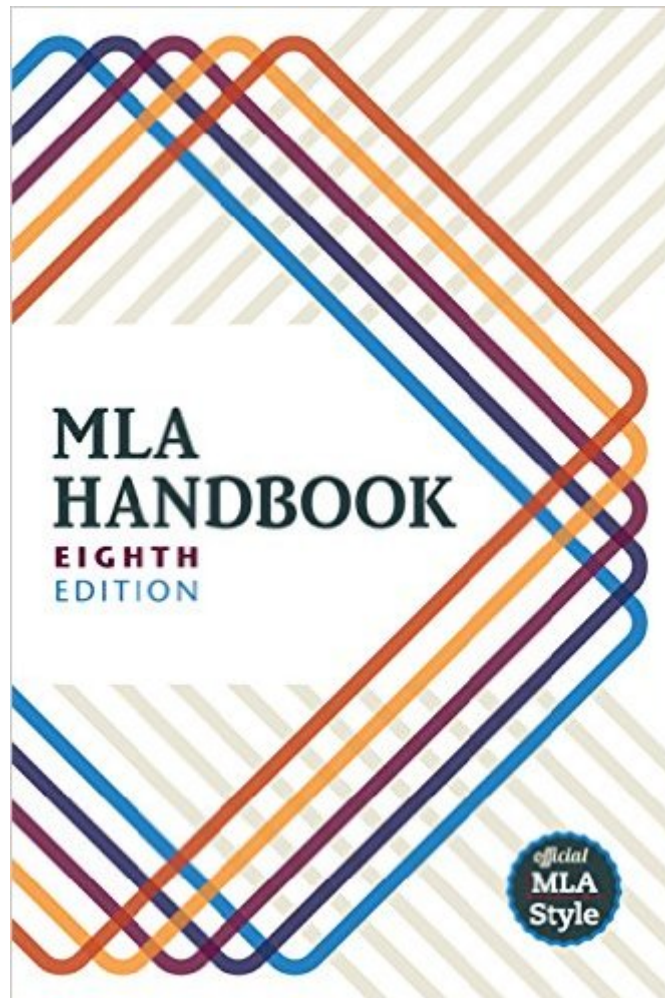


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# MLA Handbook



## Synopsis

The Modern Language Association, the authority on research and writing, takes a fresh look at documenting sources in the eighth edition of the MLA Handbook. Works are published today in a dizzying range of formats. A book, for example, may be read in print, online, or as an e-book •or perhaps listened to in an audio version. On the Web, modes of publication are regularly invented, combined, and modified. Previous editions of the MLA Handbook provided separate instructions for each format, and additional instructions were required for new formats. In this groundbreaking new edition of its best-selling handbook, the MLA recommends instead one universal set of guidelines, which writers can apply to any type of source. Shorter and redesigned for easy use, the eighth edition of the MLA Handbook guides writers through the principles behind evaluating sources for their research. It then shows them how to cite sources in their writing and create useful entries for the works-cited list. More than just a new edition, this is a new MLA style.

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## Customer Reviews

As a scholar and teacher of college/university-level composition classes, I have the MLA handbook with me all the time. I have only had this new edition a few weeks and find it to be consistently disappointing, frustrating, and not useful. Often, I end up putting the new one down and go to the 7th edition and - lo and behold - can find the answers I need quickly. This is not from having familiarity with the older text. It is from the organization of the text. For instance, I had a question about endnotes. Looking in the index for the new version, there was nothing to guide me for footnotes or endnotes. In the old version, they are listed in the index and very easy to find. This has

happened on several occasions. I simply get fed up and go to the more efficient edition or the internet, but I don't care to waste too much time on the web. That's why I have the handbook. In the previous edition, all pages are identified by section numbers, etc. In the new one, only some are - making sections harder to find and also making it so that you have to fish for info in the non-numbered pages. MLA did a much better job with the 7th edition. I will hang on to that until another edition comes out and try to be apprised of changes in other ways.

