MLA Format

This handout provides an overview of the **MLA (Modern Language Association)** format. It outlines the accepted academic standards for formatting papers and documenting sources for analytical, research, and literary papers. This format will be, with a few exceptions, the standard format for *all* of the papers you generate throughout your academic lifetime. Demonstrating knowledge and usage of MLA format is a requirement for this course and will be a part of your grade for all of the written essays and projects you submit.

This handout is only an overview. You will need to consult a more primary source as you write, edit, and format your papers for this course. Any one of the following are recommended:

Coupe, Rosemary, et.al. *The Capilano Guide to Writing Assignments.* Vancouver, BC: Capilano College,

    2010. Print.

Hacker, Diana. *A Canadian Writer's Reference* (4th Edition). Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's,

    2010. Print.

Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th Edition).

    New York: MLA, 2009. Print.

Each of these texts can be found in our university library or our English department Writing Centre in Fir 402.   It is important that you make use of current editions, since some aspects of MLA format change from time to time.

MLA Format: Three Areas

There are three (3) main areas to consider when organizing your paper in MLA format.

I. Paper Formatting

The MLA has established guidelines for formatting every paper you submit for the course. A few of the major guidelines are as follows: your paper should be double-spaced (2.0 or 1.5 spacing) throughout; titles of books, periodicals, and films should be italicized (e.g., *Pride and Prejudice*, *The New York Times* or *Crash*); titles of articles, chapters, or pieces from an anthology of collected writings should be placed in quotation marks (e.g., "Economy Falters Further," "Chapter Two: The Next Step to Good Writing" or "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"); each margin of the paper should be 1″; and page numbers should be included at the top or bottom of every page. In addition your paper should be stapled at the corner (*folds or paper clips not accepted!*) and the font style and size (12 or less) should be consistent throughout the paper. There should be no front 'cover page' on your papers for the course.

II. Documentation of Sources - Parenthetical References

Whenever you cite or paraphrase a source, either directly or indirectly, you need to provide appropriate documentation for your source. Failure to do so will lessen your credibility as a writer, researcher, and

speaker and in certain circumstances may constitute—intentionally or not—an act of plagiarism. The system for citing sources in the body of your paper is referred to as "in-text citations" or "parenthetical references."

In most cases, providing the last name of the writer and the page number is sufficient for your parenthetical reference. For instance:

> In response to rapid metropolitan expansion, urban renewal projects sought "an order in which more significant kinds of conflict, more complex and intellectually stimulating kinds of disharmony, may take place" (Mumford 485).

However, if the author is mentioned already in the text or sentence, only the page reference needs to be inserted:

> According to Postman, broadcast news influences the decision-making process (51-63).

Note that in almost all cases punctuation **follows** rather than **precedes** the parenthetical reference. Note that there should be *no* punctuation mark between the author name and the page number within the parentheses. Finally, keep in mind that MLA format does NOT use footnotes (notes at the bottom of each page) as part of its parenthetical reference process, but instead uses "endnotes": the reader consults the name given in the body of the paper to identify the complete source listed in the Works Cited page at the end of your paper (see below).

The variety of print sources and electronic sources make it imperative that you consult one of the primary guides above—or a credible and up-to-date guide—in order to make sure that your sources are correctly cited and documented in your parenthetical references.

III. Documentation of Sources - Works Cited page

A **bibliography** will generally include *all* of the works that were consulted in the conceptualizing, writing, and research of a given paper or essay. In contrast, a **Works Cited** page—which you should use for your papers—will list *only* those works that are actually cited in the body of the paper you have written.

In an MLA formatted paper a Works Cited page must appear on a new page at the end of your essay. The page lists all the sources from your paper alphabetically, and includes publication information for each source (place of publication, publisher, date of publication, and in certain cases only, page numbers or other relevant information). In addition, titles on the page are italicized and every line of the source citation except for the first line will be indented five spaces. For example, here is the standard book format for an entry on the works cited page:

Baldwin, Richard. *A Study of Canadian Economic Geography and its Influence on Public Policy.* Princeton:

> Princeton UP, 2003.

Note that this page shares the same 1.5/2.0 spacing as the body of your paper. Similar to parenthetical citations in the body of the paper, different sources on the Works Cited page call for different formats. Once again, therefore, it is important that you consult an MLA documentation resource that is credible and up-to-date.