

```

5.4.3 Bibliography

workscited This environment creates the bibliography, starting on the next counted page number.

```

130 \newenvironment{workscited}{%
131 \begin{noindent}
132 \pdfbookmark[0]{Works Cited}{workscited}
133 \begin{center}Works Cited\end{center}
134 \end{noindent}
135 \vspace{-16pt} % XXX to counter unexplained space
136 }{%

```

```

137 \newpage
138 }

```

MLA prescribes a half-inch hanging indent on all bibliography entries. This is achieved by setting the `\bibhang` macro defined in the `biblatex` package.

```

139 \setlength{\bibhang}{\parindent}

```

A Example usage

Following is a basic L^AT_EX 2_ε document using `mla.cls` and its corresponding bibliography.

A.1 example.tex

```

\documentclass[mla7]{mla}

\title{Sample MLA Document}
\author{John Doe}
\professor{Dr Suzie Que}
\course{\LaTeX\ 101}
\date{\today}

% This will be explained later!
\addbibresource{example.bib}

\begin{document}

\begin{paper}

This is an example document using ‘‘mla.cls’’.
The header is automatically printed for you when calling the
‘‘paper’’ environment, which is why we jumped straight into
writing our body.

\section{A section}

Our professor prefers we section our paper since it’s
\emph{really} long:
\begin{blockquote}
I really hope you do this right, John.
I got tired of reading that twenty-page paper with no logical breaks!
Just divide it into sections already, even though the MLA style guide
doesn’t tell you to.
It’s technically not \emph{prohibited}, I guess. \cite{que2019}
\end{blockquote}

```


That's when the `'\textbackslash{}section'` commands come in handy. You can even create a subsection!\endnote{It's just like in the normal `'article'` class.}

```
\subsection{Subsection}
```

Notice we cited something above in the blockquote. That's where `'workscited'` comes in handy with perfect MLA format! (The `'example.bib'` file follows this whole example.) But, before that\ldots didn't we specify an endnote somewhere?

```
\end{paper}
```

```
\begin{notes}
```

```
% It's also important you use the MLA template  
% provided with the class, lest it look wrong.
```

```
\printendnotes[mla]
```

```
\end{notes}
```

```
\begin{workscited}
```

```
% It's important to use 'heading=none' here, since the  
% 'workscited' environment already prints it out for us.
```

```
% Also, notice we had to include the bibliography file  
% in the preamble. That's important!
```

```
\printbibliography[heading=none]
```

```
\end{workscited}
```

```
\end{document}
```

A.2 example.bib

```
@article{que2019,  
  author = {Suzie Que},  
  title = {Notice to all students},  
  journaltitle = {Anytown High School Homepage},  
  publisher = {County Board of Education},  
  date = {2019-04-20},  
  howpublished = {Web},  
  urldate = {2019-04-21}}
```

}