
(MLA 7th ed.) How do I write an MLA parenthetical (in-text) reference?

Next to each citation you create in NoodleBib MLA (except for in the Starter version), you'll find a link titled "Parenthetical Reference." Click the link to get information about how to refer to that particular entry in-text, as well as a list of rules to follow for parenthetical references in general. We've listed that information here as well for your convenience. If you are citing the **Bible or another such religious work**, please refer to [this knowledge base article](#) that specifically addresses that type of source.

What is a parenthetical reference?

A parenthetical reference is a reference within the body of your paper to one of the sources listed in your Works Cited list. It indicates to your reader exactly what you derived from the source, and specifically where they can find it. You need to write a parenthetical, or "in-text" reference, whether you quote the material directly from the source, paraphrase it in your own words, or refer to an idea derived from the material.

What typically goes in an MLA-style parenthetical reference?

The information that you need to include depends on what type of source the material comes from. For printed material, you normally only need to include the *author(s)* (or *title* if there is no author) and *page number(s)* in your reference. For multi-volume works like encyclopedias, you may also need to include a *volume number* (see Rules 6 and 7 below). For Internet sources, sometimes an alternative to page numbers, such as *paragraph numbers*, are cited.

The information described above can be either included in the sentence that you write, or added in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

What other rules do I need to know to write a parenthetical reference?

Rule 1: Placement

The parentheses are usually placed at the end of a sentence, between the last word and the period. If you are quoting material directly, the parentheses should go between the closing quotation mark and the period:

"The chicken came before the egg" (Smith 21).

Rule 2: Sentence vs. parentheses

Only information that is not already contained in your sentence is necessary in the parenthetical reference. For example, in the following example the author's last name, Smith, is already stated, so only the page numbers are necessary within the parentheses:

Smith theorizes that the chicken came before the egg (21-33).

Rule 3: When author names are similar or the same

Information you provide in the parenthetical reference should distinguish exactly which work in your source list you are referring to. Add a first initial or whole first name if the last name is not unique in your source list, or add the title of the work if there is more than one work by the same author. For example:

It has been proven that the chicken came before the egg (J. Smith 21-33).
It has been proven that the chicken came before the egg (John Smith 21-33).

It has been proven that the chicken came before the egg (**Smith**, *Eggs* 21-33).

Rule 4: When there is no author

If the work is listed and alphabetized in your source list by its title (no author), then you should refer to it in the parenthetical reference by its title as well. The title may be shortened to just the first word (not including articles like "The" and "A"), and should be quoted or underlined if it is quoted or underlined in your source list. For example:

Experts believe that the chicken came before the egg (*Chicken* 21-33).
Experts believe that the chicken came before the egg ("**Egg**" 2-4).

If you have two entries with the same author (or no author) and title, find a publication fact that distinguishes the works and add it to their parenthetical references. For a nonperiodical print source, use the date of publication if possible. For an article in a periodical, use the title of the periodical. For a Web page, use the title of the overall Web site.

Experts believe that the chicken came before the egg (Smith, **2006**).
Experts believe that the chicken came before the egg ("Egg," *ChickenWeb*).

Rule 5: Page numbers and other numbering systems

Sources sometimes use alternate numbering systems like sections (sec.), chapters (ch.), books (bk.), parts (pt.), verses, lines, acts, or scenes. Content within online sources can often only be referenced by paragraph number. If an alternate numbering system is used, include that information instead of page numbers. Note that a comma is used after the author (or title) in this case.

Experts believe that the chicken came before the egg (Smith, **pars. 3-7**).
In "Egg Poem" Smith asks "how do we know, which came first?" (**lines 5-6**).

Occasionally, you may find that page numbers are available **in addition to** these other numbering systems. In this case, it is helpful to include both; provide the page number first, followed by a semicolon, and then the other identifying information. An example follows:

One novel reports a different theory (Smith **55; pt. 1, sec. 3, ch. 1**).
In "Egg Poem" Smith asks "how do we know, which came first?" (**6; lines 5-6**).

An exception to this rule is that when you are citing a classic verse play or poem, it is standard to omit page numbers even if they are given, and instead cite by division (act, scene, canto, book, part) and line. Divisions and the line number(s) are separated with periods, as in the following examples:

In his classic play, Smith jokes about the egg (*Egg* **1.4.55-56**).
In "Egg Poem" Smith asks "how do know, which came first?" (**4.5-6**).

Rule 6: When to cite the volume number

If you are referring to a multi-volume work like an encyclopedia **AND** you used more than one volume of that work in your paper, then your parenthetical reference should include the volume number you used, as in the following example where we are referring to pages 2-4 of the third volume:

Experts believe that the chicken came before the egg ("Egg" 3:2-4).

Rule 7: Referring to an entire work

If you are referring to an entire work (like an opera or an entire novel) and not a specific section of the work, state the author and/or title within the sentence, and do not add any further information in parentheses. For example:

Smith's opera "**Chicken and Egg**" is a light-hearted comedy.

An exception to the rule above is that if you are citing an entire volume of a multi-volume work, you should include the volume number (either within the sentence, or in parentheses as shown below). Note that we use the abbreviation **vol.** when page numbers are not provided, unlike the example for Rule 5.

Volume 2 of Smith's book solves the chicken and egg mystery.

Eggs solves the chicken and egg mystery (Smith, **vol. 2**).

Rule 8: Quoting or paraphrasing a quotation

If what you quote or paraphrase in your paper is itself a quotation in the source, add the phrase "qtd. in" to the parenthetical reference as shown here:

"I have proven that the chicken came before the egg" (qtd. in J. Smith 21).

