The \texttt{mla} class\textsuperscript{*}

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Abstract

In the United States, secondary and undergraduate students are generally expected to adhere to the format prescribed by the Modern Language Association (MLA) for typewritten essays, research papers and writings. Sadly, the tool of choice is usually Microsoft Word, even amongst those fluent with \LaTeX.

Though there are some templates and tools to aid in writing in the MLA format using \LaTeX, none fully met the expectations of the author. So \textit{voilà}, there now exists an \texttt{mla.cls} proper: a simple, straightforward class for composing papers almost perfectly adherent to the MLA style guide\textsuperscript{1}.

Licensing

The files contained in this package may be distributed and/or modified under the conditions of the \LaTeX Project Public License (LPPL), either version 1.3 of this license or any later version. The latest version of this license is in \url{https://www.latex-project.org/lppl/lppl-1-3c/}, and version 1.3c or later is part of all distributions of \LaTeX version 2008/05/04 or later.

Contents

1 Initial code 2

2 Options 3
  2.1 Processing ................. 3

3 Loading packages 4

\textsuperscript{*}This document corresponds to \texttt{mla} v0.6, dated 2019/05/29.

4 Document layout
  4.1 Font .................................................. 5
    4.1.1 Microtype ........................................ 5
  4.2 Line breaking and spacing .................................. 5
  4.3 Paragraphing ............................................. 5
  4.4 Page layout ............................................. 6
  4.5 Running head ........................................... 6

5 Document markup
  5.1 The header ............................................. 7
  5.2 Sectioning ............................................. 8
  5.3 Lists .................................................. 8
  5.4 Block quotation ......................................... 9
  5.5 Figures and tables ...................................... 9
  5.6 Paper sections ......................................... 10
    5.6.1 Paper .............................................. 10
    5.6.2 Endnotes .......................................... 10
    5.6.3 Bibliography ...................................... 11

A Example usage
  A.1 mla-example.tex ........................................ 11
  A.2 mla-example.bib ........................................ 14

B Change history ............................................ 14

1 Initial code

The \texttt{mla} class uses the \texttt{article} class as its base. Thanks to this, macros such as
\textit or \textsuperscript work as expected and won’t have to be re-defined.

\LoadClass[letterpaper,12pt]{article}

The \texttt{Handbook} requires use of the \texttt{day month year} date format, not \TeX’s standard
\texttt{month day, year}. The macro \texttt{mladate} will format \today accordingly to be used
as the default value for \texttt{date} (see section 5.1).

\newcommand{\mladate}{%
  \the\day\%
  \ifcase\the\month
    \or January
    \or February
    \or March
    \or April
    \or May
    \or June
    \or July
    \or September
    \or October
  \else
    \today\%
  \fi}

2 \newcommand{\mladate}{%
2 Options

Some teachers and professors might still require using the seventh edition of the *Handbook*, while others will likely use the eighth edition. Which edition to implement can be explicitly specified with the `mla7` and `mla8` class options. The only difference this makes within the `mla` class itself is the citation format used by `biblatex`.

Some versions of `biblatex-mla` might not recognize the `style=mla-new` option for the eighth edition. In this case, one can specify `mla8alt` to the `mla` class.

The `microtype` package can be optionally included with the `microtype` option to offset the pain of using the Times typeface.

2.1 Processing

A friendly warning will be provided when an unknown option is provided.

By default, the eighth edition of the *Handbook* is used. To future-proof your documents for upcoming editions, however, it may be wise to explicitly specify `mla8`.

```latex
\or November
\or December
\fi
\the\year
}
\MLA@seven
\MLA@eight
\MLA@eightalt
\MLA@microtype

The following are true/false switches to toggle certain features.

\newif\ifMLA@seven
\newif\ifMLA@eight
\newif\ifMLA@eightalt
\newif\ifMLA@microtype

\DeclareOption{mla7}{\MLA@seventrue\MLA@eightfalse\MLA@eightaltfalse}
\DeclareOption{mla8}{\MLA@sevenfalse\MLA@eighttrue\MLA@eightaltfalse}

\DeclareOption{mla8alt}{\MLA@sevenfalse\MLA@eightfalse\MLA@eightalttrue}
\DeclareOption{microtype}{\MLA@microtypetrue}

\DeclareOption*{%
    \ClassWarning{mla}{Unknown option \CurrentOption; ignoring}
}

\ExecuteOptions{mla8}
\ProcessOptions\relax
```
3 Loading packages

