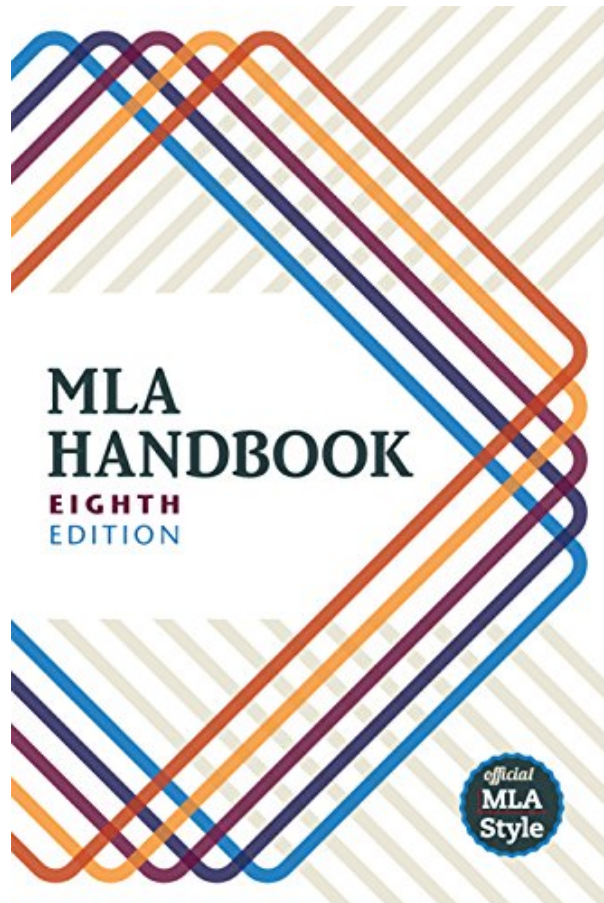
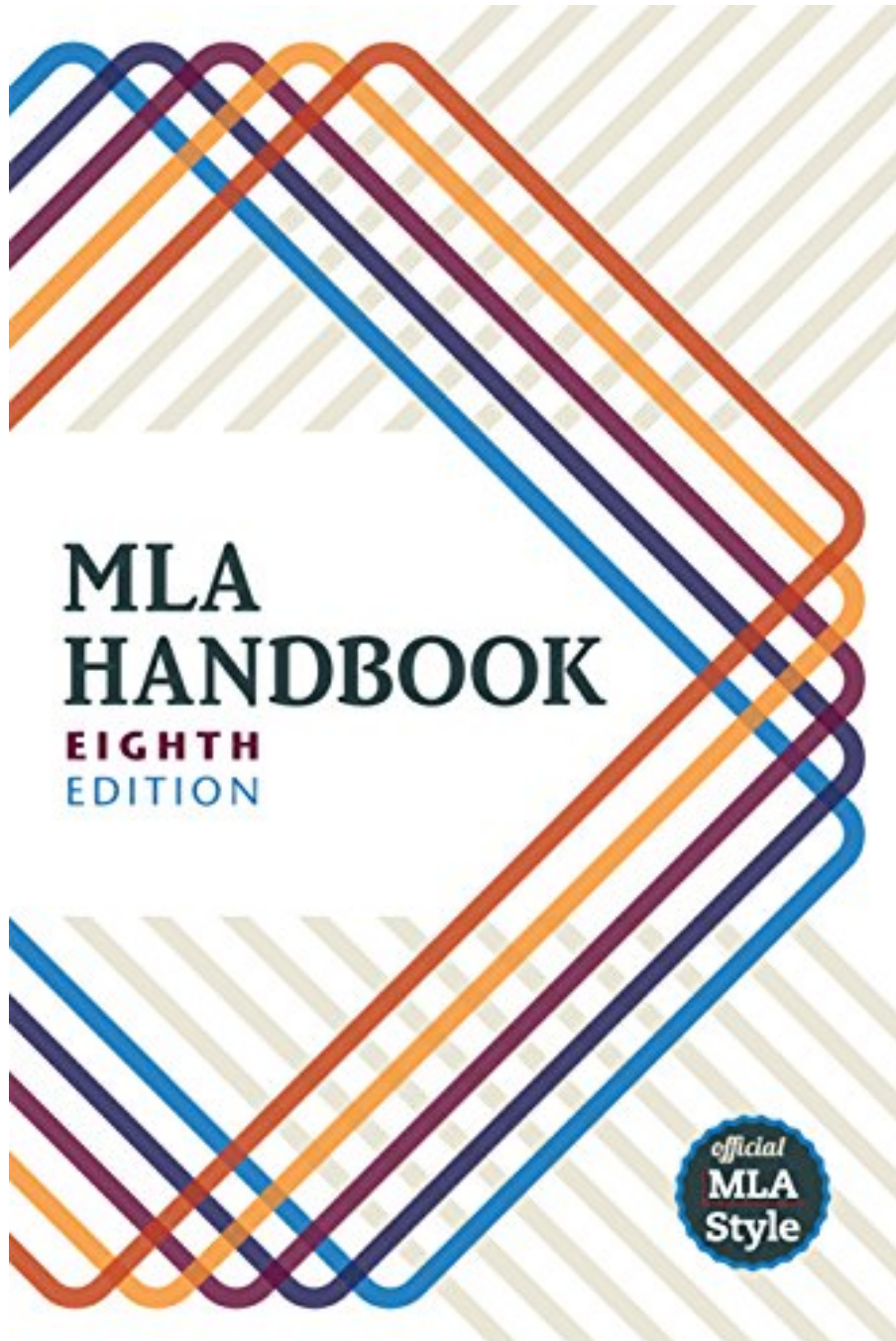


