

# The `mla` class\*

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May 7, 2019

## Abstract

In the United States, secondary and undergraduate students are generally expected to adhere to the format prescribed by the Modern Language Association (MLA) for typewritten essays, research papers and writings. Sadly, the tool of choice is usually Microsoft Word, even amongst those fluent with  $\text{\LaTeX}$ .

Though there *are* some templates and tools to aid in writing in the MLA format using  $\text{\LaTeX}$ , none fully met the expectations of the author. So *voilà*, there now exists an `mla.cls` proper: a simple, straightforward class for composing papers almost perfectly adherent to the MLA style guide<sup>1</sup>.

## Licensing

The files contained in this package may be distributed and/or modified under the conditions of the  $\text{\LaTeX}$  Project Public License (LPPL), either version 1.3 of this license or any later version. The latest version of this license is in <https://www.latex-project.org/lppl/lppl-1-3c/>, and version 1.3c or later is part of all distributions of  $\text{\LaTeX}$  version 2008/05/04 or later.

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\*This document corresponds to `mla` v0.3, dated 2019/05/07.

<sup>1</sup>Modern Language Association of America. *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 8th ed. Modern Language Association of America, 2016. ISBN: 9781603292627.

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## 1 Initial code

The mla class uses the article class as its base. Thanks to this, macros such as `\textit` or `\textsuperscript` work as expected and won't have to be re-defined.

```

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

\mladate The Handbook requires use of the day month year date format, not TEX's standard
month day, year. The macro \mladate will format \date accordingly.

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 teachers and professors might still require using the seventh edition of the *Handbook*, while others will likely use the eighth edition. Which edition to implement can be explicitly specified with the `mla7` and `mla8` class options. The only difference this makes within the `mla` class itself is the citation format used by `biblatex`.

```
19 \DeclareOption{mla7}{\def\@optMlaSeven}
20 \DeclareOption{mla8}{\def\@optMlaEight}
```

Some versions of `biblatex-mla` might not recognize the `style=mla-new` option for the eighth edition. In this case, one can specify `mla8alt` to the `mla` class.

```
21 \DeclareOption{mla8alt}{\def\@optMlaEightAlt}
```

### 2.1 Processing

A friendly warning will be provided when an unknown option is provided.

```
22 \DeclareOption*{%
23   \ClassWarning{mla}{Unknown option ‘\CurrentOption’; ignoring}
24 }
```

By default, the eighth edition of the *Handbook* is used. To future-proof your documents for upcoming editions, however, it may be wise to explicitly specify `mla8`.

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

## 3 Loading packages

The `mla` class requires the following packages<sup>1</sup>:

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

The following consists of prerequisites for `biblatex-mla`:

```
35 \RequirePackage[american]{babel}
36 \RequirePackage{csquotes}
37 \RequirePackage{hanging}
38 \RequirePackage[hidelinks,pdfusetitle]{hyperref}
```

---

<sup>1</sup>All of the required packages are available for download on the Comprehensive TeX Archive Network (CTAN) if unavailable on your system: <https://www.ctan.org/>.

And finally, `biblatex`. The `mla` class options dictate what options are passed to `biblatex`, hence the *if-then* clauses. Due to the nature of the code, earlier editions specified will override later versions (this will later be fixed).

```

39 \ifdefined\optMlaSeven
40   \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,showmedium=true,
41                 backend=biber]{biblatex}
42 \else
43   \ifdefined\optMlaEightAlt
44     \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,
45                   showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
46   \else \ifdefined\optMlaEight
47     \RequirePackage[style=mla-new,noremoteinfo=false,
48                   showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
49   \fi \fi
50 \fi

```

## 4 Document layout

### 4.1 Font

The `newtxtext` package was already loaded in section 3, and the font 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<sup>1</sup>.

### 4.2 Line breaking and spacing

The *Handbook* prescribes exact double-spacing, the definition of which varies between typesetters. With these parameters exact, `LATEX` produces 23 lines of text whereas the “industry standard” Microsoft Word<sup>2</sup> produces 24. To compensate, line spacing is set to *just enough*:

```
51 \linespread{1.99}
```

Though not explicitly denounced in the *Handbook*, most MLA-style papers don’t hyphenate or adjust spacing for pretty typesetting.

