

The `mla` class*

Seth Price
`ssterling@firemail.cc`

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Abstract

In the United States, secondary and undergraduate students are generally expected to adhere to the format prescribed by the Modern Language Association (MLA) for typewritten essays, research papers and writings. Sadly, the tool of choice is usually Microsoft Word, even amongst those fluent with \LaTeX .

Though there *are* some templates and tools to aid in writing in the MLA format using \LaTeX , none fully met the expectations of the author. So *voilà*, there now exists an `mla.cls` proper: a simple, straightforward class for composing papers almost perfectly adherent to the MLA style guide¹.

Licensing

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*This document corresponds to `mla` v0.4.1, dated 2019/05/18.

¹Modern Language Association of America. *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 8th ed. Modern Language Association of America, 2016. ISBN: 9781603292627.

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1 Initial code

The mla class uses the article class as its base. Thanks to this, macros such as `\textit` or `\textsuperscript` work as expected and won't have to be re-defined.

```
1 \LoadClass[letterpaper,12pt]{article}
```

`\mladate` The *Handbook* requires use of the *day month year* date format, not TeX's standard *month day, year*. The macro `\mladate` will format `\today` accordingly to be used as the default value for `\date` (see section 5.1).

```
2 \newcommand{\mladate}{%
3   \the\day\
4   \ifcase\the\month
5     \or January
6     \or February
7     \or March
8     \or April
9     \or May
10    \or June
11    \or July
12    \or September
13    \or October
14    \or November
15    \or December
16  \fi}
```

```

17 \the\year
18 }

```

2 Options

Some teachers and professors might still require using the seventh edition of the *Handbook*, while others will likely use the eighth edition. Which edition to implement can be explicitly specified with the `mla7` and `mla8` class options. The only difference this makes within the `mla` class itself is the citation format used by `biblatex`.

```

19 \DeclareOption{mla7}{\def\@optMlaSeven}
20 \DeclareOption{mla8}{\def\@optMlaEight}

```

Some versions of `biblatex-mla` might not recognize the `style=mla-new` option for the eighth edition. In this case, one can specify `mla8alt` to the `mla` class.

```

21 \DeclareOption{mla8alt}{\def\@optMlaEightAlt}

```

2.1 Processing

A friendly warning will be provided when an unknown option is provided.

```

22 \DeclareOption*{%
23   \ClassWarning{mla}{Unknown option ‘\CurrentOption’; ignoring}
24 }

```

By default, the eighth edition of the *Handbook* is used. To future-proof your documents for upcoming editions, however, it may be wise to explicitly specify `mla8`.

```

25 \ExecuteOptions{mla8}
26 \ProcessOptions\relax

```

3 Loading packages

The `mla` class requires the following packages¹:

```

27 \RequirePackage{enotez}
28 \RequirePackage{enumitem}
29 \RequirePackage{fancyhdr}
30 \RequirePackage{fullpage}
31 \RequirePackage{indentfirst}
32 \RequirePackage{ragged2e}
33 \RequirePackage{microtype}
34 \RequirePackage{newtxtext}
35 \RequirePackage{titlesec}
36 \RequirePackage{xstring}

```

¹All of the required packages are available for download on the Comprehensive T_EX Archive Network (CTAN) if unavailable on your system: <https://www.ctan.org/>.

The following consists of prerequisites for biblatex-mla:

```
37 \RequirePackage[american]{babel}
38 \RequirePackage{csquotes}
39 \RequirePackage{hanging}
40 \RequirePackage[hidelinks,pdfusetitle]{hyperref}
```

And finally, biblatex. The mla class options dictate what options are passed to biblatex, hence the *if-then* clauses. Due to the nature of the code, earlier editions specified will override later versions (this will later be fixed).

```
41 \ifdefined\@optMlaSeven
42   \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,showmedium=true,
43                 backend=biber]{biblatex}
44 \else
45   \ifdefined\@optMlaEightAlt
46     \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,
47                   showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
48   \else\ifdefined\@optMlaEight
49     \RequirePackage[style=mla-new,noremoteinfo=false,
50                   showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
51   \fi\fi
52 \fi
```

4 Document layout

4.1 Font

The newtxtext package was already loaded in section 3, and the font was set to 12pt when loading the article class in section 1. This should be metric-compatible with the infamous Times New Roman, the *de facto* standard of the MLA format¹.

