

MLA Container Guide

What is a Container?

Container = The larger work that holds your source

Think of it like nested boxes: - A song is contained in an album - An article is contained in a journal - A chapter is contained in a book - A video is contained in YouTube

MLA 9th Edition uses containers to organize complex sources.

Basic Container Format

Pattern:

Author. "Title of Source." *Title of Container*, other details, location.

Visual breakdown:

Author. "Small Work Title." [CONTAINER], date/publisher/etc., location.
 ↓ ↓
 (The piece) (What holds it)

Common Container Examples

Article in a Journal

Johnson, Mary. "Article Title." *Journal Name*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45-67.

Breakdown: - **Source:** "Article Title" - **Container:** *Journal Name*

Chapter in a Book

Lee, Sarah. "Chapter Title." *Book Title*, edited by John Smith, Publisher, 2023, pp. 120-145.

Breakdown: - **Source:** “Chapter Title” - **Container:** *Book Title*

Video on YouTube

Smith, John. "How to Write Essays." *YouTube*, uploaded by Education Channel, 15 May 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=abc123.

Breakdown: - **Source:** “How to Write Essays” - **Container:** *YouTube*

Article on a Website

Doe, Jane. "Climate Change Solutions." *Environmental News*, 10 Nov. 2024, www.envnews.com/climate-solutions.

Breakdown: - **Source:** "Climate Change Solutions" - **Container:** *Environmental News*

Song on an Album

Swift, Taylor. “Anti-Hero.” *Midnights*, Republic Records, 2022.

Breakdown: - **Source:** “Anti-Hero” - **Container:** *Midnights*

TV Episode in a Series

“Pilot.” *Breaking Bad*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Vince Gilligan, AMC, 20 Jan. 2008.

Breakdown: - **Source:** “Pilot” - **Container:** *Breaking Bad*

Multiple Containers (Nested)

Some sources have TWO containers: - Article in journal found in database - Video on platform accessed through library - Chapter in book found on website

Format:
Author. “Title.” *Container 1*, details, location. *Container 2*, location.

Examples with Two Containers

Journal Article in Database: Johnson, Mary. “Research Methods.” *Education Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2024, pp. 89-104. *JSTOR*, doi:10.1234/eq.2024.0056.

Breakdown: - **Source:** “Research Methods” - **Container 1:** *Education Quarterly* (the journal) - **Container 2:** *JSTOR* (the database)

Song on Streaming Service: Beyoncé. “Formation.” *Lemonade*, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016. *Spotify*, open.spotify.com/track/abc123.

Breakdown: - **Source:** “Formation” - **Container 1:** *Lemonade* (the album) - **Container 2:** *Spotify* (the platform)

Article on Website Found in Database: Smith, John. “Technology Trends.” *Tech Review*, 5 Mar. 2024, www.techreview.com/trends. *Academic Search Complete*, doi:10.5678/tr.2024.

Breakdown: - **Source:** “Technology Trends” - **Container 1:** *Tech Review* (the website) - **Container 2:** *Academic Search Complete* (the database)

Core Elements for Containers

For each container, include these elements (when available):

- 1. **Title of container** (italicized)
- 2. **Other contributors** (editors, translators, directors)
- 3. **Version** (edition, director’s cut)
- 4. **Number** (volume, issue, season, episode)
- 5. **Publisher** (company, studio, network)
- 6. **Publication date**
- 7. **Location** (pages, URL, DOI, time stamp)

Not all elements appear in every citation.

How to Identify Containers

Ask: “Where did I find this?”

Examples:

“I found an article...” - In a journal → Container is the *journal* - On a website → Container is the *website* - In a database → Two containers (*journal* and *database*)

“I watched a video...” - On YouTube → Container is *YouTube* - In a streaming service → Container is the *service* - On a news website → Container is the *website*

“I read a chapter...” - In a book → Container is the *book* - In an e-book → Container is *book* plus *platform*

Container Decision Tree

```
What are you citing?
↓
Is it part of something larger?
↓
YES → That larger work is Container 1
↓
Did you access Container 1 through something else?
↓
YES → That access point is Container 2
↓
NO → Stop at Container 1
```

Common Container Scenarios

Scenario 1: Standalone Book

No container needed

Smith, John. *Book Title*. Publisher, 2023.

(The book itself is not contained in anything)

Scenario 2: Article in Print Journal

One container

Johnson, Mary. “Article Title.” *Journal Name*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45-67.

