

APA vs MLA Quick Reference Chart

When to Use Each Style

APA	MLA
Sciences & Social Sciences	Humanities
Psychology, Sociology, Education	Literature, Languages, Arts
Nursing, Business, Political Science	Philosophy, History, Cultural Studies
Emphasis on publication date	Emphasis on authorship

General Paper Formatting

Element	APA	MLA
Title Page	Required	Not used
Running Head	Title on every page (top left)	Last name + page # (top right)
Page Numbers	Top right corner	Top right with last name
Font	12-point Times New Roman	12-point Times New Roman
Margins	1 inch all sides	1 inch all sides
Spacing	Double-space everything	Double-space everything
Paragraph Indent	0.5 inch	0.5 inch
Alignment	Left-aligned	Left-aligned

First Page Format

APA Title Page

[Top left: Running head - shortened title]
[Top right: page number]

[Centered, middle of page:]
Paper Title: Use Title Case
Student Name
Department, University Name
Course Number: Course Name
Instructor Name
Due Date

MLA First Page (No Title Page)

[Top right: Smith 1]

[Top left:]

Student Name

Professor Name

Course Name

15 November 2024

[Centered:]

Paper Title: Use Title Case

[First paragraph begins...]

In-Text Citations

Format	APA	MLA
Basic	(Smith, 2023)	(Smith 45)
With page	(Smith, 2023, p. 45)	(Smith 45)
Direct quote	(Smith, 2023, p. 45)	(Smith 45)
Author in sentence	Smith (2023) found...	Smith argues... (45)
Two authors	(Smith & Jones, 2023)	(Smith and Jones 45)
3+ authors	(Smith et al., 2023)	(Smith et al. 45)
No author	("Article Title," 2023)	("Article Title" 12)
No page	(Smith, 2023)	(Smith)

Key Differences

- **APA:** Uses **&** between authors and includes **year**
- **MLA:** Uses **and** between authors and includes **page number**
- **APA:** Uses **"p."** or **"pp."** for page numbers
- **MLA:** No **"p."** or **"pp."** needed

Reference List vs Works Cited

Element	APA (References)	MLA (Works Cited)
Page title	References	Works Cited
Location	New page at end	New page at end
Alphabetization	By author last name	By author last name
Indent	Hanging indent (0.5 in)	Hanging indent (0.5 in)
Spacing	Double-space	Double-space
Date placement	After author	At end
Author format	Last, F. M.	Last, First Middle

Citation Format Examples

Book

APA:

Smith, J. M. (2023). *Book title: Subtitle*. Publisher Name.

MLA:

Smith, John Michael. *Book Title: Subtitle*. Publisher Name, 2023.

Key differences: - APA: Initials only, date after author, sentence case title - MLA: Full first name, date at end, title case

Journal Article

APA:

Johnson, M. A. (2023). Article title: Subtitle. *Journal Name*, 15(3), 45-67.
<https://doi.org/10.xxxx>

MLA:

Johnson, Mary Ann. "Article Title: Subtitle." *Journal Name*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45-67, doi:10.xxxx.

Key differences: - APA: Italicize journal AND volume, use issue in parentheses - MLA: Only italicize journal, spell out "vol." and "no."

Website

APA:

Doe, J. (2024, May 15). Page title. *Site Name*. <https://www.example.com/page>

MLA:

Doe, John. "Page Title." *Site Name*, 15 May 2024, www.example.com/page.

Key differences: - APA: Month Day, Year format; include <https://> - MLA: Day Month Year format; omit <https://>

Newspaper Article

APA:

Martinez, C. (2024, November 15). Article title. *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/article>

MLA:

Martinez, Carlos. "Article Title." *New York Times*, 15 Nov. 2024,
www.nytimes.com/article.

Title Formatting

Capitalization

APA - Sentence case: - The impact of social media on students - Only first word and proper nouns capitalized

MLA - Title case: - The Impact of Social Media on Students - Capitalize all major words

Italics vs Quotation Marks

Source Type	APA	MLA
Books	<i>Italics</i>	<i>Italics</i>
Journals	<i>Italics</i>	<i>Italics</i>
Websites	<i>Italics</i>	<i>Italics</i>
Articles	No quotes	"Quotation marks"
Chapters	No quotes	"Quotation marks"

Key difference: - APA: Article/chapter titles have NO special formatting in reference list -

MLA: Article/chapter titles use quotation marks

Author Name Format

In Reference List

APA:

- Smith, J. M. - Smith, J. M., & Jones, A. B. - Use initials only - Use "&" before last author

MLA:

- Smith, John Michael. - Smith, John Michael, and Alice Brown Jones. - Use full first and middle names - Use "and" before last author

Multiple Authors

Number	APA	MLA
1 author	Smith, J.	Smith, John.
2 authors	Smith, J., & Jones, A.	Smith, John, and Alice Jones.
3-20 authors	List all with & before last	List all with "and" before last
21+ authors	First 19, ..., last author	Smith, John, et al.

