Rules for Proper Citation of Research in English Classes (MLA style)

In general the purpose of citing outside work in your research paper is to:

A. Show that you have obtained information from outside sources and are not attempting to pass off the ideas of others as your own (plagiarize), and
B. Make it easy for your reader to see where you got your information and to check your sources if desired.

The Rules

Short quotations can be included in the body of your text in double-quotiation marks with a citation in parentheses:

The article “Mother Tongue” includes the statement that even though many people cannot understand the author’s mother English, for the author “my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue” (Tan 39).

Amy Tan described the English of her mother as her “mother tongue.” Even though many found this English hard to understand, for Tan “my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue” (39).

“Mother Tongue” is how Amy Tan describes the imperfect English that her mother used when Tan was growing up (39).

Long quotations of three lines or more of text should be a) indented 10 spaces, b) not in quotation marks, c) with ending punctuation before documentation:

[S]ome of my friends tell me they understand 50 percent of what my mother says. Some say they understand 80 to 90 percent. Some say they understand none of it, as if she were speaking pure Chinese. But to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. (Tan 39)

When referring to an outside source in your paper, give its full title, author, and publication details in a Works Cited list at the end of your paper.

For more information about the proper forms of citation for any type of source imaginable, see the Purdue OWL MLA Formatting and Style Guide


