

The `mla` class*

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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 \LaTeX .

Though there *are* some templates and tools to aid in writing in the MLA format using \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 guide¹.

Licensing

The files contained in this package may be distributed and/or modified under the conditions of the \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 \LaTeX version 2008/05/04 or later.

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*This document corresponds to `mla` v0.8, dated 2020/08/16.

¹Modern 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 `\today` accordingly to be used as the default value for `\date` (see section 5.1).

```
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 August
13    \or September
14    \or October
15    \or November
```

```

16         \or December
17     \fi
18     \the\year
19 }

\MLA@seven The following are true/false switches to toggle certain features.
\MLA@eight
\MLA@eightalt
\MLA@microtype
20 \newif\ifMLA@seven
21 \newif\ifMLA@eight
22 \newif\ifMLA@eightalt
23 \newif\ifMLA@microtype

```

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 `m1a7` and `m1a8` class options. The only difference this makes within the `m1a` class itself is the citation format used by `b1blatex`.

```

24 \DeclareOption{m1a7}{\MLA@seventrue\MLA@eightfalse\MLA@eightaltfalse}
25 \DeclareOption{m1a8}{\MLA@sevenfalse\MLA@eighttrue\MLA@eightaltfalse}

```

Some versions of `b1blatex-m1a` might not recognize the `style=m1a-new` option for the eighth edition. In this case, one can specify `m1a8alt` to the `m1a` class.

```

26 \DeclareOption{m1a8alt}{\MLA@sevenfalse\MLA@eightfalse\MLA@eightalttrue}

```

The `microtype` package can be optionally included with the `microtype` option to offset the pain of using the Times typeface.

```

27 \DeclareOption{microtype}{\MLA@microtypetrue}

```

2.1 Processing

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

```

28 \DeclareOption*{%
29     \ClassWarning{m1a}{Unknown option ‘\CurrentOption’; ignoring}
30 }

```

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 `m1a8`.

```

31 \ExecuteOptions{m1a8}
32 \ProcessOptions\relax

```

3 Loading packages

The `m1a` class requires the following packages¹:

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

```

33 \RequirePackage{caption}
34 \RequirePackage{enotez}
35 \RequirePackage{enumitem}
36 \RequirePackage{fancyhdr}
37 \RequirePackage{float}
38 \RequirePackage{fullpage}
39 \RequirePackage{graphicx}
40 \RequirePackage{ragged2e}
41 \RequirePackage{newtxtext}
42 \RequirePackage{titlesec}
43 \RequirePackage{xstring}

```

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

```

44 \RequirePackage[american]{babel}
45 \RequirePackage{csquotes}
46 \RequirePackage{hanging}

```

And finally, `biblatex`. The `mla` class options dictate what options are passed to `biblatex`, hence the *if-then* clauses.

```

47 \ifMLA@seven
48   \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,showmedium=true,
49                   backend=biber]{biblatex}
50 \fi
51 \ifMLA@eight
52   \RequirePackage[style=mla-new,noremoteinfo=false,
53                   showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
54 \fi
55 \ifMLA@eightalt
56   \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,
57                   showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
58 \fi

```

The microtype package is loaded if the `microtype` option is specified.

```

59 \ifMLA@microtype
60   \RequirePackage{microtype}
61 \fi

```

For some reason, common practice is to load `hyperref` last of all packages.

```

62 \RequirePackage{hyperref}
63 \hypersetup{hidelinks,pdfusetitle}

```

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 format¹.

4.1.1 Microtype

The `microtype` package (if loaded as in section 3) will marginally offset the burden of using Times by correcting its ugly kerning and tracking. The vague `activate=false` below simply disables protrusion, maintaining original line and page breaks.

```
64 \ifMLA@microtype
65   \microtypesetup{activate=false}
66 \fi
```

4.2 Line breaking and spacing

The *Handbook* prescribes exact double-spacing, the definition of which varies between typesetters. With these parameters exact, L^AT_EX produces 23 lines of text whereas the “industry standard” Microsoft Word² produces 24. To compensate, line spacing is set to *just enough*:

```
67 \linespread{1.905}
```

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

```
68 \hyphenpenalty=10000
69 \pretolerance=10000
```

4.3 Paragraphing

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

```
70 \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}
71 \setlength{\RaggedRightParindent}{\parindent}
72 \setlength{\parskip}{0em}
73 \setlength{\topsep}{0em}
74 \setlength{\partopsep}{0em}
```

T_EX does not indent the first paragraph after headings by default. Thankfully, the fix for this is simple.

```
75 \let\@afterindentfalse\@afterindenttrue
76 \@afterindenttrue
```

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

```
77 \widowpenalty=0
78 \clubpenalty=0
79 \interlinepenalty=0
```

¹According 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.