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Review

Rethinking Documentation for the Digital Age

About the Author

Founded in 1883, the Modern Language Association of America provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy. MLA members host an annual convention and other meetings, work with related organizations, and sustain one of the finest publishing programs in the humanities. For more than a century, members have worked to strengthen the study and teaching of language and literature.

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The Modern Language Association, the authority on research and writing, takes a fresh look at documenting sources in the eighth edition of the MLA Handbook. Works are published today in a dizzying range of formats. A book, for example, may be read in print, online, or as an e-book?or perhaps listened to in an audio version. On the Web, modes of publication are regularly invented, combined, and modified. Previous editions of the MLA Handbook provided separate instructions for each format, and additional instructions were required for new formats. In this groundbreaking new edition of its best-selling handbook, the MLA recommends instead one universal set of guidelines, which writers can apply to any type of source.

Shorter and redesigned for easy use, the eighth edition of the MLA Handbook guides writers through the principles behind evaluating sources for their research. It then shows them how to cite sources in their writing and create useful entries for the works-cited list.

More than just a new edition, this is a new MLA style.

- Sales Rank: #788 in Books
- Published on: 2016-04-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.80" h x .60" w x 5.90" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 160 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Exasperated, angry, and betrayed

By Professor M

I don't know how to begin to convey my exasperation, my anger, my sense of betrayal in reading the new

MLA Handbook 8th edition.

Let's start with the good news.

1. MLA hasn't touched in-text citation. Thank God for small favors. In parentheses Author-page number, no comma in between.
2. The odious, tack-on descriptors from 7th edition, Print-Film-Web, have vanished. Good riddance!

Now, for the bad news. It's all about the Works Cited.

Journal citation:

1. There is a proliferation of commas that have to be seen to be believed. Commas are appearing in places whence they were banished 25 years ago or more! A comma now must appear after a journal, for example. Why do this?
2. Out of the blue, "vol." and "no." and "pp." are baa-aa-ck in 8th edition. WHY? I fought the changeover when they were erased in 3rd edition (?) years ago. Then, I came to love the efficiency of using 3.2 instead of vol. 3 no. 2. Why are we going backwards?
3. Why use commas to set off the date? What was wrong with parentheses?
4. While we're on the subject, did I somehow miss expressing the date day-month-year in an earlier edition? It looks cool; I just didn't know it was required.

Book citation:

1. MLA has declared the place of publication irrelevant. The logic of this decision escapes me. I want to know where a source is published. There's a note to say if you absolutely must, you can include it. Somehow it feels condescending.
2. Previously understood abbreviations such as "Ed.", "Trans.", "Dir." etc. now have to be spelled out!! "Edited by", "Translated by", "Directed by". WHY?
3. Ah, BUT university presses still have to be expressed: U of California P, Cambridge UP. This was one of MLA's dumbest moves in an earlier edition because some presses, like Indiana University Press, won't accept a manuscript that uses these abbreviations. But this rule MLA decided to keep in the 8th edition!

When the MLA revolutionized citation by eliminating "Op.cit" and "Ibid." and virtually banished footnotes in favoring the creation of a list of "Works Cited" at the end, I thought it was a stroke of genius. Those bloated "Bibliographies" and vague "References" were shown to be what they were: padding and/or slipshod scholarship. "Works Cited" meant you had to account for every single work on the list.

