MLA vs. APA (Citation, Formatting, & Commonly Overlooked Rules)

HOW THIS WORKS: Universal rules are presented first. Deviations between MLA and APA are given after.

RULE #1: IDENTIFY THE SOURCE. Identify (*don't guess!*) if the source is from a book, journal, newspaper, magazine, or generic website. Then find the correct example/model based on that answer.

RULE #2: FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE (EXCEPT WHEN YOU SHOULDN'T). In most cases, you should follow the model exactly as shown, punctuation and formatting included. The exception is when the example doesn't *perfectly* fit your source/information. For instance, an example may not show an author, but you would include one if your source is authored. There also might be other changes/information you need to account for.

RULE #3: USE THEY/THEIR AS GENDER-NEUTRAL PRONOUNS. In the past, they/their pronouns have been used only as third-person plural pronouns. However, APA 7 and MLA 8 both encourage writers to use they/their to refer to a single person. This is applicable not only when the person in question identifies with they/them pronouns, but also when the person's gender is not known or the person is hypothetical. (For instance, *a doctor* may examine *their* patient).

RULE #4: AUTHORS. List authors in the order the source gives them (no rearranging). Omit any credentials or titles except Jr./Sr./etc. If a person is not clearly listed, is an *organization* (not company) responsible?

MLA	APA
Give all/full name information.	Use initials for first/middle names.
Invert the first author's name (Last, First).	Invert *all* authors' names (Last, F. M.)
Leave all other names (including those later in the entry, like editor) in first last order.	Place other names (editors, etc.) in first last order.
Use et al. with 3+ authors.	Must name *all* authors until you get to 20+. At that point, see a rule book.

RULE #5: DATES. Include as much date information as provided. Use season if that's given (Fall 2017).

MLA	APA
Present dates in **day Mon. year** order.	Present dates in (**year, month day**) order, spelling months fully.
Abbreviate all months* to three letters.	Date will always go in parentheses as item #2.
Exceptions: Spell May, June, and July fully. September is abbreviated to "Sept."	Use (n.d.) if there's no date entirely, or skip month and/or day if none are given.
Skip over any missing pieces.	

RULE #6: CAPITALIZATION. Capitalize the titles of your sources according to the *style guide,* not the source. For "first/last" rules, those count for both the title and any **subtitles** the source might have; a subtitle counts as a whole new title in terms of capitalization. Capitalization rules are minor but important (particularly for APA).

MLA	APA
For **all titles** (regardless of type), capitalize the first and last words, always. Then, capitalize everything else except… ⊠ Articles (a, an, the) ⊠ Prepositions ⊠ Coordinating conjunctions	For **periodicals,** capitalize the first, last, and major words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and all words of 4+ letters) (aka "title case"). For **anything else** (including books), use "sentence case," meaning you capitalize it like you would a sentence ⬜ first word and proper nouns only. Yes, this is weird. Do it anyway. ☺

RULE #7: ITALICS/QUOTATION MARKS. Italics are used for books and periodicals (newspapers, magazines, and journals), things that might be considered *long/standalone* works.

MLA	APA
Use quotation marks for "short" works, like articles or chapters. Use italics additionally for anything considered a 'container'—something that *holds* other (smaller) works, like **websites and databases**.	Don't use quotation marks in the **reference** list. If you're referring to a "short" work, like an article or chapter, within the **text** of your discussion, then use quotation marks.

RULE #8: CITATION LIST. Begin on a new page by using the "insert break" function. In the center of the first line, with no formatting of any kind, title the page as indicated below. Alphabetize the list by whatever the first word of the entry is—that's usually an author's last name, but no always (overlook *a, an,* or *the*). Double space the entire list, but do not include any extra gaps or breaks—there should be no empty lines. Hanging indent all entries (see example below); do this using the word processor function or using the shortcut command Ctrl T (Windows) or Command/⌘ T (Apple). In Google Docs, Ctrl/⌘ T opens a new tab, so to hanging indent there, you have to adjust the ruler markers (shown below). *Do not manually indent your entries* (it's a nightmare).

MLA	APA
Title the page Works Cited (1 source = Work)	Title the page References (1 source = Reference)

➔ A paragraph is "first line" indented, meaning the first line is pushed in a half inch and all following lines are flush with the margin (like so).

"Hanging indent" does the opposite, where the first line is flush with the margin (like so), and all following
➔ lines are pushed in a half inch. As noted above, this can be a formatting pain if you try to indent using
➔ the "tab" key, so I don't recommend it—use shortcuts or word processor functions instead!

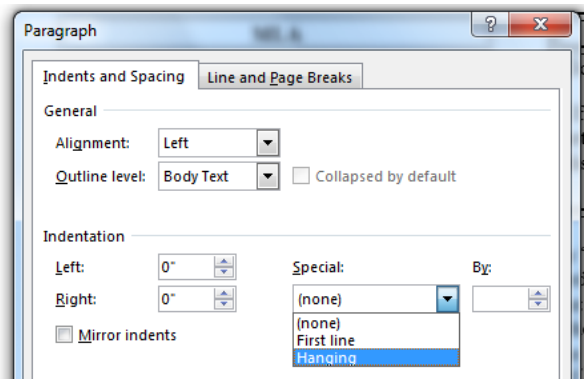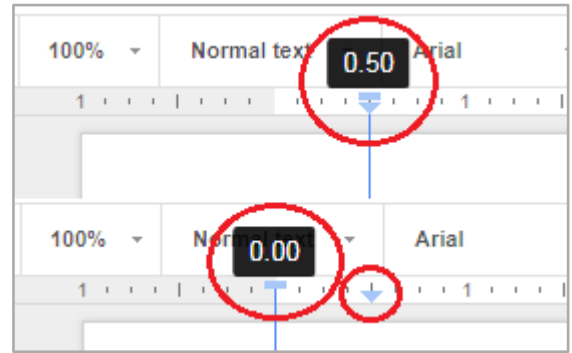Figure 1. Hanging indent in Word.   Figure 2. Hanging indent in Google Docs.

Figure 1: highlight the segment you want to hanging indent. Then, open the "paragraph" settings and select "hanging" under the special indentation options. Remember: in Word, Ctrl/⌘ T will do this automatically.

Figure 2: highlight the segment you want to hanging indent. Then, slide the blue ruler markers to 0.50 inch (click and drag the *bottom*, arrow-shaped marker to get both to move together) as shown above. Then click and drag the *top*, rectangle marker back to 0.0.

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