

Clarksburg High School

English Composition Style Guide



Clarksburg High School
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*Created in consultation with the CHS English Department
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MLA



This guide is based on formal writing rules outlined by the Modern Language Association (MLA). These guidelines are used for formal writing used in English departments in high schools, colleges and universities. It explains the correct way to identify and give credit to sources, gives advice on mechanics, explores plagiarism, and how to structure different types of essays, as well as the research paper.

More information about the MLA is available at:

www.MLA.org Modern Language Association

www.owl.english.purdue.edu extensive English writing resources

www.chompchomp.com grammar rules and concepts

A Note about Plagiarism



Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. According to the Montgomery County Public Schools Policy, a student who plagiarizes will receive a failing grade for that assignment.

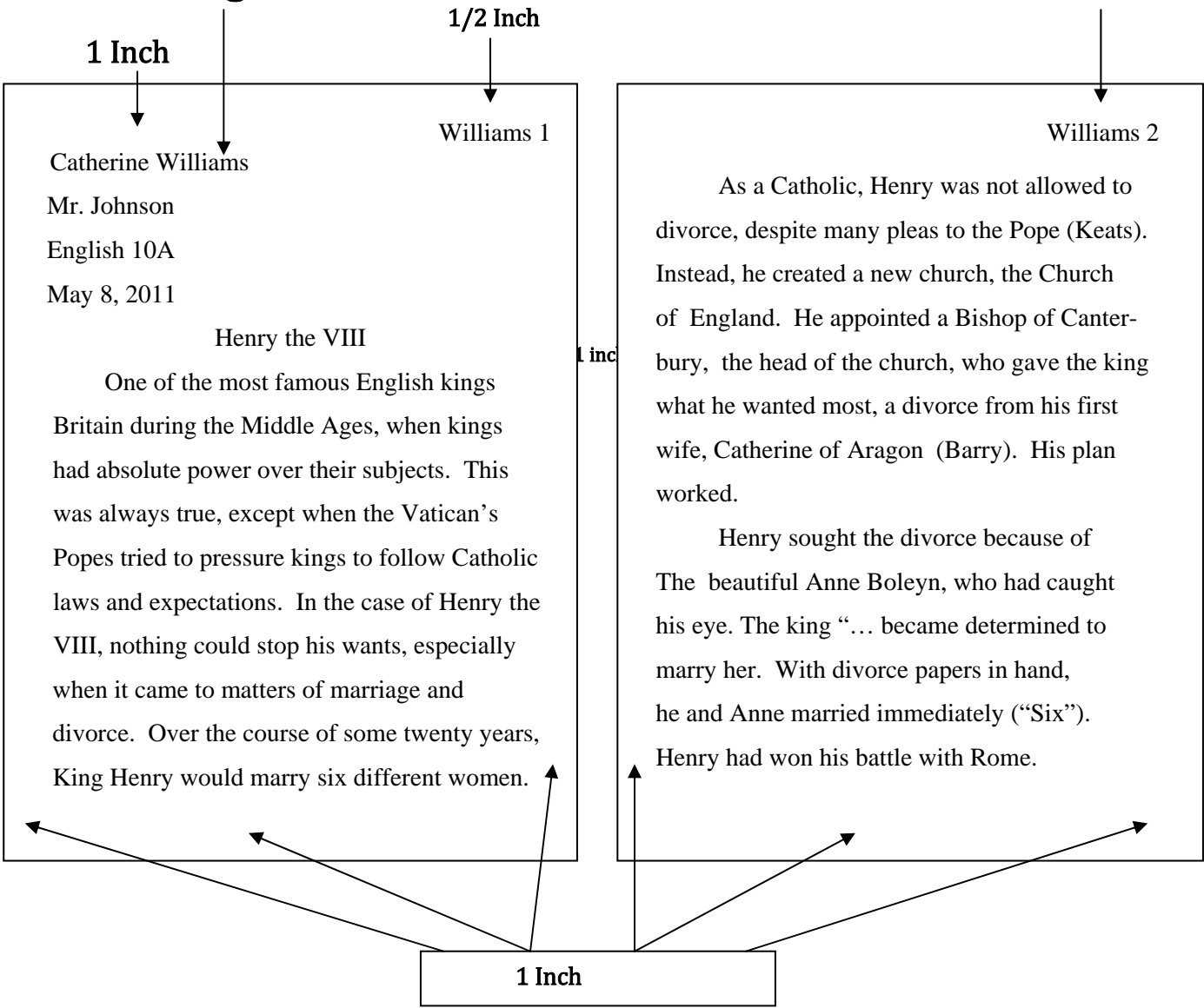
Definition of plagiarism: *The taking of another person's words or ideas without giving proper credit.* Plagiarism is also known as "literary theft."

