

WRITING UP RESEARCH

**CURRENT TRENDS IN
THE HUMANITIES**

Edited by

Z. I. Oseni,

V. A. Alabi,

O. C. Medubi

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Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin.
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Chapter Eight

DOCUMENTING RESEARCH: THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (MLA) STYLE

AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye

Introduction

No matter its type or nature, one of the basic universal goal of research is sustainable development. This can only occur through the development of human and material resources. However, the pedagogy of research in African scholarship has created overlapping results between adequate and inadequate research. It should be noted that inadequate research is partly caused by improper research documentation or what can be aptly described as poor referencing.

It should be noted that improper research documentation is not limited to research students or young academics, it is all encompassing. It can occur in several ways. Some of these are:

- A. Improper in-text citations.
- B. Failure to acknowledge or give credit to the authors of the works consulted while writing or producing the result of research.

- C. Smart paraphrasing of other people's research works through mere rehash without acknowledging the source.
- D. Untidy research documentation of the works used in the works cited page.
- E. Inconsistency or duplication of research referencing styles in one work and many more.

The template above falls under unacademic research behaviours which cannot produce good research. We should note that good research must be "controlled, rigorous, systematic, valid and verifiable, empirical, and critical" (Kumar 7). This is why the researcher is expected to be truthful, upright, alert, honest, tenacious and current within the happenings in his or her chosen area of research and in the global research market generally.

To stem the tide of improper research documentation, the existing research documentation style sheets such as the American Psychological Association (APA), Harvard style, Chicago style, Turabian style and so on should be studied and their various editions (old and new) understood for meaningful application. Researchers should note that one day, we will have reason(s) to use some of the research style sheets mentioned above. Knowing the details of how the style sheets are to be used for documentation is, therefore, important for the proper development of scholarship.

The Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation style sheet is one of the numerous research documentation style sheets that can be used for research working and documentation. Hence, this study examines the essence of the Modern Language Association (MLA)

documentation style sheet in the humanistic studies. The theoretical basis for this study is the deductive method of research while the participatory observation method is used to foreground our analysis and in particular, the writing of this paper. The facts behind the procedure involved in the old and new MLA styles are also presented through illustrative examples.

Literature Review

Various scholars such as Nwamuo (8-72), Layiwola (ix-xv), Albert (102-114), Ukala (1-50), Saliu and Oyebanji (1-79), Kumar (3-9), Kafewo (278-303) and so on have written extensively on the core concepts and underlining factors in research methodology with particular reference to humanistic studies and the social sciences. It can be summarised, after a careful deduction, therefore, that the researchers and scholars mentioned above wrote mainly on the essence of research methodology, report writing, data collation, and ethical issues in the research process, field analysis and investigation. The fact is that there is no much attention from researchers and most research related books on research documentation and reference style sheets.

Interestingly, Shettima and Nwaji (4-68) and AbdulRahaman (58-66) have theorised, (though not in details) on the essence of documentation and reference style sheets in research methodology. However, the work of Victoria A. Alabi that documents the details involved in various reference styles with particular reference to humanistic studies and other related fields of scholarship is important to us in this

study. Alabi (55) concludes that:

There are standard documentation formats in every field and a researcher needs to find out the style being used in his field and adhere religiously to it. In humanities disciplines, the styles used include Turabian, Chicago, MLA (Modern Language Association) and APA (American Psychological Association) but the most widely used of these styles are MLA and the APA.

Indeed, research findings can only come to fore through research documentation. The failure to adopt or chose a clear-cut reference style sheet in the research process should, therefore, be seen as a failure in communicating, analysing, criticising and documenting research works.

Documenting research works through proper referencing should also be seen as scholars and researchers' attempt at being truthful and honest. Referencing procedure separates the bibliographical data of the works that scholars have consulted from the researcher's original and or genuine findings. Referencing tells the reader where a researcher is starting from and it also invites other researchers into the future on a particular topic or matter. It is pertinent to recall, at this point of our study, the essence of referencing and documentation of work as clearly articulated by Shettima and Nwaji (34-5). The two scholars are of the opinion that:

In carrying out a research project, we make use of ideas borrowed from other sources of works. Usually, a researcher is expected to document or

provide proper citations to such sources or works which he has made reference to and from where he must have obtained useful information or ideas in executing his own work.