```

52 \hyphenpenalty 10000
53 \pretolerance 10000

```

### 4.3 Paragraphing

The *Handbook* specifies half-inch first-line indentation for each paragraph and no extra spacing in between.

```
54 \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}
```

---

<sup>1</sup>According to the popular, oft-referenced Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html).

<sup>2</sup>Microsoft Word 97 through 2016, and likely following versions as well.

```

55 \setlength{\RaggedRightParindent}{\parindent}
56 \setlength{\parskip}{0em}
57 \setlength{\topsep}{0em}

```

And, for the sake of consistent 24-line papers, orphans and widows are explicitly allowed.

```

58 \widowpenalty 0
59 \clubpenalty 0
60 \interlinepenalty 0

```

For a final heinous crime against typesetting, the *Handbook* advises flush-left/ragged-right alignment. (This is achieved with the `ragged2e` package.)

```

61 \RaggedRight

```

`noindent` The `noindent` environment doesn't work as expected in conjunction with `ragged2e`, hence the re-definition.

```

62 \renewenvironment{noindent}{%
63   \edef\tmpind{\parindent}
64   \setlength{\parindent}{0pt}
65 }{%
66   \setlength{\parindent}{\tmpind}
67   \undef\tmpind
68 }

```

## 4.4 Page layout

With few exceptions, the US uses “letter-size” paper. The paper size was already set when loading the `article` class in section 1.

Furthermore, the *Handbook* dictates uniform one-inch margins on said paper. This was already set by the `fullpage` package as loaded in section 3. The `\textheight` and `\textwidth` definitions are here just for good measure.

```

69 \setlength{\textheight}{9in}
70 \setlength{\textwidth}{6.5in}

```

## 4.5 Running head

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

```

71 \fancypagestyle{norule}{%
72   \renewcommand{\headrulewidth}{0pt}
73   \renewcommand{\footrulewidth}{0pt}
74 }
75 \fancyhf{}
76 \pagestyle{headings}
77 \pagestyle{norule}
78 \fancyhead[R0]{\StrBehind{@author}{ }[\last]\last} \thepage}

```

The following code is largely a hack to align the header in the middle of the one-inch margin above the body text.

```
79 \setlength{\headheight}{18pt}
80 \setlength{\headsep}{12pt}
81 \setlength{\voffset}{-34pt}
```

## 5 Document markup

### 5.1 The header

The `\title`, `\author` and `\date` macros work as expected. The following, however, are unique to the `mla` class.

`\professor` The instructor who assigned the paper, i.e. “Dr. Marjorie Stewart”.

```
82 \newcommand*{\professor}[1]{\gdef\@professor{#1}}
```

`\course` The course for which this paper was assigned, i.e. “ENGL 101-02”.

```
83 \newcommand*{\course}[1]{\gdef\@course{#1}}
```

To prevent undefined behavior, the internal macros used to store the above information are set empty (except for `\date`).

```
84 \title{}
85 \author{}
86 \professor{}
87 \course{}
88 \date{\today}
```

`\makemlaheader` This command finally prints out the standard four-line MLA header, as well as the title. (Note the use of `\mladate`; see section 1.)

```
89 \newcommand{\makemlaheader}{%
90   \begin{noindent}
91     \@author \\
92     \@professor \\
93     \@course \\
94     \mladate \\
95     \begin{center}\@title\end{center}
96   \end{noindent}
97 }
```

For simplicity’s sake, `\maketitle` is directly aliased to `\makemlaheader`.