MLA Manuscript Style



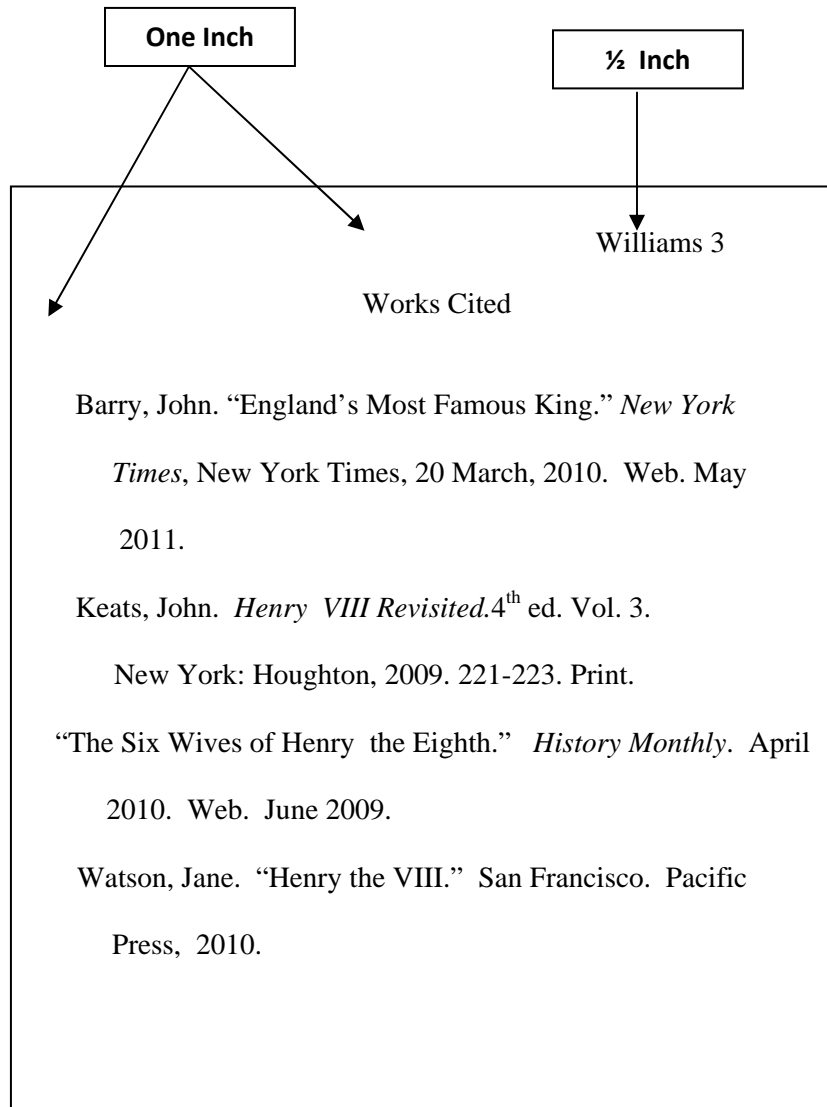
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The Works Cited Page

Using MLA Style



Parenthetical Documentation

Parenthetical documentation is used to acknowledge another person's ideas, facts or words. A brief citation follows each fact, direct quote or paraphrase. Some examples:

If an *author's name is given* as a source, use the **author's last name**, in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

Example, if the author's name is Jason Smith:

- According to weather experts in Washington D.C., last year's annual rainfall increased by two percent (Smith).

If there is *no author*, use the **first significant word in the title**, with quotation marks. Example, if the article title is: "The Space Station Receives Repairs"

- When NASA sent up its latest rocket, in June 2010, ...its only mission was to repair the International Space Station ("Space").

Source	Has an Author	No Author
Internet Sources	(Hernandez). Author's last name	("American"). 1 st significant word in title
Book	(Johnson 42). Author's last name + page #	("War" 26). 1 st significant word in title + page #

Rules of Formal Writing



What is formal writing? The ingredients of formal writing include: strong diction (appropriate and interesting word choice), varied sentence length, a serious tone, clarity, and higher level syntax (sentence structure). In most cases, formal writing includes a thesis statement and credible, cited support.

