



MLA PARENTHETICAL CITATIONS BASICS

What is parenthetical citing?

Parenthetical citations refer readers to the original source material that appears in the text of your essay. Parenthetical citations give readers brief information that allows them to identify the source of your information. You will provide information that is more detailed about your sources in your Works Cited.

What do I need to know about parenthetical citing?

Parenthetical citations are an abbreviated form of your source. They are shortened to be brief in your essay, and must correspond to something in your Works Cited list. They immediately follow your cited information and are contained within the closing punctuation of your sentence. If you are ever in doubt of what to put in your parenthetical citation, look at your Works Cited entry. Your safest bet is to pick the first part of that – either the author's last name or the title of your source, for example.

What does a parenthetical citation look like?

This depends somewhat on what you are citing, but it will usually be your author's last name with the corresponding page number for that specific piece of information. If you are directly quoting a source, your parenthetical citation will look like this:

Weft-faced cloth is one where “the warp is often completely concealed by the weft, which packs down into the spaces between the widely spaced warp” (Sutton 9).

You can see that the quote is completely contained within the quotation marks; the parenthetical citation immediately follows it, and then the closing punctuation for the sentence. Your parenthetical citation is a part of the sentence – all punctuation will go on the outside of the closing parentheses.



If you are paraphrasing a source, your parenthetical citation will be similar:

Weft-faced cloths are designed to be sturdy and heavy duty, and are often used for rugs (Sutton 9)

You can see that the basic structure is the same.

What if I am using a print source that is not a book?

All print sources, whether they are a magazine, anthology, journal, or otherwise will follow the same basic format of the author's last name, and the page number on which the quoted or paraphrased information appears. If you are using a print source you have found through an online method (such as a peer-reviewed journal article you located on a database) you may not have a page number, in which case you are fine to just include the author's last name.

Online sources can be a bit more challenging. In some cases, you may still be able to identify an author, in which case that is the only information you will be required to include in your parenthetical citation. For example:

Despite popularity in the 1950s and 60s, "Bombay Beach today exists in a state of disrepair" (Swann).

We viewed this source in an HTML format, meaning we were unable to identify page numbers. As such, using the author's last name will be sufficient for this parenthetical citation.

What if my source doesn't have an author?

Often we will find sources that do not have an author clearly identified. In this case, you will not use the author in your parenthetical citation, but instead will use the title. For example, if it is a print source, your parenthetical citation would be the title (abbreviated if your title is very long), and then the page number.

**Often we will
find sources
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During “the Middle Ages, lace was no more than a kind of white trimming of linen thread, made with bobbins or needles and having no mesh” (*Lace* 7).

We can see by the use of italics that *Lace* is the title of our source, and this quote is located on page 7.

What if I am citing an online source?

With online sources, you will often find that authors are difficult to identify. If you are on a site like an artist’s website, you may be tempted to assign the artist as the author –do not do this unless they are clearly identified as the writer. You are always best to go with the information you can verify. For example, in this case your parenthetical citation would look like this:

Studio Other Spaces was founded by Olafur Eliasson and Sebastian Behmann as a place that “focuses on interdisciplinary and experimental building projects and works in public space” (“Biography”).

In this case, since we are not clear who our author is, we are using the page title for the website where we found this. Since online sources do not have page numbers, using only the title is sufficient.

What if I have several sources from the same author?

You will sometimes encounter multiple sources from the same author. You still need to cite, but you will also need to differentiate for your reader which information came from which source. Usually, you would just use an abbreviated form of the title.

“But because Leonardo drew (often uncanny) associations among his diverse activities, it may yet be possible to identify extensive connections between his scientific writings and his evolving plans” (Farago, “Leonardo’s Battle”).

“Only recently have Leonardo’s vast and fragmentary literary remains been ordered and his sources in formal optical theory investigated, making feasible a systematic study of the developmental aspects of Leonardo’s scientific writings on pictorial perspective in relation to his critical writings on painting” (Farago, “Leonardo’s Color”).

As both of these articles have very long titles (“Leonardo’s Battle of Anghiari: A Study in the Exchange between Theory and Practice” and “Leonardo’s Color and Chiaroscuro Reconsidered: The Visual Force of Painted Images”) it makes sense to shorten them.

The MLA standard is to include the word by which the title is alphabetized (in both of our examples this is Leonardo), and when possible, include the first noun which follows. As both of our examples begin with Leonardo, it is essential for us to include the nouns (*Color*, *Battle*) to ensure it is clear which source we are citing.

If you have several authors with the same last name, you can differentiate them using either their first initial or first name in the parenthetical citation: (D. Smith 123).

You will only use the full name if your other author has the same initials.

What if my source is a film?

Films will be referenced by their title, which will be formatted in italics: (*Exit Through the Gift Shop*).

What if I am citing the Bible?

On your first citation, you will need to let your reader know which version of the Bible you are citing; different versions have different translations, and thus it is important for you, as the writer, to let your reader know which version you are

referencing. You will also need to identify the book, chapter, and verse that you are citing.

As such, your first parenthetical citation will look something like this: (*King James Bible, Jeremiah 17:5*).

After that, you only need to use the book, chapter and verse in your citation, as you have already let the reader know which version you are using. Your subsequent citations would look like this: (*Daniel 3:17*).

In the case of the Bible, only the title of the version you are using is in italics; the chapters, verses, etc. are not. If you are citing different versions of the Bible throughout your essay, you will need to identify which you are using each time.

What if I need to cite something that isn't discussed here?

ACAD has numerous learning supports available, including the Writing Centre and Drop-in Tutoring. These services are available to you as a student for no additional charge. The Writing Centre is by appointment; please email writing_centre@acad.ca.

Can I get someone to check my citations before I hand in my essay?

Drop-in Tutoring is available all semester long in the Luke Lindoe Library; please email tutoring@acad.ca for hours.

Works Cited

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