```
98 \renewcommand{\maketitle}{\makemlaheader}
```

## 5.2 Sectioning

`\section` Section headings are neither defined nor discouraged in the *Handbook*, though  
`\subsection` commonly used in longer papers. Customary section headings are rather straight-  
`\subsubsection` forward, consisting of the section number in Arabic numerals, a space, and the  
section name with no special decoration<sup>1</sup>.

However, for the sake of clarity, the section headings in this class will be set in small-caps.

```
99 \renewcommand{\thesection}{\@arabic\c@section}  
100 \renewcommand{\thesubsection}{\thesection.\@arabic\c@subsection}  
101 \renewcommand{\thesubsubsection}{\thesubsection.\@arabic\c@subsubsection}
```

Un-fancifying the headings is achieved using the `titlesec` package.

```
102 \titleformat*{\section}{\normalsize\sc}  
103 \titleformat*{\subsection}{\normalsize\sc}  
104 \titleformat*{\subsubsection}{\normalsize\sc}  
105 \titlespacing*{\section}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}  
106 \titlespacing*{\subsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}  
107 \titlespacing*{\subsubsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}  
108 \titlelabel{\thetitle. }
```

Under default configuration,  $\text{\TeX}$  doesn't indent the first paragraph after a section heading, violating MLA style. The solution `indentfirst` package was already loaded in section 3.

## 5.3 Block quotation

`blockquote` The *Handbook* dictates blockquotes be set flush a half-inch from the left margin with no extra space on the right. The existing `blockquote` environment is re-defined for this purpose.

```
109 \renewenvironment{blockquote}{%  
110     \list{}{\leftmargin 0.5in}  
111     \item[]  
112     \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}  
113     \vspace{-\topsep}  
114 }{%  
115     \endlist  
116     \vspace{-\topsep}  
117 }
```

## 5.4 Paper sections

### 5.4.1 Paper

`paper` The main content; the body. This environment produces the MLA header at the top.

---

<sup>1</sup>According to the popular, oft-referenced OWL: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html).

```

118 \newenvironment{paper}{%
119     \makemlaheader
120 }{%
121     \newpage
122 }

```

### 5.4.2 Endnotes

**notes** Endnotes can be typeset manually or with the supported `enotez` package<sup>1</sup>.

```

123 \newenvironment{notes}{%
124     \begin{noindent}
125         \pdfbookmark[0]{Notes}{notes}
126         \begin{center}Notes\end{center}
127     \end{noindent}
128     \vspace{-16pt} % XXX to counter unexplained space
129 }{%
130     \newpage
131 }

```

The following code is to format endnotes per common practice<sup>2</sup> when using the `enotez` package.

```

132 \setenotez{list-name={}}
133 \DeclareInstance{enotez-list}{mla}{list}{%
134     heading = {},
135     format = \normalsize\normalfont,
136     list-type = description
137 }

```

### 5.4.3 Bibliography

**workscited** The bibliography can be typeset manually or with the supported `biblatex` package<sup>3</sup>.

```

138 \newenvironment{workscited}{%
139     \begin{noindent}
140         \pdfbookmark[0]{Works Cited}{workscited}
141         \begin{center}Works Cited\end{center}
142     \end{noindent}
143     \vspace{-16pt} % XXX to counter unexplained space
144 }{%
145     \newpage
146 }

```

The *Handbook* prescribes a half-inch hanging indent on all bibliography entries. This is achieved by setting the `\bibhang` length defined by the `biblatex` package.

```

147 \setlength{\bibhang}{\parindent}

```

<sup>1</sup>Refer to the `enotez` documentation for instructions.

<sup>2</sup>According to the popular, oft-referenced OWL: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_endnotes\\_and\\_footnotes.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_endnotes_and_footnotes.html).

<sup>3</sup>Refer to the `biblatex` documentation for instructions.



## A Example usage

Following is a basic L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X document using the mla class. The document is composed of a text file, mla-example.tex, and a biblatex bibliography file, mla-example.bib.

### A.1 mla-example.tex

```
\documentclass[mla8]{mla}

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

% The .bib file (explained later) must be included in the preamble
\addbibresource{mla-example.bib}

\begin{document}

\begin{paper}

This is an example document using ‘‘mla.cls’’.
The header is automatically printed upon using the ‘‘paper’’ class,
which is why there is no ‘‘\textbackslash{}maketitle’’.