In teaching graduate students about the importance of correct citation, I felt confident in teaching from the MLA Handbook. How can I teach from the 8th edition with a straight face?

MLA Executive Director Rosemary Feal even ends her introduction by saying there will be "future iterations." God help us all.

I'm ready to bail for Turabian, Chicago, or the EPA.

55 of 61 people found the following review helpful.

A New Pedagogical Approach to Documenting Sources

By Joseph Ryan Kelly

"They're trying to make money." I received this comment immediately upon announcing to my colleagues that MLA was updating its handbook. The assumption of financial gain proved unfounded. The change in the title—the removal of the superfluous "for Writers of Research Papers"—symbolizes the general tendency of this volume to simplify and slenderize. The page count alone testifies to this change, from 292 to 160 pages.

The loss of pulp and ink inaugurates a new pedagogical approach to documenting sources. Rather than treating sources as belonging to particular categories for which there exists a singular format, the MLA Handbook now presents a single unifying and flexible framework for citing the diverse sources that exist in today's multifaceted media age. Whether citing Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Masque of the Red Death" accessed through the HathiTrust Digital Library, Sarah Michelle Geller's performance in an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or a tweet from @persiankiwi in Iran during the Arab Spring—all of these sources serve as examples in the text—a single set of nine core elements provide the framework for identifying and organizing the relevant information for documentation. These general principles of citation, part 1 of the MLA Handbook, replace a long and complicated labyrinth of instructions where students frequently got lost, and understandably so. A set of prescriptive guidelines regarding the mechanics of prose, advanced aspects of the works-cited list, and a brief section about non-print modes of citation follow in part 2. These two sections of the book helpfully cross-reference each other and themselves. Students will find the resulting product much easier to navigate, interpret, and apply to their writing than anything they had previously.

With all of these changes, little about the MLA style of citation has fundamentally changed. Notably, MLA now recognizes that in most cases the city of publication holds little relevance to readers. It now functions as an optional element, particularly for books published before 1900. Furthermore, the handbook reverses the prescription added in the previous edition of the MLA Handbook that each entry in the works-cited should indicate the medium of publication. Many sources, especially digital ones, still indicate their online provenance through digital containers (e.g., HathiTrust Digital Library) or digital location markers (i.e., URLs and DOIs). A common reference to a printed edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* no longer requires the superfluous "Print" at the end.

Admittedly, the 8th edition has also slimmed down because instructions that used to be printed within its covers—page margins, headings, outlining instructions, gender-inclusive language, etc.—are now relegated to a new website, rendering the MLA Handbook essentially a citation guide and not a full style guide. This decision will undoubtedly upset some, but it makes the printed handbook less formidable to students and more singularly useful. The only change that bothers me is the loss of online access to the full-text of the handbook. The 7th edition came with a unique code that allowed consumers to set up an online account with access to the full text of the handbook. This online resource enhanced the utility of the handbook. Whether I had the printed copy of the handbook with me while grading, I nearly always had access to its content. The 7th edition was published in 2009, a year before the release of Apple's first iPad. The increased popularity of tablets and their widespread use among students and in educational institutions likely explains the reason the 8th edition does not automatically come with digital access. While I understand this change, it negatively impacts my reliance on universal access to the MLA Handbook, and for that reason, I cannot give this 8th edition five full stars.

My colleague suspected financial motivations for the release of a new edition of the MLA Handbook.

Ironically, this new pedagogical approach, if it proves successful, will make it difficult for MLA to justify publishing a ninth edition for many years to come!

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

New MLA Handbook Inadequate

By C. D. Rooks

The new MLA Handbook tries to keep up with the ever-changing world of documenting sources from a widening variety of ways and places where sources can now be found or accessed. However, in trying to be as broad as possible to account for as many possibilities as it can, it unfortunately is inadequate in that it is too vague and does not account for the great variety of sources that now exist. The idea of citing sources as containers in containers (boxes in boxes would have been clearer) is not a bad approach, but its execution leaves much to be desired as the text has too few examples and it brings back using URLs, for example, while admitting that often they are not useful as some change or disappear over time. It also has little in the way of how to document things like charts, maps, and other visuals. (It does have "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"; yes, really.) It probably would have been useful to have a professional tech writer do the handbook instead of an academic. I foresee another edition having to be done in a few years, unfortunately, that will be a more useful revision that will combine the former documentation style with this one. Hopefully, the next one will get it right.

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