The second face value of research documentation is the culture of acknowledgement and appreciation of past researchers and their research efforts. This should not be ignored.

Research documentation has also been widely discussed by scholars such as Nwamuo (53), Ukala (34) and AbdulRahaman (64). The general consensus on research documentation is that it should not be trivialised. Most research methodology scholars warned that doing this can lead to plagiarism. This is a dishonest and fraudulent academic crime which can easily destroy the integrity of the scholar involved and may signal the death of true research which sustainable development depends on.

In fact, AbdulRahaman (58) says that "the most crucial and the most problematic aspects of research exercise are the interpretation of results and the communication of the findings to others". Interpretation and communication ultimately fall within the nexus of research documentation. Through a holistic overview of research documentation, Nwamuo (60) also submits that:

The completion of the research does not necessarily mean that it is ready for submission. It is considered ready for submission only when it has been given little bits of the sophistication, the trimming, the seasoning and the expectations that help it stand out as an academic paper

presented by a research student. This is the documentation of the research project.

Apart from a researcher's analysis, interpretation and findings which may be original to the researcher, a researcher must be honest to document in his research work, the following important points:

1. Theoretical submissions or suppositions from other scholars that have been clearly documented in published works.
2. Practical or fieldwork findings of other researchers that have been documented and are related to the work of a researcher working on a related topic.
3. Interviews (oral and structured) conducted by other researchers that may and may not have been documented.
4. Results of administered questionnaire (if the work is rooted in empiricism).
5. Findings made through internet sources and so on.

History of MLA

The Modern Language Association (MLA) is an umbrella Association for researchers in the Humanities with bias in the study, and teaching of language and literature. M.L.A. the acronym for Modern Language Association was founded in 1883 at the United States of America by committed scholars in the Humanities who strived for best practices in research documentation. Presently, MLA is growing and it has over 30,000 members in 100 countries.

On publication, MLA is publishing an average of four major periodicals (The *ADE Bulletin*, the *ADFL Bulletin*

Profession and *PMLA* which is a journal) and maintains the publication of about twelve books annually. Details about MLA formation, historical evolution and development can be got at www.mla.org/store/CID24/PID363. This present research work has benefited tremendously from the above internet source. It is important to note that MLA is an academic association with a focus on scholarly publications, administration and award of prizes. MLA also promotes the teaching of English and Foreign Language including Literature all over the world.

MLA Style Sheet

The above is about MLA as an academic body. It is important; therefore, to separate MLA as an association from MLA as a documentation style sheet. This is crucial because "a created work cannot talk by itself unless its creator first breathes or talks into it. It then means that the conceptualised mode of dialogue is already lopsided" (Layiwola xiii). Historically, the Modern Language Association (MLA) style "was first issued in 1951 as the MLA Style sheet, its 4th edition, issued in 1995 is entitled *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*" (Ukala 34). MLA is currently in the 7th edition as at January 2009. The same book mentioned above has been slightly modified within the *MLA 2009 Formatting and Style Guide*. This book was written by Jennifer Liethen Kunka and Joe Barbato and it was last edited by Allen Brizee.

The second book on MLA style sheet is titled *The MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. This book is in the third edition by slight modification. It consists of core

issues of MLA research referencing and documentation such as:

- ♦ Professional, Technical, and Job Search Writing
- ♦ General Academic Writing
- ♦ Research and Citation
- ♦ Grammar and Mechanics
- ♦ English as a Second Language (ESL)
- ♦ Internet Literacy
- ♦ Writing in the Social Sciences
- ♦ Writing in Engineering
- ♦ Literary Analysis and Criticism
- ♦ Creative Writing
- ♦ Teaching Writing
- ♦ Tutoring Writing

Our main concern in the above is the General Academic Writing, and Research and Citation in relation to the documentation of scholarly works.