²Microsoft Word 97 through 2016, and likely following versions as well.

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

```
80 \RaggedRight
```

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

```
81 \renewenvironment{noindent}{%
82   \edef\tmpind{\parindent}
83   \setlength{\parindent}{0pt}
84 }{%
85   \setlength{\parindent}{\tmpind}
86   \undef\tmpind
87 }
```

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.

```
88 \setlength{\textheight}{9in}
89 \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.

```
90 \fancypagestyle{norule}{%
91   \renewcommand{\headrulewidth}{0pt}
92   \renewcommand{\footrulewidth}{0pt}
93 }
94 \fancyhf{}
95 \pagestyle{headings}
96 \pagestyle{norule}
97 \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.

```
98 \setlength{\headheight}{18pt}
99 \setlength{\headsep}{12pt}
100 \setlength{\voffset}{-34pt}
```

5 Document markup

5.1 The header

`\title` The `\title`, `\author` and `\date` macros work as expected. However, if your surname contains a space, you must contain the surname in braces as such:
`\author` `\author{Ludwig {van Beethoven}}`. This keeps the full surname in the running head (see section 4.5).

The following header commands are unique to the `mla` class.

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

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

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

```
102 \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`. (Note the use of `\mladate`; see section 1.)

```
103 \title{}
104 \author{}
105 \professor{}
106 \course{}
107 \date{\mladate}
```

`\makemlaheader` This command finally prints out the standard four-line MLA header, as well as the title.

```
108 \newcommand{\makemlaheader}{%
109     \begin{noindent}
110         \@author \\
111         \@professor \\
112         \@course \\
113         \@date \\
114         \begin{center}\@title\end{center}
115     \end{noindent}
116 }
```

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

```
117 \renewcommand{\maketitle}{\makemlaheader}
```

Finally, the header will print at the beginning of every document.

```
118 \AtBeginDocument{\maketitle}
```

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 decoration¹.

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

```
119 \renewcommand{\thesection}{\@arabic\c@section}
120 \renewcommand{\thesubsection}{\thesection.\@arabic\csubsection}
121 \renewcommand{\thesubsubsection}{\thesubsection.\@arabic\csubsubsection}
```

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

```
122 \titleformat{\section}[block]{\normalsize\sc}{\thetitle.\enspace}{0pt}{0}[]
123 \titleformat{\subsection}[block]{\normalsize\sc}{\thetitle.\enspace}{0pt}{0}[]
124 \titleformat{\subsubsection}[block]{\normalsize\sc}{\thetitle.\enspace}{0pt}{0}[]
125 \titlespacing*{\section}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
126 \titlespacing*{\subsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
127 \titlespacing*{\subsubsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
128 \titlelabel{}
129 \patchcmd{\ttl@select}{\strut}{\strut}{}{}
130 \patchcmd{\ttlh@hang}{\strut}{\strut}{}{}
131 \patchcmd{\ttlh@hang}{\strut}{\strut}{}{}%
```

5.3 Lists

`itemize` To the user, `itemize` and `enumerate` lists will function exactly as expected. How-
`enumerate` ever, the formatting of the lists must be modified as to preserve double-spacing
and adhere to common practice²; these changes are achieved using the `enumitem`
package.

```
132 \setlist[itemize]{%
133     parsep=0pt,
134     itemsep=0pt,
135     topsep=0pt,
136     leftmargin=\parindent
137 }
138 \setlist[enumerate]{%
139     parsep=0pt,
140     itemsep=0pt,
141     topsep=0pt,
142     leftmargin=\parindent
143 }
```

¹According 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.

²According to the MLA itself: <https://style.mla.org/vertical-lists-in-mla-style/>.

5.4 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.

```

144 \renewenvironment{blockquote}{%
145     \list{}{\leftmargin 0.5in}
146     \item[]
147     \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}
148     \vspace{-\topsep}
149 }{%
150     \endlist
151     \vspace{-\topsep}
152 }
```

5.5 Figures and tables

The *Handbook* doesn't specify much of anything about the actual formatting of figures or tables or their captions, so the following is mostly based on the package author's personal preference and observations.

figure Centered figures with margins the equivalent of one line of text seems customary
table and logical.

```

153 \setlength{\floatsep}{\baselineskip}
154 \setlength{\intextsep}{\baselineskip}
155 \setlength{\textfloatsep}{\baselineskip}
156 \g@addto@macro{\floatboxreset}{centering}
```

Thanks to a bug inherited from the **here** package which has remained unfixed since 1987¹, there is not only extra space after the figure but the inability to insert a figure within a paragraph. Miraculously, there is a fix for this².