4.1.1 Microtype

The microtype package (as loaded in section 3) will marginally offset the burden of using Times by correcting its ugly kerning and tracking. The vague `activate=false` below simply disables protrusion, maintaining original line and page breaks.

```
53 \microtypesetup{activate=false}
```

4.2 Line breaking and spacing

The *Handbook* prescribes exact double-spacing, the definition of which varies between typesetters. With these parameters exact, L^AT_EX produces 23 lines of text whereas the “industry standard” Microsoft Word² produces 24. To compensate, line spacing is set to *just enough*:

¹According to the popular, oft-referenced Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html.

²Microsoft Word 97 through 2016, and likely following versions as well.

```
54 \linespread{1.905}
```

Though not explicitly denounced in the *Handbook*, most MLA-style papers don't hyphenate or adjust spacing for pretty typesetting.

```
55 \hyphenpenalty 10000
```

```
56 \pretolerance 10000
```

4.3 Paragraphing

The *Handbook* specifies half-inch first-line indentation for each paragraph and no extra spacing in between.

```
57 \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}
```

```
58 \setlength{\RaggedRightParindent}{\parindent}
```

```
59 \setlength{\parskip}{0em}
```

```
60 \setlength{\topsep}{0em}
```

And, for the sake of consistent 24-line papers, orphans and widows are explicitly allowed.

```
61 \widowpenalty 0
```

```
62 \clubpenalty 0
```

```
63 \interlinepenalty 0
```

For a final heinous crime against typesetting, the *Handbook* advises flush-left/ragged-right alignment. (This is achieved with the `ragged2e` package.)

```
64 \RaggedRight
```

`noindent` The `noindent` environment doesn't work as expected in conjunction with `ragged2e`, hence the re-definition.

```
65 \renewenvironment{noindent}{%
```

```
66   \edef\tmpind{\parindent}
```

```
67   \setlength{\parindent}{0pt}
```

```
68 }{%
```

```
69   \setlength{\parindent}{\tmpind}
```

```
70   \undef{\tmpind}
```

```
71 }
```

4.4 Page layout

With few exceptions, the US uses "letter-size" paper. The paper size was already set when loading the article class in section 1.

Furthermore, the *Handbook* dictates uniform one-inch margins on said paper. This was already set by the `fullpage` package as loaded in section 3. The `\textheight` and `\textwidth` definitions are here just for good measure.

```
72 \setlength{\textheight}{9in}
```

```
73 \setlength{\textwidth}{6.5in}
```

4.5 Running head

The running head in MLA style is simply the author's surname followed by the current page number, right-aligned. This is managed using the `fancyhdr` and `xstring` packages.

```
74 \fancypagestyle{norule}{%
75   \renewcommand{\headrulewidth}{0pt}
76   \renewcommand{\footrulewidth}{0pt}
77 }
78 \fancyhf{}
79 \pagestyle{headings}
80 \pagestyle{norule}
81 \fancyhead[R0]{\StrBehind{\@author}{ }[\last]\last} \thepage}
```

The following code is largely a hack to align the header in the middle of the one-inch margin above the body text.

```
82 \setlength{\headheight}{18pt}
83 \setlength{\headsep}{12pt}
84 \setlength{\voffset}{-34pt}
```

5 Document markup

5.1 The header

```
\title The \title, \author and \date macros work as expected. However, if your
\author surname contains a space, you must contain the surname in braces as such:
\date \author{Ludwig {van Beethoven}}. This keeps the full surname in the running
head (see section 4.5).
```

The following header commands are unique to the `mla` class.

```
\professor The instructor who assigned the paper, i.e. "Dr. Marjorie Stewart".
85 \newcommand*{\professor}[1]{\gdef\@professor{#1}}

\course The course for which this paper was assigned, i.e. "ENGL 101-02".
86 \newcommand*{\course}[1]{\gdef\@course{#1}}
```

To prevent undefined behavior, the internal macros used to store the above information are set empty, except for `\date`. (Note the use of `\mladate`; see section 1.)

```
87 \title{}
88 \author{}
89 \professor{}
90 \course{}
91 \date{\mladate}
```

`\makemlaheader` This command finally prints out the standard four-line MLA header, as well as the title.

```

92 \newcommand{\makemlaheader}{%
93   \begin{noindent}
94     \@author \\
95     \@professor \\
96     \@course \\
97     \@date \\
98     \begin{center}\@title\end{center}
99   \end{noindent}
100 }
```

For simplicity's sake, `\maketitle` is directly aliased to `\makemlaheader`.

```

101 \renewcommand{\maketitle}{\makemlaheader}
```

5.2 Sectioning

`\section` Section headings are neither defined nor discouraged in the *Handbook*, though
`\subsection` commonly used in longer papers. Customary section headings are rather straight-
`\subsubsection` forward, consisting of the section number in Arabic numerals, a space, and the
section name with no special decoration¹.