We must note at this point that MLA reference style sheet has undergone many modifications starting from what is now known as the old MLA to the latest MLA Formatting and Style Guide of 2009. However, the following, which are clearly outlined in the MLA web (mla.org) are important and should be considered in the MLA style sheet:

1. General Format
2. In-Text Citations: The Basics
3. In-Text Citations: Author-Page Style
4. Formatting Quotations

5. Footnotes and Endnotes
6. Works Cited Page: Basic Format
7. Works Cited Page: Books
8. Works Cited: Periodicals
9. Works Cited: Electronic Sources
10. Works Cited: Other Non-Print Sources
11. Additional Resources
12. Abbreviations in MLA
13. Works Cited Page: Other Non-Print Sources
14. MLA Works Cited Example Page
15. MLA Update 2009
16. MLA Tables, Figures, and Examples
17. MLA Sample Paper

The old MLA Reference Style Sheet

The old MLA in-text citations will start with the use of the superscript after quotations of works and issues to be referenced or documented. The superscript is the use of numerical numbers that will graduate from ^{1,2,3} and so on to the last work quoted. It is usually written or carefully printed in a tiny or small character after the quotations and or works that are directly quoted or paraphrased.

The Works Cited Page of the old MLA which comes after the entire work can take three or four forms. It is usually the last page, and depending on the journal's editorial format, it may be called:

- ♦ Notes and References

- ♦ References
- ♦ Notes; and
- ♦ Endnotes

Once the last page (the works cited page) has been titled, the old MLA can take any of the following forms:

- A. 1. AbdulRasheed Adeoye, *The Smart Game. (A Neo-alienation Script)*. Ilorin: Department of the Performing Arts, 2009. p. 36.

or

- B. 1. AbdulRasheed Adeoye, *The Smart Game. (A Neo-alienation Script)*. (Ilorin: Department of the Performing Arts, 2009). p. 36.

The two examples above can be used for published books/plays. For published chapters in a book, consider the examples below:

- A. 1. Joseph Kahiga, "Being or Non-Being: The Existential Dialectical Challenges of Man in the Context of Time", in R. A. Akamidu (ed.) *Footprints in Philosophy*. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd, 2006, p. 10.

or

- B. 1. Joseph Kahiga, "Being or Non-Being: The Existential Dialectical Challenges of Man in the Context of Time," in R. A. Akamidu (ed.) *Footprints in Philosophy*. (Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd, 2006). p. 10.

For published articles in a journal, the following examples may be instructional:

- A. 1. R. A. Musa, "Democratic Direction and the Aesthetics of Military Theatre in Nigeria". *Ilorin Journal of History*,

Vol. 1, No. 2, June, 2006, p.44.

or

- B. 1. R. A. Musa, "Democratic Direction and the Aesthetics of Military Theatre in Nigeria". *Ilorin Journal of History*, (Vol. 1, No. 2, June, 2006). p.44.

For unpublished Doctoral Theses, Master Degree Dissertations and or Bachelor of Arts' Long Essays, the examples below should be considered:

- A. 1. R. A. Musa, "Directing Wole Soyinka's Comedies on the Nigerian Theatre". Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 2007, pp.4-6.

or

- B. 1. R. A. Musa, "Directing Wole Soyinka's Comedies on the Nigerian Theatre" (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 2007), pp.4-6.

A careful consideration of the above will show that the page(s) that the work being documented appears are clearly written for ease of referencing to assist future users. This procedure should not be ignored.

Alabi has summarised the core of the old MLA style sheet when she concludes that in the documentation purpose of MLA:

The author's name will appear in the normal order (not reversed), separated from the title of the work with a comma. Publication data appears in parentheses, and no period is used until the very end of the citation (60).

From the various examples given about the old MLA

above, it can be deduced that there are variants of the old MLA style sheet. What is important is the ability of researchers and the users of the old MLA to be consistent while adopting any of the variants discussed.