The mla class requires the following packages:\textsuperscript{1}:

\begin{verbatim}
\RequirePackage{caption}
\RequirePackage{enotez}
\RequirePackage{enumitem}
\RequirePackage{fancyhdr}
\RequirePackage{float}
\RequirePackage{fullpage}
\RequirePackage{graphicx}
\RequirePackage{ragged2e}
\RequirePackage{newtxtxt}
\RequirePackage{titlesec}
\RequirePackage{xstring}
\end{verbatim}

The following consists of prerequisites for biblatex-mla:

\begin{verbatim}
\RequirePackage[american]{babel}
\RequirePackage{csquotes}
\RequirePackage{hanging}
\end{verbatim}

And finally, biblatex. The mla class options dictate what options are passed to biblatex, hence the if-then clauses.

\begin{verbatim}
\ifMLA@seven
  \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,showmedium=true,
                  backend=biber]{biblatex}
\fi
\ifMLA@eight
  \RequirePackage[style=mla-new,noremoteinfo=false,
                  showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
\fi
\ifMLA@eightalt
  \RequirePackage[style=mla,noremoteinfo=false,
                  showmedium=false,backend=biber]{biblatex}
\fi
\end{verbatim}

The microtype package is loaded if the microtype option is specified.

\begin{verbatim}
\ifMLA@microtype
  \RequirePackage{microtype}
\fi
\end{verbatim}

For some reason, common practice is to load hyperref last of all packages.

\begin{verbatim}
\RequirePackage{hyperref}
\hypersetup{hidelinks,pdfusetitle}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{1}All of the required packages are available for download on the Comprehensive \TeX\ Archive Network (CTAN) if unavailable on your system: https://www.ctan.org/.

4 Document layout

4.1 Font

The newtxtext package was already loaded in section 3, and the font was set to 12pt when loading the article class in section 1. This should be metric-compatible with the infamous Times New Roman, the de facto standard of the MLA format\footnote{According to the popular, oft-referenced Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html.}.

4.1.1 Microtype

The microtype package (if loaded as in section 3) will marginally offset the burden of using Times by correcting its ugly kerning and tracking. The vague activate=false below simply disables protrusion, maintaining original line and page breaks.

\begin{verbatim}
\ifMLA@microtype
  \microtypesetup{activate=false}
\fi
\end{verbatim}

4.2 Line breaking and spacing

The Handbook prescribes exact double-spacing, the definition of which varies between typesetters. With these parameters exact, \LaTeX{} produces 23 lines of text whereas the “industry standard” Microsoft Word\footnote{Microsoft Word 97 through 2016, and likely following versions as well.} produces 24. To compensate, line spacing is set to just enough:

\begin{verbatim}
\linespread{1.905}
\end{verbatim}

Though not explicitly denounced in the Handbook, most MLA-style papers don’t hyphenate or adjust spacing for pretty typesetting.

\begin{verbatim}
\hyphenpenalty=10000
\pretolerance=10000
\end{verbatim}

4.3 Paragraphing

The Handbook specifies half-inch first-line indentation for every paragraph and no extra spacing in between.

\begin{verbatim}
\MLA@indent
\newlength{\MLA@indent}
\setlength{\MLA@indent}{0.5in}
\end{verbatim}

In case the indent should be changed, several other macros relying on it might be broken. Using an internal like \MLA@indent prevents this.

\begin{verbatim}
\setlength{\parindent}{\MLA@indent}
\setlength{\RaggedRightParindent}{\MLA@indent}
\setlength{\parskip}{0em}
\end{verbatim}
TEX does not indent the first paragraph after headings by default. Thankfully, the fix for this is simple.
\let\afterindentfalse\afterindenttrue
\afterindenttrue
And, for the sake of consistent 24-line papers, orphans and widows are explicitly allowed.
\widowpenalty=0
\clubpenalty=0
\interlinepenalty=0
For a final heinous crime against typesetting, the Handbook advises flush-left/ragged-right alignment. (This is acheived with the ragged2e package.)
\RaggedRight
The noindent environment doesn’t work as expected in conjunction with ragged2e, hence the re-definition.
\renewenvironment{noindent}{%\edef\tmpind{\parindent}\setlength{\parindent}{0pt}}{\setlength{\parindent}{\tmpind}\edef{\tmpind}}