Basic Rules

- Use **literary present tense** when writing about literature.
- Use **3rd person** (*he, she, they, it, him, her, them, people, adolescents, citizens, family*).
Exceptions: memoirs, poetry, business correspondence.
- Do not use **contractions**: [**wrong (right)**] aren't (*are not*), can't (*cannot*) couldn't (*could not*), didn't (*did not*), don't (*do not*), hadn't (*had not*), hasn't (*has not*), isn't (*is not*), shouldn't (*should not*), they're (*they are*), they've (*they have*), weren't (*were not*), won't (*will not*), wouldn't (*would not*).
- Avoid **slang** words. Examples: *kids, stuff, ain't, chill out, no way, awesome*, or for example, "James was *super* upset when he *bombed* his driving test."
- Do not begin sentences with **conjunctions**, such as *But, And, So*. Use them to join words, phrases and clauses. *It was dark in the woods, but they were not afraid.*
- Avoid ending sentences with **prepositions** (ex: *in, at, on, toward, above, into, from, off, etc*).
Wrong: *He decided to enter in.* **Right:** *He decided to enter the building.*
- Avoid **a lot of** or **lots**. Use stronger words, such as: *a great deal, many, numerous, countless, a myriad number of*.
- Spell out **numbers** zero through nine. Use numerals for 10 and more. For numbers in the millions, use *1 million*.
- Avoid terms or words that are **cliché**. Examples: "His car *stopped on a dime*." "She felt like she had *all the time in the world* to complete her paper."

Other rules to remember:

Generally, place **punctuation marks INSIDE of quotation marks**. "Mark made a touchdown," said Coach Smith. Mr. Washington asked, "Did you need more time for that assignment?" When quoting words that appear in the original document as being quoted, use a single quotation mark inside of a double quotation mark. Example: When professor Jones discusses the nation's

first president, George Washington, he describes the leader as “the most competent and ‘courageous man in history,’” (Smith).

When directly quoting more than four lines, use a **hanging, or block quote**:

When the characters fight during the beginning of Romeo and Juliet, the Montagues and Capulets show they violent natures:

Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
Profaners of this neighbor-stained steel—
Will they not hear? What ho!
You men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage (Rom. 1.1.83-87)

Punctuating Titles of Works

Book, Play italicize, or underline

Magazine, Journal, Newspaper italicize

**Article in a journal, magazine,
newspaper, or online source**

Online Database , Website italicize

place in quotation marks

Film, Music Recording italicize

Works of Art italicize

TV and Radio Broadcasts italicize

Song italicize

Numbers

Generally, **spell out numerals that are one or two words**, and **use numerals for 100 and greater**.

Example: There were zero students present. Today, thirty-nine people arrived. The airport had more than 125 planes landing in one afternoon.

Weight or mass *5 ounces one-third

Amounts 6.5 million 4 thousand 3 hundred 15%

Money \$9 9 cents 2 quarters 23 dimes

Time Years—use all four digits—2011 six

page 7 chapter 14 lines 16-21

**exception: when a number begins a sentence, then spell out. Six ounces of...*

The differences in meaning of **commonly confused words**:

- **Accept vs. Except** The verb form is to accept which means to take or receive. I will **accept** your proposal. The verb except means to omit or leave out. I did the homework, **except** for the math. The noun form means an omission. The **exception** from the rule is that I stay out late on Fridays.
- **Affect vs. Effect** To affect is an action (verb) meaning to influence. Ex: Rain can **affect** how crops grow. The cause of the dead crops was from the **effects** of no rainfall (shows the result of something).
- **Farther vs. Further** – Farther describes distance. *He will travel **farther** tonight.* Further describes quantity or degree. *The government says that **further** work is needed before a decision can be made.*
- **Historic vs. Historical** Something **historic** is a significant, notable or important event. Something **historical** describes an old object, or past event.
- **It/Its/It's** It is true that I am a good person (the pronoun form). The book has lost **its** cover (possessive form). My sister knows that **it's** wrong to take my favorite jacket (contraction).
- **Lay/Lie/Laid** You **lay** down the toy (generally placing something in a horizontal position. The chicken **lays** an egg. You **lay** in bed all yesterday (past tense) You **lie** in bed. She **laid** the book down. The duck **laid** its egg. She is **lying** down. She **lay** down. She **had lain** down.
- **Lose vs. Loose** My team will **lose** tonight if we do not score at least 10 goals (lose being a verb). The lid became **loose** and I was able to open the jar (adjective form, meaning easy to move).
- **Principal vs. Principle** Principal describes a person, such as Mr. Koutsos (noun form). It is my **principle** to always be truthful (a basic truth or law).
- **There/Their/They're** *There* is the preposition and shows direction. Please go over **there**. *Their* is the possessive form and shows belonging. Without **their** money, they will not be able to get a cab ride home. They're is the contraction of *they* and *are*. **They're** going to the movies tonight.
- **To/Too/Two** – I go **to** the mall. I want to go, **too!** (meaning in addition to) I have **two** minutes to go.
- **Whether vs. Weather**– I do not know **whether** I should go shopping (meaning if it is true, is the case, or is better).