It is important to state that the old MLA is flexible for it gives room for Footnotes which normally come at the bottom of each page. In fact, "Footnotes are usually indicated by Arabic numerals placed immediately after the material to be footnoted" (AbdulRahaman 63). Footnotes too must adopt the in-text numerical style and adopt all the features of old MLA reference style sheet through the various examples given above in the works cited page.

In the old MLA, the Works Cited Page gives room for the use of **ibid** which means "in the same place" and it is the "abbreviation used in writing when you are including words from a particular book for the second time, and want to show that they are from the same book that you mentioned before" (Shovel 746). In usage, **op cit** is also closely related to **ibid** because it can be used to make reference to a "book already mentioned".

The other advantage of the old MLA is the fact that the researcher has the opportunity to "open up" or supply brief but necessary information such as report of interviews, questionnaire, findings from programme notes and pamphlets and or his general impression about an issue or concept. Yet, some non-users of the old MLA style sheet believe that it gives room for plagiarism because a superscript can be used after a whole page and that it is often difficult to separate the voice of the researcher from the works that he or she is

making reference to. Nonetheless, it is a documentation style sheet that should be considered because some academic journals and institutions are conservative users of the old MLA reference style sheet.

The new MLA Reference Style Sheet

Of importance to us in this study is the new MLA style sheet. This is aimed at making research documentation better. It is a good "development which is hinged on the need to gain knowledge" (Gwam-Nzekwu 35). Importantly, the new MLA style sheet is "author-page centered". The following illustrative examples may help to foreground some of the variants:

1. For the in-text citation, the surname of the author and the actual page or pages that one is quoting from must be written immediately. This can come before or after quotation. For example: Adeoye (223) has argued that "contemporary theatre trends favour theatre of performance rather than theatre of literature. This is because the theatre of literature is dialogue-based and relies heavily on technical elements in its realisation".
2. The same in-text citation above can appear at the end of the quotation as: (Adeoye 223) without a comma.
3. The page will not be written immediately if the full name of the author is used. Rather, the page will appear in the bracket after the quotation. For example: AbdulRasheed Adeoye has argued that "contemporary theatre trends..." (223).
4. If Adeoye (223) is the last quotation and the same Adeoye

is to be quoted again, the surname will not appear; rather the page will appear in bracket after the quotation as (227).

5. For a published chapter in a book or a published article in a journal, the following examples should be considered as in-text citations.
 - Ai. ("The Endless Metaphor: Directors and the Plays of Yerima", 210).
 - Aii. (*Radical Theatre in Nigeria*, 49)
 - Bi. (*The Performers: Ilorin Journal of the Performing Arts* 4:36).
 - Bii. (*Ilorin Journal of History*, 1(2): 43).

Although there is nothing wrong in quoting titles of published chapters in a book or titles of published articles in a journal, it should be avoided since the names of the authors are known. Ukala (37-8), Alabi (75) and AbdulRahaman (65-6) have given different examples to justify the essence of the in-text citations of the new MLA style sheet.

After the in-text citations of the new MLA style sheet, the next important point of research documentation is the Works Cited Page. The following variants and examples may be useful:

For published book:

Davis, Desmond. *The Grammar of Television*. London: Barnes and Jenkins, 1970. Print.

This includes:

1. Surname first with a comma and last name with a full stop.

2. Title of published book.
3. Place of publication.
4. Name of publisher.
5. Year of publication; and
6. Medium of publication

For chapter in a published book:

Adeoye, AbdulRasheed. "The Endless Metaphor: Directors and the Plays of Yerima". *Making Images, Re-Making Life: Art and Life in Ahmed Yerima*. Eds. Uwemedimo Atakpo and Stephen Inegbe. Uyo: Modern Business Press, 2007. 209-229. Print.

or

Adeoye, AbdulRasheed. "The Endless Metaphor: Directors and the Plays of Yerima". *Making Images, Re-Making Life: Art and Life in Ahmed Yerima*. Eds. Uwemedimo Atakpo and Stephen Inegbe. Uyo: Modern Business Press, (2007): 209-229. Print.