Container: *Journal Name*

Scenario 3: Article Accessed Through Database

Two containers

Johnson, Mary. “Article Title.” *Journal Name*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45-67. *JSTOR*, doi:10.xxxx.

Container 1: *Journal Name*

Container 2: *JSTOR*

Scenario 4: Video on YouTube

One container

Creator Name. "Video Title." *YouTube*, 15 May 2024, www.youtube.com/watch?v=abc.

Container: *YouTube*

Scenario 5: Article on Website

One container

Author. "Article Title." *Website Name*, 10 Nov. 2024, www.site.com/article.

Container: *Website Name*

Special Cases

Website Without Distinct Site Name

If the website doesn't have a distinct name, skip the container:

Smith, John. "Article Title." 10 Nov. 2024, www.johnsmith.com/article.

Book on E-Reader Platform

Smith, John. *Book Title*. Publisher, 2023. *Kindle*.

Container: *Kindle* (the platform)

Netflix/Streaming Shows

Show Title. Created by Creator Name, Production Company, Years. *Netflix*.

Container: *Netflix*

Magazine Article in Database

Lee, Sarah. "Article Title." *Time*, 5 June 2024, pp. 28-32. *EBSCOhost*, www.ebscohost.com/article.

Container 1: *Time*

Container 2: *EBSCOhost*

Quick Reference: Italics vs Quotes

Italicize containers: - *Journal names* - *Website names* - *Platform names* (YouTube, Netflix, Spotify) - *Database names* (JSTOR, EBSCOhost) - *Book titles* (when they're containers for chapters) - *Album titles* - *TV series titles*

Use quotes for sources: - "Article titles" - "Chapter titles" - "Song titles" - "Episode titles" - "Video titles" - "Poem titles"

Punctuation Rules

Between source and container: Use a period after the source title, then the container in italics.

Smith, John. "Article Title." *Journal Name*, details. ↑ period

Between containers: Use a period after first container's location, then second container.

"Article." *Journal*, vol. 5, pp. 10-20. *Database*, doi:xxxxx. ↑ period

Container Checklist

When citing a source, ask:

1. ☐ Is my source part of a larger work?
 - YES → Identify Container 1
 - NO → No container needed
 2. ☐ Did I access that larger work through another platform?
 - YES → Identify Container 2
 - NO → Stop at Container 1
 3. ☐ Have I italicized all container titles?
 4. ☐ Have I put source titles in quotation marks?
 5. ☐ Have I included proper punctuation between elements?
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Practice Examples

Example 1: Journal Article in Print

What you read: An article about education in a printed journal

Citation:

Johnson, Mary. "Teaching Methods." *Education Today*, vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60.

Containers: One (*Education Today*)

Example 2: Same Article in Database

What you read: Same article, but accessed through JSTOR

Citation:

Johnson, Mary. "Teaching Methods." *Education Today*, vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60. *JSTOR*, doi:10.xxxx.

Containers: Two (*Education Today*, *JSTOR*)

Example 3: Music Video

What you watched: Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" video on YouTube

Citation:

Swift, Taylor. "Anti-Hero." *YouTube*, uploaded by Taylor Swift, 21 Oct. 2022,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=abc.

Containers: One (*YouTube*)

Example 4: Chapter in E-book

What you read: A chapter from a book on your Kindle

Citation:

Smith, John. "Chapter Title." *Book Title*, edited by Mary Jones, Publisher, 2023, pp. 50-75. *Kindle*.

Containers: Two (*Book Title*, *Kindle*)

Common Mistakes

☐ **Forgetting the container**

"Article Title." Vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60.

☐ **Include container name**

"Article Title." *Journal Name*, vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60.

☐ **Not italicizing containers**

"Article Title." Journal Name, vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60.

☐ **Italicize all containers**

"Article Title." *Journal Name*, vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60.

☐ **Missing second container for database access**

"Article Title." *Journal Name*, vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60.

☐ **Include database as Container 2**

"Article Title." *Journal Name*, vol. 15, 2024, pp. 45-60. *JSTOR*, doi:10.xxxx.

Why Containers Matter

Containers provide: 1. **Context** - Shows where the source comes from 2. **Access** - Shows how readers can find it 3. **Clarity** - Organizes complex citation information 4. **Flexibility** - Works for print and digital sources

The container system makes MLA 9th edition more adaptable to modern sources like streaming services, databases, and online platforms.

For complete container rules: *MLA Handbook* (9th ed.), Chapter 5