"They're trying to make money." I received this comment immediately upon announcing to my colleagues that MLA was updating its handbook. The assumption of financial gain proved unfounded. The change in the title - the removal of the superfluous "for Writers of Research Papers" - symbolizes the general tendency of this volume to simplify and slenderize. The page count alone testifies to this change, from 292 to 160 pages. The loss of pulp and ink inaugurates a new pedagogical approach to documenting sources. Rather than treating sources as belonging to particular categories for which there exists a singular format, the MLA Handbook now presents a single unifying and flexible framework for citing the diverse sources that exist in today's multifaceted media age. Whether citing Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Masque of the Red Death" accessed through the HathiTrust Digital Library, Sarah Michelle Geller's performance in an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or a tweet from @persiankiwi in Iran during the Arab Spring - all of these sources serve as examples in the text - a single set of nine core elements provide the framework for identifying and organizing the relevant information for documentation. These general principles of citation, part 1 of the MLA Handbook, replace a long and complicated labyrinth of instructions where students frequently got lost, and understandably so. A set of prescriptive guidelines regarding the mechanics of prose, advanced aspects of the works-cited list, and a brief section about non-print modes of citation follow in part 2. These two sections of the book helpfully cross-reference each other and themselves. Students will find the resulting product much easier to navigate, interpret, and apply to their writing than anything they had previously. With all of these changes, little about the MLA style of citation has fundamentally changed. Notably, MLA now recognizes that in most cases the city of publication holds little relevance to readers. It now functions as an optional element, particularly for books published before 1900. Furthermore, the handbook reverses the prescription added in the previous edition of the MLA Handbook that each entry in the works-cited should indicate the medium of publication. Many sources, especially digital ones, still indicate their online provenance through digital containers (e.g., HathiTrust Digital Library) or digital location markers (i.e., URLs and DOIs). A common reference to a printed edition of

Shakespeare's Hamlet no longer requires the superfluous "Print" at the end. Admittedly, the 8th edition has also slimmed down because instructions that used to be printed within its covers—page margins, headings, outlining instructions, gender-inclusive language, etc.—are now relegated to a new website, rendering the MLA Handbook essentially a citation guide and not a full style guide. This decision will undoubtedly upset some, but it makes the printed handbook less formidable to students and more singularly useful. The only change that bothers me is the loss of online access to the full-text of the handbook. The 7th edition came with a unique code that allowed consumers to set up an online account with access to the full text of the handbook. This online resource enhanced the utility of the handbook. Whether I had the printed copy of the handbook with me while grading, I nearly always had access to its content. The 7th edition was published in 2009, a year before the release of Apple's first iPad. The increased popularity of tablets and their widespread use among students and in educational institutions likely explains the reason the 8th edition does not automatically come with digital access. While I understand this change, it negatively impacts my reliance on universal access to the MLA Handbook, and for that reason, I cannot give this 8th edition five full stars. My colleague suspected financial motivations for the release of a new edition of the MLA Handbook. Ironically, this new pedagogical approach, if it proves successful, will make it difficult for MLA to justify publishing a ninth edition for many years to come!

I understand an earlier reviewer who said not to buy this book, but to buy the easier, more easy-to-understand version. I understand the sentiment, but it is not a viable option. Using the previous version will result in formatting works cited entries incorrectly according to current standards. While the entries in the new edition are simplified for the most part, the book itself is terrible. The approach for the container system of nine "core elements" is ridiculous. The core elements as presented follow: Author, Title of source, Title of container, Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication date, Location. Title and author are clear, but the other elements? "Container"? "Location"? What these actually mean varies widely. "Publisher," by the way, does not always mean what we think of as a publisher, nor do the other terms always make sense as applied. The writers just wanted nine elements for everything, darn it, and didn't picture anything as basic as making sense to actual college students. I've taught for over twenty years, and grasping the basic concepts of MLA format is very difficult for some students. I have students who can't seem to understand the difference between italics and quotation marks at the end of a semester. Now I am supposed to try to get them to understand these nine badly-named "core elements" and how they

apply? This book is just insane. "Location" can be any number of things, including page numbers. (Not exactly intuitively-named.) And some changes are just plain arbitrary, such as deciding to require "vol." and "no." for volumes and numbers, instead of the simpler approach used for years: we used to put 62.3, for example, instead of vol. 63, no. 3. This book does not list an author. It is a committee-generated work by people who obviously did not work well together. And the index is the least helpful index I've ever struggled through. Buy it, figure it out for yourself, but DO NOT ask your students to buy it. They'll drop out of college.

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