However, for the sake of clarity, the section headings in this class will be set in small-caps.

```

102 \renewcommand{\thesection}{\@arabic\c@section}
103 \renewcommand{\thesubsection}{\thesection.\@arabic\c@subsection}
104 \renewcommand{\thesubsubsection}{\thesubsection.\@arabic\c@subsubsection}
```

Un-fancifying the headings is achieved using the `titlesec` package.

```

105 \titleformat*{\section}{\normalsize\sc}
106 \titleformat*{\subsection}{\normalsize\sc}
107 \titleformat*{\subsubsection}{\normalsize\sc}
108 \titlespacing*{\section}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
109 \titlespacing*{\subsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
110 \titlespacing*{\subsubsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
111 \titlelabel{\thetitle. }
```

Under default configuration, \TeX doesn't indent the first paragraph after a section heading, violating MLA style. The solution `indentfirst` package was already loaded in section 3.

5.3 Lists

`itemize` To the user, `itemize` and `enumerate` lists will function exactly as expected. How-
`enumerate` ever, the formatting of the lists must be modified as to preserve double-spacing

¹According to the popular, oft-referenced OWL: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html.

and adhere to common practice¹; these changes are achieved using the `enumitem` package.

```
112 \setlist[itemize]{%
113     parsep=0pt,
114     itemsep=0pt,
115     topsep=0pt,
116     leftmargin=\parindent
117 }
118 \setlist[enumerate]{%
119     parsep=0pt,
120     itemsep=0pt,
121     topsep=0pt,
122     leftmargin=\parindent
123 }
```

5.4 Block quotation

blockquote The *Handbook* dictates blockquotes be set flush a half-inch from the left margin with no extra space on the right. The existing `blockquote` environment is re-defined for this purpose.

```
124 \renewenvironment{blockquote}{%
125     \list{}{\leftmargin 0.5in}
126     \item[]
127     \setlength{\parindent}{0.5in}
128     \vspace{-\topsep}
129 }{%
130     \endlist
131     \vspace{-\topsep}
132 }
```

5.5 Paper sections

5.5.1 Paper

paper The main content; the body. This environment produces the MLA header at the top.

```
133 \newenvironment{paper}{%
134     \makemlaheader
135 }{%
136     \newpage
137 }
```

5.5.2 Endnotes

notes Endnotes can be typeset manually or with the supported `enotez` package².

¹According to the MLA itself: <https://style.mla.org/vertical-lists-in-mla-style/>.

²Refer to the `enotez` documentation for instructions.

```

138 \newenvironment{notes}{%
139     \begin{noindent}
140         \pdfbookmark[0]{Notes}{notes}
141         \begin{center}Notes\end{center}
142     \end{noindent}
143 }{%
144     \newpage
145 }

```

To correctly format endnotes per common practice¹, a custom `mlanotes` list type will be created. This is achieved with the `enumitem` package.

```

146 \newlist{mlanotes}{description}{1}
147 \setlist[mlanotes]{%
148     parsep=0pt,
149     itemsep=0pt,
150     topsep=0pt,
151     leftmargin=\parindent
152 }

```

The following initializes the `enotez` package to use the `mlanotes` list format.

```

153 \DeclareInstance{enotez-list}{mla}{list}{%
154     heading = {},
155     format = \normalsize\normalfont,
156     list-type = mlanotes
157 }
158 \setenotez{list-name={},list-style=mla,backref}

```

5.5.3 Bibliography

`workscited` The bibliography can be typeset manually or with the supported `biblatex` package².

```

159 \newenvironment{workscited}{%
160     \begin{noindent}
161         \pdfbookmark[0]{Works Cited}{workscited}
162         \begin{center}Works Cited\end{center}
163     \end{noindent}
164     \vspace{-16pt} % XXX to counter unexplained space
165 }{%
166     \newpage
167 }

```

The *Handbook* prescribes a half-inch hanging indent on all bibliography entries. This is achieved by setting the `\bibhang` length defined by the `biblatex` package.

```

168 \setlength{\bibhang}{\parindent}

```

¹According to the popular, oft-referenced OWL: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_endnotes_and_footnotes.html.

²Refer to the `biblatex` documentation for instructions.

A Example usage

Following is a basic L^AT_EX document using the mla class. The document is composed of a text file, mla-example.tex, and a biblatex bibliography file, mla-example.bib.

