

Presenting Your Essay – MLA Style

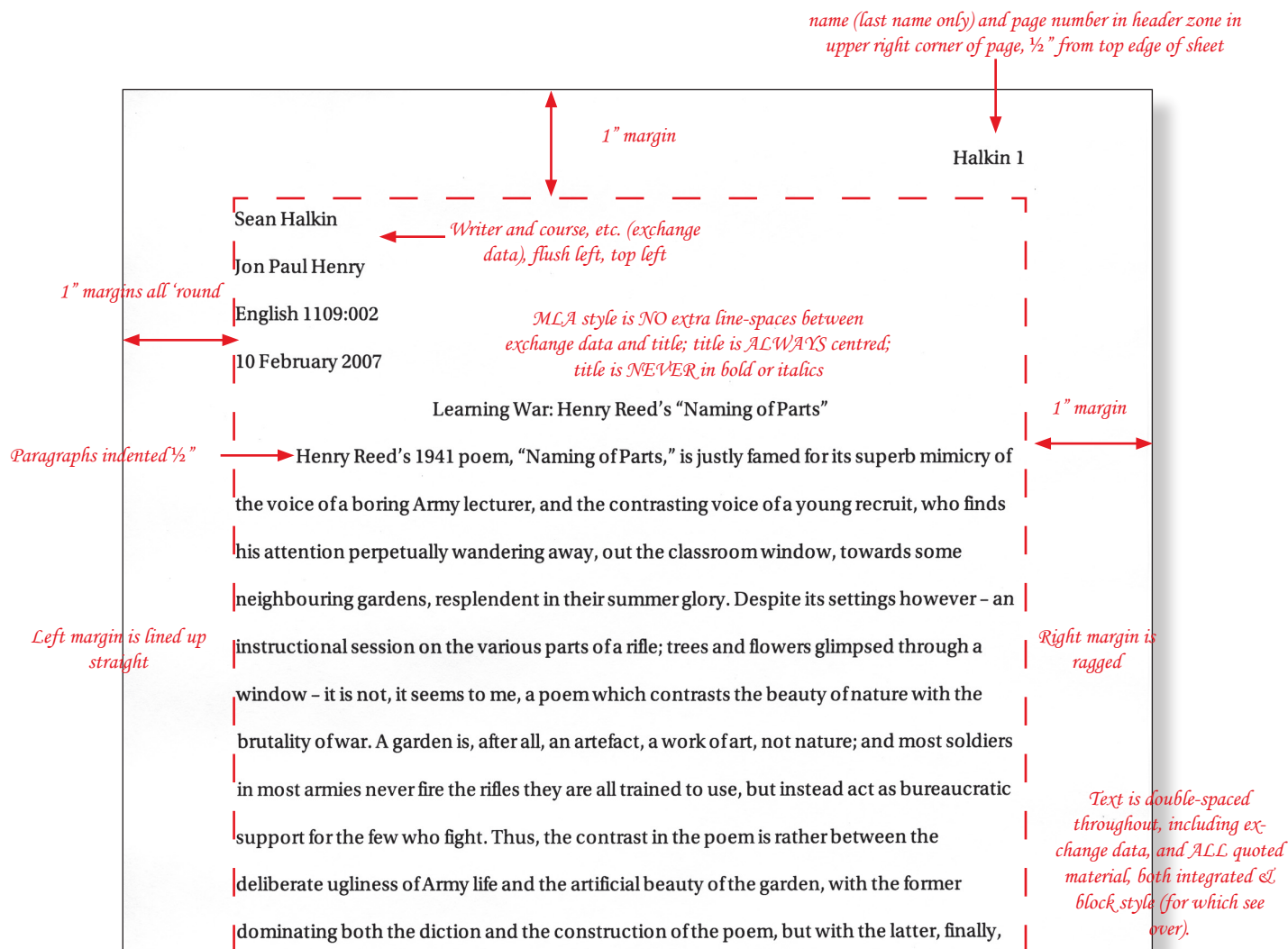


Figure 1: "Title" page

The three illustrations on this page and the next show how to present your essay in MLA (Modern Language Association) style. Figure 1 shows how to set out your title page; the subsequent ones show how to set out quotations, and how to account for the sources of your quotations with parenthetical references and a "Works Cited" list. The object of both references and list is to make it easy and convenient for your reader to find your sources.

At the top right of each page of the essay the writer's name and the page number should appear; use the "Header zone" of your word processing program to insert these automatically on every page. Moving to the text zone, the "title page" of your essay is created by placing what we call the *exchange data* at the top left of the first page, followed by the title, centred above the text.

