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Things You Need to Know For Future Essays

Citing Sources

Remember that any text you write about in an essay, including the literary work under discussion, is a *source* and needs to be cited. This issue is particularly important in a course where many of the works appear in different translations. But also for most books published before the twentieth century, different editors provide different editorial apparatus: introduction, notes, variant wordings and spellings, scholarly essays. So your text may differ markedly from the one your neighbor is reading, and you need to identify that difference explicitly. (For more contemporary works, you provide the information so that readers know how to find the book).

Of course, you must also list any outside sources you used in your essay: books, articles, databases, web sites. MLA Format distinguishes between Works Cited and Bibliography. A bibliography is a list of all the relevant works that you consulted or cited or think a reader would want to know about. A Works Cited list identifies only the sources that you actually quoted or referred to in your essay. Why use Works Cited instead of Bibliography? I'm surely not the first to reveal that scholars sometimes pad their bibliographies, adding works they haven't read in order to look impressive. Shhh. But what if you looked at, say, the Encyclopedia Britannica or Wikipedia or another source that you found helpful? You have decided not to cite it in your essay, but you did learn something important from it. If so, you may include a Works Consulted list as well. Better to err on the side of zealousness about these details than under-reporting.

Finally, use MLA Works Cited format and use it *absolutely correctly*. There are no shortcuts on this. The form is logical and easy to use, but you must be accurate down to the last comma, period, and colon. I've provided several links on the Materials page of the MIT Server to get you going: Citing Sources and the Mayfield Manual. Remember that many articles now appear in online databases (JSTOR, LION, Gale, etc.) that also have print versions. You need to cite *both* the print information and the information about the database, with URL and date you visited.

If you have any questions, *do not hesitate* to consult with me, the writing consultants, the Writing and Communications Center, or any other authoritative source.

Quotations

Always quote passages from the text to support your points. An essay without textual evidence is not a literary analysis; at best it summarizes the text, but it cannot perform a significant analysis or argument without close attention to language and details. So quote.

When you quote passages, identify the source in parentheses by page number or, in the case of Shakespeare's plays, by act, scene, and line numbers, like this: II, iv, 6-8. If the original text is set up in poetic lines, you must supply slashes between them in your quotation and capitalize the first word in each line, as in this quotation from *The Comedy of Errors*: "Dissembling harlot, thou are false in all, / And art confederate with a damnèd pack / To make a loathsome abject scorn of me" (IV, iv, 107-9). Or you can set it up separately, without the quotation marks:

Dissembling harlot, thou are false in all,
And art confederate with a damnèd pack
To make a loathsome abject scorn of me. (IV, iv, 107-9)

Note the differences in where the closing period appears in those two examples.

If the quotation is in prose, you still observe the rule above: put quotation marks around a passage that you're including in the text, end with the close-quotation marks, give the page number in parentheses, and then provide the concluding period or comma; a question mark or exclamation point should appear within the quotation marks. See, for example, this quotation from Erich Segal's preface to the collection of plays by Plautus: "In 254 BC, the generally accepted date for Plautus' birth, Rome was still a relatively insignificant nation" (xi). If you have a longer passage, set it off with margins on both sides and use no quotation marks except those that appear in the passage:

In 254 BC, the generally accepted date for Plautus' birth, Rome was still a relatively insignificant nation. But she was in the midst of the first of her three wars with Carthage, the powerful Phoenician colony in Africa. (xi-xii)