Date Format

In Citations

APA:

- (Smith, 2023) - (Smith, 2023, May 15) - Year, Month Day format

MLA:

- (Smith 45) - Date only appears in Works Cited - Day Month Year format

In Reference Lists

APA:

- (2023) - (2023, May 15) - Year in parentheses after author

MLA:

- 2023. - 15 May 2023. - Date at end, no parentheses

Page Numbers

In-Text Citations

APA:

- Use "p." for single page: (Smith, 2023, p. 45) - Use "pp." for multiple: (Smith, 2023, pp. 45-47)

MLA:

- No "p." or "pp.": (Smith 45) - Multiple pages: (Smith 45-47)

In Reference Lists

APA:

- Journal articles: 45-67 (no “pp.”) - Book chapters: pp. 45-67 (with “pp.”)

MLA:

- Always use “pp.”: pp. 45-67

Block Quotations

Element	APA	MLA
When to use	40+ words	4+ lines (prose) or 3+ lines (poetry)
Indent	0.5 inch	0.5 inch
Spacing	Double-space	Double-space
Quotation marks	No	No
Citation placement	After period	After period

Example format:

APA:

Text introducing quote:

This is the block quotation text that is 40 or more words long and continues here with proper formatting. (Smith, 2023, p. 45)

MLA:

Text introducing quote:

This is the block quotation text that is four or more lines and continues here with proper formatting. (Smith 45)

Abstract

Element	APA	MLA
Required?	Often required	Rarely used
Placement	Page 2 (after title page)	After title page (if used)
Word count	150-250 words	150-250 words
Format	One paragraph	One paragraph
Keywords	Often included	Not typically used

Headings

APA (5 Levels)

Level 1: Centered, Bold, Title Case

Level 2: Left-Aligned, Bold, Title Case

Level 3: Left-Aligned, Bold Italic, Title Case

Level 4: Indented, Bold, Title Case, Ending with Period.

Level 5: Indented, Bold Italic, Title Case, Ending with Period.

MLA

- No required heading system
 - If used: Left-aligned, bold or regular
 - No numbering required
 - Double-space before and after
-

Special Cases

No Author

APA:

- Start with title - In-text: ("Title," 2023) - Reference: *Book title*. (2023). Publisher.

MLA:

- Start with title - In-text: ("Title" 45) - Works Cited: *Book Title*. Publisher, 2023.

No Date

APA:

- Use (n.d.) - Smith, J. (n.d.). *Book title*. Publisher. - In-text: (Smith, n.d.)

MLA:

- Omit date from in-text citation - Include "Accessed" date in Works Cited - Doe, John. "Page Title." *Site*. Accessed 15 Nov. 2024.

Multiple Works by Same Author

APA:

- List chronologically (oldest first) - Same year: Use a, b, c (2023a, 2023b)

MLA:

- List alphabetically by title - Use three hyphens for repeated name: - Smith, John. *Book One*. 2022. - —, *Book Two*. 2023.

Quick Decision Guide

Choose APA if:

- ☐ Writing for psychology, sociology, education
- ☐ Emphasizing research dates and recency
- ☐ Using scientific or social science journals
- ☐ Instructor specifies APA format

Choose MLA if:

- ☐ Writing for literature, languages, arts
 - ☐ Analyzing texts and authors
 - ☐ Writing humanities essays
 - ☐ Instructor specifies MLA format
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Side-by-Side Example

Complete Book Citation

APA Format:

Reference entry:

Smith, J. M. (2023). The digital revolution: How technology changed society. Academic Press.

In-text citation:

Smith (2023) argues that technology has transformed society. Recent research shows this transformation (Smith, 2023, p. 45).

MLA Format:

Works Cited entry:

Smith, John Michael. The Digital Revolution: How Technology Changed Society. Academic Press, 2023.

In-text citation:

Smith argues that technology has transformed society (45). Recent research shows this transformation (Smith 45).

Most Common Mistakes

APA Mistakes

- ☐ Using full first names (should be initials)
- ☐ Using “and” instead of “&” in references
- ☐ Forgetting the year in citations
- ☐ Title case instead of sentence case
- ☐ Missing DOI for online articles

MLA Mistakes

- ☐ Using initials instead of full names
 - ☐ Using “&” instead of “and”
 - ☐ Including year in in-text citations
 - ☐ Sentence case instead of title case
 - ☐ Using “p.” or “pp.” in citations
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Remember

APA = Author-DATE system - Emphasizes WHEN research was published - (Smith, 2023)

MLA = Author-PAGE system - Emphasizes WHERE in the text information is found - (Smith 45)

For complete guidelines: - **APA:** Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.) - **MLA:** MLA Handbook (9th ed.)