An essay is an exchange between you and your instructor, and consists in two parts, the people involved in the exchange and the context in which the exchange is being made. The details are

inserted, one line for each, in the following order:

- ❑ the name of the writer (*who presents the paper*);
- ❑ the name of the instructor (*who receives the paper*);
- ❑ course and section number (*where the paper is being presented*);
- ❑ the date (*when the paper is being presented*).

MLA allows no extra spaces between the exchange data and the title, it specifies that the title should be in the same typeface as the main text, and that the title **MUST** be centred.

Use a serif font for the main text, for example, Times, or Palatino. Double-space the text throughout, **including** any quoted material. To begin a new paragraph, indent the first line by 1/2". **DO NOT** separate paragraphs with additional blank spaces.

Figure 2: Source notation

Petrarchan and Shakespearian. Like the Petrarchan sonnet, "The Women on my Mother's Side" disposes its material into octet and sestet, but like the Shakespearian, it ends with an epigrammatic rhymed couplet: "and it suits me that between resemblance / and words, I got the right inheritance" (Alvarez 13-14). Strikingly, the octet and sestet are not arrayed in the traditional manner, but rather as tercet, octet and tercet (3 + 8 + 3), with the second tercet absorbing the closing couplet. As for being rhymed, apart from the closing couplet, the rhymes are disposed irregularly throughout the poem, with five of the lines unrhymed: *ab-acc--b--bdd*. Only at one point does form obtrude, lines 4-6, where Alvarez breaks the line precisely at the fifth foot and forces a rhyme:

Ada, whose husband
was so devoted he would lay his hand-
kerchief on seats for her (4-6).

Quotation marks at the start and finish of quoted text that is integrated into a sentence, or is less than four lines in length

Line breaks for integrated poetry quotations indicated by a slash mark

Name of source and page numbers (or line numbers for poetry) placed in parentheses AFTER the quoted material, but BEFORE the punctuation.

Longer quotations set as a block of text, indented by ½" from the margin; poetry blocks set out PRECISELY as in source text

Line numbers (or page numbers for prose quotations) in parentheses; author's name omitted here because it's in the sentence above the quotation.

Figure 3: Works Cited list

Small Thing Title centred Big Thing Halkin 5

Works Cited

Alvarez, Julia. "The Women on My Mother's Side." 1984. *An Introduction to Poetry*. 9th ed. Eds. X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia. Don Mills: Longman, 1998. 299. Print.

First line flush with left margin, second and subsequent lines indented by ½"

Date of first publication (if known) *Publication date of source used* *Page number* *Edition (in this case, the ninth)*

MLA style is a two-part system. Part A is the notation of sources within the essay text. Part B is a list of those sources (called "Works Cited"). The list is placed on a separate page following the main body of the essay (Figure 3).

Quotations (Part A) are indicated in one of two ways, either by the use of quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quotation – called an integrated quotation – or by setting the text in a separate block, the entire block being indented ½" from the left margin; these are called block quotations. Quotations are integrated when they are brief (four lines of text or less), and set out as blocks when they exceed that length. The source of the quotation is indicated in parentheses, author's name first, followed by page number(s), with any necessary punctuation following the parentheses (Figure 2).

Each item in the sources list (Part B) is divided into three parts:

- ❑ **who** wrote it (last name first);
- ❑ **what** it's called;
- ❑ and **where** it originates (i.e., where you found it).

Note that each part of the source listing is followed by a period. Origin can sometimes be further subdivided, because Small Things

(essays, articles, poems, etc.) are often found inside Big Things (journals, books, etc.), and we must account for the origin of both sorts of Things.

Authors are listed last name first, and first name last, the two separated by a comma. If it is a Small Thing, the title is enclosed in quotation marks; if it is a Big Thing, the title is set in italics. "Title casing" is used for the title, that is, every important word is capitalized. Publication data also consists in three parts: **where** (city); **who** (publisher); and **when** (date). City and publisher are separated by a colon; publisher and date by a comma; publisher's names are conventionally abbreviated (a list of abbreviations can be found in the *MLA Handbook*).

In the above example, Alvarez's poem was first published in 1984, but was found in a 1998 anthology. The first date is placed directly after the title, the second is part of the publication data, and goes after the publisher's name. The names of the editors of the anthology are not reversed because they are not the main entry; and the edition number of the anthology (the ninth) is placed after the title, but before the names of the editors and the publication data. Finally, the page of the anthology on which Alvarez's poem was found is noted, and the type of source (in this case "Print").