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How to Write A Scholarly Paper in MLA Style with Headings

The “introduction” of an MLA style paper opens the discussion on the writer’s topic. It can be one paragraph or a few paragraphs, depending on the length and depth of the paper. The introduction begins with a more general opening sentence, or “hook,” which draws the attention of the reader. Then, the introduction should provide the necessary context required for the rest of the paper and include a bit about why the writer’s topic is important. The introduction must also include a thesis statement to provide a clear position that the writer will develop throughout the essay. In most cases, the thesis statement will be the last sentence of the introduction.

Historical Context

This paragraph is where the body of the paper begins. In many cases, the paper will not be split into sections, so the above section heading can be ignored and the paragraph will be indented if there are no subheadings in the paper. If the paper is split into sections, MLA requires that headings (here, called “Level 2 headers”) should be in a different style than the title of the paper. This paragraph, since it’s the first after the subheader, should begin without an indent, and MLA recommends having a space before and after the Level 2 header for readability (“How do I Style”). Headings like this one can help organize the paper, but some professors may prefer

avoiding using subheadings. Content-wise, this will be where the writer starts to provide support for the thesis statement, or main idea of the essay.

The Origin of MLA Formatting. A section of a paper with a Level 3 header continues immediately after the header with no paragraph break. This would be for if you are dividing a section of a paper into its own subsections, such as if you are providing an in-depth historical context, but the content would be confusing without creating a section for each historical era.

Note: This is a formatting example, so sections of the paper are omitted.

Discussing MLA Style

When moving to a new paragraph, MLA suggests providing transitions between topics to strengthen the essay's overall argument and flow. A writer can avoid redundancy by making sure the ending transition of a paragraph does not say too much about the topic of the next paragraph. For example, a paragraph about the origin of MLA style might conclude with the end of the origin and the next paragraph might move onto the next historical era for MLA style.

Ensuring that an MLA paper has a strong argument is important to a writer's success. Each paragraph should include its own ideas, and each time a source is introduced (a quote, paraphrase, or summary from an outside text), the writer should make sure the content makes sense and connects to the main argument of the paper.

Pretending that the thesis was proved in this paper, the last paragraph is the conclusion. The conclusion closes the argument of the paper. It's the last thing the reader looks at — the last chance the writer has to ensure their argument is established to the reader. The conclusion begins by referring back to the main idea of the paper. Then, the claims in the paper should be wrapped

up. The final element of the conclusion is the final sentence or two, where the reader provides a “bigger picture” viewpoint on the argument. The writer could “zoom out” here by stating further ways the issue could be discussed, why the issue is important, how audience members might react to the issue, etc., to give the reader a strong, compelling final note to take with them after they finish reading the paper.

Works Cited

“How do I Style Headings and Subheadings in a Research Paper?” *The MLA Style Center*, 13

Dec. 2018, <https://style.mla.org/styling-headings-and-subheadings/>.

“MLA Formatting and Style Guide.” *Purdue Online Writing Lab*, 20 Oct. 2016,

www.owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/08/.

Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook*, 8th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2016.