For an article in a published journal:

Ododo, Sunday Enessi. "Stage Design and Aesthetics Criteria in the Nigerian Theatre". *Alore: Ilorin Journal of the Humanities*. 9. 1 (1998): 90-98. Print.

For unpublished B.A, M.A and Ph.D research works:

Ododo, Sunday Enessi. "Facekuerade Theatre: A Performance Model from the Playing and Technical Aesthetics of Ebira-Ekuechi Festival in Nigeria". DISS. University of Ilorin, 2004.

It should be noted that the same style used above can be used for B.A and M.A research works.

For unpublished interview:

Akinwale, Ayo. Personal interview. 16 Jan. 2003.

For published interview:

Adelugba, Dapo. "On the Art of Play Directing: Conversation with AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye". *Developments in the Theory and Practice of contemporary Nigerian Drama and Theatre*. Eds. Duro Oni and Sola Adeyemi United Kingdom: Alpha Crownes Publishers, 2011. 285-294. Print.

For Web Publications:

The MLA style sheet named all electronic sources as Web Publications. While citing from the internet sources, researchers should take note of the following:

- A. The date that the material to be referenced is retrieved from the net must be acknowledged. For example: Web. 10 May. 2011.
- B. Authors/editors/reviewers/writers of the work to be referenced must also be acknowledged. For example: Adeoye, AbdulRasheed. *Creativity is Endless*. Purdue U. 30 Aug. 2006. Web. 12 May. 2011. The information here includes the first day that the work appears on the internet (Purdue U. 30 Aug. 2006) and the day that the user consults the work (Web. 12 May. 2011).
- C. Some works on the internet have no date and no name of publisher. Here *n.d* (no date) and *n.p* (no publisher) should be italicized and used. However, if there are dates and the publishers' names of internet works on the net, researchers must acknowledge them accordingly.
- D. Online and or internet magazine, scholarly journal,

painting, sculpture, photography, E-mail, E-mail interview, blog posting and so on can also be accommodated in the in-text citations and finally at the works cited page has shown in the new MLA style sheet.

The surname of the authors whose works have been quoted or cited in the in-text citations should be **arranged alphabetically** at the Works Cited Page. The date should come last except during the documentation for the chapter in a published book or article in a published journal. Here, the entire page that the work appeared on will be acknowledged.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Considering the timelessness in the space of research documentation, the following suggestions and recommendations should be considered as we attempt to document our research works in the humanities:

Scholars and researchers in the humanities should understand the details of research documentation styles that are commonly used in the humanistic studies. Research documentation styles such as Harvard, Chicago, APA, MLA and so on should be studied and understood. We will need them sooner or later.

Scholars and researchers should understand the details and the variants involved in a particular research documentation style. This will enable scholars and researchers to avoid the danger of muddling research documentation styles together in one research work.

While the old MLA style sheet is simple and flexible, it is hereby recommended that the users of the old MLA style

sheet should adopt and use the new MLA style sheet. This is in tune with currency of scholarship.

It is important for lecturers and teachers of research methods and related courses to deepen their knowledge and sharpen their skills as they teach research methods' related courses. Research documentation styles are changing, knowledge givers should change with the trends.

It is good to celebrate MLA, APA, Harvard and Chicago styles in research documentation because of their universal acceptance. It is also important for us here to be talking about Ilorin research documentation style sheet. This home-grown style, if clearly articulated, may correct some of the flaws noticed in the other research documentation styles.

Lastly, as we document our research works for the present and the future, we must be honest, thorough and consistent. Through the culture of research friendliness, we will be having quality research works which will breach the gap of inadequate research and engender sustainable development.

Conclusion

Researchers are active participants in the social process. It is, therefore, important that researchers should document their research works through the generally agreed style(s) prevalent in their chosen careers. The MLA style sheet has undergone different stages and transformations, the understanding of such changes and transformations should not escape the users of the MLA style sheet in research

documentation.

As we avoid improper research documentation, we want to conclude that there should be unity of tradition in research documentation in the humanistic studies of the present Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria and elsewhere.

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