MLA Formatting Without Tears

An essay or research paper is a highly structured form of written communication that should convey the writer’s ideas in a clear, concise, and effective manner (Gibaldi 4). The structure of a traditional essay contains three major parts. Part one, the opening paragraph, introduces the topic and contains the thesis statement. Part two is the body or “heart” of the essay and serves to develop or “prove” the thesis statement (Sebranek and Kemper 55). Lastly, the third part contains a summary or closing paragraph, which is followed on a separate page by a Works Cited list (58).

The opening paragraph should attempt to gain the attention of the reader and allow for a smooth transition into the body of the essay. The introduction sets the tone of the essay by expressing the writer’s attitude toward the subject of the paper. The tone may be serious, sarcastic, solemn, objective, etc. (Sebranek and Kemper 61). One common technique is to develop the opening paragraph by starting with an attention-getting or unusual fact (57).

After developing an interesting introduction, the paragraph should briefly mention the supporting details that you will develop to prove your thesis and then end with the thesis statement itself (“Online”). Your paper will benefit by beginning new paragraphs or sections with connecting words and phrases such as: in addition, likewise, accordingly, in contrast, and in other words (Gibaldi 8).

Finally, make sure your closing paragraph reiterates your thesis and supporting points. You will want to reword this paragraph somewhat to avoid sounding repetitive or disinterested (Sebranek and Kemper 72).
Works Cited


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FAQ

Why do I have to use citations?

The premise behind every research paper, no matter if it’s MLA, APA or DIY, is:

Here’s what I think about this topic. You don’t have to take my word for it because I’ve got highly respected writers and scholars to back me up. You can see who these people are and what insights I got from them in a list at the end of this paper. I’ll let you know exactly where in my paper I’ve used their ideas to back up what I’ve written by citing them in ( ) each time I use one of their ideas.

Whose leg are you trying to pull? (AKA plagiarism)

So use their ideas (and give them credit for them) but don’t use their words and their phrasing unless of course you’re quoting them word for word. Don’t even rewrite the idea like they wrote it. The wording should be in your style not theirs. After all, it’s your paper; own it. If you think it’s your style, then read it aloud or to someone who has read something you’ve written. Does it “sound” like you? First impressions count.