A.1 mla-example.tex

```
\documentclass[mla8]{mla}

\title{Sample MLA Document}
\author{John Doe}
\professor{Dr. Suzie Que}
\course{\LaTeX\ 101}
\date{\mladate} % see docs for '\mladate'

% The .bib file (explained later) must be included in the preamble
\addbibresource{mla-example.bib}

\begin{document}

\begin{paper}

This is an example document using ‘‘mla.cls’’.
The header is automatically printed upon using the ‘‘paper’’ class,
which is why there is no ‘‘\textbackslash{}\maketitle’’.

\section{Professors who prefer sections}

Sometimes, research papers can become unmanageably lengthy.
In that case, section headings can help divide up the ideas
to make it more accessible to the reader.
Though this paper is short, section headings are employed
as an example of the ‘‘mla’’ class’ capabilities.

Some professors may explicitly require or denounce use of headings.
Dr. Suzie Que of Anytown, PA requires they be used for anything
longer than five pages:
\begin{blockquote}
John---so help me God---if you turn in another twenty-page research
paper with no logical breaks I will hang you at the stake.
Even though the MLA style guide doesn’t say anything about
section headings, they’re not actually prohibited.
So, if you turn in \emph{anything} longer than five pages to me
and there isn’t a \emph{single} break or section heading,
I will dock your grade to an F.
Capisce? \cite{que2019}
```

```
\end{blockquote}
```

Despite her language, she does have a point to say.

```
\subsection{Subsections}
```

Alongside regular top-level sections, one can use
“`\textbackslash{}subsection`” commands too\endnote{Section commands
in “`mla.cls`” work identical to those of the “`article`” class.}.

```
\section{Lists}
```

Vertical lists are a rarity in MLA format, but if one so pleases,
they can be used.
The “`itemize`”, “`enumerate`” and “`description`” lists
work just as expected, even with sublists.

```
\begin{itemize}
\item A bogus item
\item Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet. This item has a bunch of text
just so it covers more than one line in the paper and shows
proper indentation.
\item Last item!
\begin{enumerate}
\item Just kidding; there's a subitem. And it's a number!
\end{enumerate}
\item Okay, now it's the last item.
\end{itemize}
```

```
\section{Using endnotes}
```

As one may notice, the above subsection used an endnote.
These can simply be cited with
“`Yada yada text\textbackslash{}endnote\{more info\ldots\}`.”
Endnotes can be easily printed in correct format by calling
“`\textbackslash{}printendnotes`” within the
“`notes`” environment.

```
\section{Using bibliographies}
```

Dr. Suzie Que was cited in the above blockquote.
The ins-and-outs of “`biblatex`” will not be explained in this
document, so please refer to online documentation such as the
“`BibLaTeX Cheat Sheet`”.

Just as with the endnotes,
the bibliography can be easily printed in correct format by calling

‘‘\textbackslash{}printbibliography[heading=none]’’ within the ‘‘workscited’’ environment.
 (The ‘‘heading=none’’ part is important; the ‘‘workscited’’ environment already prints one.)

```
\end{paper}

\begin{notes}

\printendnotes

\end{notes}

\begin{workscited}

\printbibliography[heading=none]

\end{workscited}

\end{document}
```

A.2 mla-example.bib

```
@article{que2019,
  author = {Suzie Que},
  title = {Notice to all students},
  journaltitle = {Anytown High School Homepage},
  publisher = {County Board of Education},
  date = {2019-04-20},
  howpublished = {Web},
  urldate = {2019-04-21}
}
```

Change history

v0.2		\mladate: Added macro	2
General: Added support for PDF metadata	4	workscited: Countered unexplained vertical space after heading	9
Hid hyperlink boxes in PDF output	4	notes: Added environment	8
blockquote: Countered unexplained vertical space after environment	8	Countered unexplained vertical space after heading	8
\makemlaheader: Changed date format to <i>day month year</i>	7	\section: Changed heading to small-caps	7
		\subsection: Changed heading to	

small-caps	7	Changed <code>\linespacing</code> to prints	
Properly formatted	7	24 lines per page	4
<code>\subsubsection</code> : Changed heading		Disabled <code>microtype</code> protrusion ..	4
to small-caps	7	<code>enumerate</code> : Added list type	7
Properly formatted	7	<code>notes</code> : Changed default endnotes	
v0.3		format to <code>mla</code>	8
General: Added <code>mla8alt</code> option ...	3	Changed endnotes list type to cus-	
Improved options parsing to avoid		tom <code>mlaendnotes</code> list	8
contradiction and undefined be-		Removed extra <code>\vspace</code>	8
havior	3	<code>itemize</code> : Added list type	7
Replaced obsolete <code>times</code> package		v0.4.1	
with <code>newtxtext</code>	3	<code>\makemlaheader</code> : Changed date for-	
v0.4		mat back to whatever is inside	
General: Added <code>enumitem</code> package	3	<code>\@date</code>	7
Added <code>microtype</code> package	3		