\section{Professors who prefer sections}

Sometimes, research papers can become unmanageably lengthy.
In that case, section headings can help divide up the ideas
to make it more accessible to the reader.
Though this paper is short, section headings are employed
as an example of the ‘‘mla’’ class’ capabilities.

Some professors may explicitly require or denounce use of headings.
Dr. Suzie Que of Anytown, PA requires they be used for anything
longer than five pages:
\begin{blockquote}
John---so help me God---if you turn in another twenty-page research
paper with no logical breaks I will hang you at the stake.
Even though the MLA style guide doesn’t say anything about
section headings, they’re not actually prohibited.
So, if you turn in \emph{anything} longer than five pages to me
and there isn’t a \emph{single} break or section heading,
I will dock your grade to an F.
```

```
Capisce? \cite{que2019}
\end{blockquote}
Despite her language, she does have a point to say.
```

```
\subsection{Subsections}
```

Alongside regular top-level sections, one can use  
“`\textbackslash{}subsection`” commands too\endnote{Section commands  
in “`mla.cls`” work identical to those of the “`article`” class.}.

```
\section{Using endnotes}
```

As one may notice, the above subsection used an endnote.  
These can simply be cited with  
“`Yada yada text\textbackslash{}endnote\{more info\ldots\}`.”  
Endnotes can be easily printed in correct format by calling  
“`\textbackslash{}printendnotes[mla]`” within the  
“`notes`” environment.

```
\section{Using bibliographies}
```

Dr. Suzie Que was cited in the above blockquote.  
The ins-and-outs of “`biblatex`” will not be explained in this  
document, so please refer to online documentation such as the  
“`BibLaTeX Cheat Sheet`”.

Just as with the endnotes,  
the bibliography can be easily printed in correct format by calling  
“`\textbackslash{}printbibliography[heading=none]`” within the  
“`workscited`” environment.  
(The “`heading=none`” part is important; the “`workscited`” environment  
already prints one.)

```
\end{paper}
```

```
\begin{notes}
```

```
\printendnotes[mla]
```

```
\end{notes}
```

```
\begin{workscited}
```

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

```
\end{workscited}
```

```
\end{document}
```

## A.2 mla-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}
}
```

## Change history

|  |   |                                     |   |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| v0.2                                   |   | space after heading . . . . .       | 8 |
| General: Added support for PDF         |   | \section: Changed heading to        |   |
| metadata . . . . .                     | 3 | small-caps . . . . .                | 7 |
| Hid hyperlink boxes in PDF out-        |   | \subsection: Changed heading to     |   |
| put . . . . .                          | 3 | small-caps . . . . .                | 7 |
| blockquote: Countered unex-            |   | Properly formatted . . . . .        | 7 |
| plained vertical space after en-       |   | \subsubsection: Changed heading     |   |
| vironment . . . . .                    | 7 | to small-caps . . . . .             | 7 |
| \makemlaheader: Changed date for-      |   | Properly formatted . . . . .        | 7 |
| mat to <i>day month year</i> . . . . . | 6 | v0.3                                |   |
| \mladate: Added macro . . . . .        | 2 | General: Added mla8alt option . . . | 3 |
| workscited: Countered unex-            |   | Improved options parsing to         |   |
| plained vertical space after           |   | avoid contradiction and unde-       |   |
| heading . . . . .                      | 8 | finied behavior . . . . .           | 3 |
| notes: Added environment . . . . .     | 8 | Replaced obsolete times package     |   |
| Countered unexplained vertical         |   | with newtxtext . . . . .            | 3 |