```

157 \renewcommand{\float@endH}{%
158     \vspace{-12pt}
159     \@endfloatbox\vskip\intextsep
160     \if@flstyle\setbox\@currbox\float@makebox\columnwidth\fi
161     \box\@currbox\vskip\intextsep\relax\@doendpe
162 }
```

caption Un-fancifying the caption is achieved using the **caption** package.

```

163 \captionsetup{%
164     font={normalfont},
165     labelformat=simple,
166     labelsep=period,
167     position=bottom,
168     aboveskip=6pt,
169     belowskip=-10pt
170 }
```

¹See the `\par` on p. 11, line 249 of `lfloat.dtx` from the L^AT_EX kernel.

²See David Carlisle's answer on T_EX SE: <https://tex.stackexchange.com/a/310793>

In the author’s personal experience, most MLA-style papers use “Fig.” and not “Figure”.

```
171 \captionsetup[figure]{name=Fig.}
```

5.6 Paper sections

5.6.1 Paper

paper The main content; the body. This environment exists only for a logical division and does nothing special.

```
172 \newenvironment{paper}{}{}
```

5.6.2 Endnotes

notes Endnotes can be typeset manually or with the supported `enotez` package¹.

```
173 \newenvironment{notes}{%
174     \newpage
175     \begin{noindent}
176         \pdfbookmark[0]{Notes}{notes}
177         \begin{center}Notes\end{center}
178     \end{noindent}
179 }
```

To correctly format endnotes per common practice², a custom `mlanotes` list type will be created. This is achieved with the `enumitem` package.

```
180 \newlist{mlanotes}{description}{1}
181 \setlist[mlanotes]{%
182     parsep=0pt,
183     itemsep=0pt,
184     topsep=0pt,
185     leftmargin=\parindent
186 }
```

The following initializes the `enotez` package to use the `mlanotes` list format.

```
187 \DeclareInstance{enotez-list}{mla}{list}{%
188     heading = {},
189     format = \normalsize\normalfont,
190     list-type = mlanotes
191 }
192 \setenotez{list-name={},list-style=mla,backref}
```

¹Refer to the `enotez` documentation for instructions.

²According 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.

5.6.3 Bibliography

`workscited` The bibliography can be typeset manually or with the supported `biblatex` package¹.

```
193 \newenvironment{workscited}{%
194     \newpage
195     \begin{noindent}
196         \pdfbookmark[0]{Works Cited}{workscited}
197         \begin{center}Works Cited\end{center}
198     \end{noindent}
199     \vspace{-10pt} % XXX to counter unexplained space
200 }
```

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.

```
201 \setlength{\bibhang}{\parindent}
```

A Example usage

Following is a basic \LaTeX 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{\mladate} % see docs for ‘\mladate’

% 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}
```

¹Refer to the `biblatex` documentation for instructions.

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{Lists}
```

Vertical lists are a rarity in MLA format, but if one so pleases, they can be used. The ‘‘itemize’’, ‘‘enumerate’’ and ‘‘description’’ lists work just as expected, even with sublists.

```
\begin{itemize}
\item A bogus item
\item Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet. This item has a bunch of text
just so it covers more than one line in the paper and shows
proper indentation.
\item Last item!
\begin{enumerate}
\item Just kidding; there’s a subitem. And it’s a number!
\end{enumerate}
\item Okay, now it’s the last item.
\end{itemize}
```

`\section{Figures}`

On rare occasions, you might have to use figures or tables in your paper.

Good news is the “figure” and “table” environments work exactly as expected!

Just make sure to use “`\textbackslash{}begin\{figure\}[H]`” if you want the image to stay exactly where you put it.

`\begin{figure}[H]`

`\includegraphics[width=0.5\linewidth]{mla-example-image}`

`\caption{A scene from atop Spruce Knob, West Virginia}`

`\end{figure}`

And yes, I shamelessly used my own image.

`\section{Using endnotes}`

As one may notice, the above subsection used an endnote.

These can simply be cited with

“`\textbackslash{}endnote\{more info\ldots\}`.”

Endnotes can be easily printed in correct format by calling

“`\textbackslash{}printendnotes`” 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`

`\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}  
}  
  
@online{price2018,  
  author = {Seth Price},  
  title = {Spruce Knob Overlook},  
  publisher = {Instagram},  
  date = {2018-07-20},  
  howpublished = {Web},  
  url = {https://www.instagram.com/p/Bleocv-hknc/},  
  urldate = {2019-05-29}  
}
```