4.4 Page layout
With few exceptions, the US uses “letter-size” paper. The paper size was already set when loading the article class in section 1.
Furthermore, the Handbook dictates uniform one-inch margins on said paper. This was already set by the fullpage package as loaded in section 3. The \textheight and \textwidth definitions are here just for good measure.
\setlength{\textwidth}{6.5in}

4.5 Running head
The running head in MLA style is simply the author's surname followed by the current page number, right-aligned. This is managed using the fancyhdr and xstring packages.
The following code is largely a hack to align the header in the middle of the one-inch margin above the body text.

\setlength{\headheight}{18pt}
\setlength{\headsep}{12pt}
\setlength{\voffset}{-34pt}

5 Document markup

5.1 The header

The \title, \author and \date macros work as expected. However, if your surname contains a space, you must contain the surname in braces as such: \author{Ludwig \textit{van} Beethoven}. This keeps the full surname in the running head (see section 4.5).

The following header commands are unique to the mla class.

\professor The instructor who assigned the paper, i.e. “Dr. Marjorie Stewart”.
\course The course for which this paper was assigned, i.e. “ENGL 101-02”.

To prevent undefined behavior, the internal macros used to store the above information are set empty, except for \date. (Note the use of \mladate; see section 1.)

\makemlaheader This command finally prints out the standard four-line MLA header, as well as the title.
For simplicity’s sake, \maketitle is directly aliased to \makemlaheader.

Finally, the header will print at the beginning of every document.

\AtBeginDocument{\maketitle}

5.2 Sectioning

Section headings are neither defined nor discouraged in the Handbook, though commonly used in longer papers. Customary section headings are rather straightforward, consisting of the section number in Arabic numerals, a space, and the section name with no special decoration\footnote{According to the popular, oft-referenced OWL: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html}.

However, for the sake of clarity, the section headings in this class will be set in small-caps.

\renewcommand{\thesection}{\@arabic\c@section}
\renewcommand{\thesubsection}{\thesection.\@arabic\c@subsection}
\renewcommand{\thesubsubsection}{\thesubsection.\@arabic\c@subsubsection}

Un-fancifying the headings is achieved using the titlesec package.

\titleformat*{\section}{\normalsize\sc}
\titleformat*{\subsection}{\normalsize\sc}
\titleformat*{\subsubsection}{\normalsize\sc}
\titlespacing*{\section}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
\titlespacing*{\subsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
\titlespacing*{\subsubsection}{0pt}{0pt}{0pt}
\titlelabel{\thetitle.

5.3 Lists

To the user, itemize and enumerate lists will function exactly as expected. However, the formatting of the lists must be modified as to preserve double-spacing and adhere to common practice\footnote{According to the MLA itself: https://style.mla.org/vertical-lists-in-mla-style/}; these changes are achieved using the enumitem package.

\setlist[itemize]{%
parsep=0pt,
itemsep=0pt,
topsel=0pt,
leftmargin=\MLA@indent
}
\setlist[enumerate]{%
parsep=0pt,
itemsep=0pt,
topsel=0pt,
leftmargin=\MLA@indent
}
5.4 Block quotation

The *Handbook* dictates blockquotes be set flush a half-inch from the left margin with no extra space on the right. The existing `blockquote` environment is re-defined for this purpose.

\begin{verbatim}
\renewenvironment{blockquote}{\list{}{\leftmargin {\MLA@indent}}
\item[]\setlength{\parindent}{\MLA@indent}
\vspace{-\topsep}}{\endlist\vspace{-\topsep}}
\end{verbatim}

5.5 Figures and tables

The *Handbook* doesn’t specify much of anything about the actual formatting of figures or tables or their captions, so the following is mostly based on the package author’s personal preference and observations.

```
\setlength{\floatsep}{\baselineskip}
\setlength{\intextsep}{\baselineskip}
\setlength{\textfloatsep}{\baselineskip}
\g@addto@macro\@floatboxreset\centering
```

Thanks to a bug inherited from the `here` package which has remained unfixed since 1987\footnote{See the \texttt{par} on p. 11, line 249 of \texttt{ltxfloat.dtx} from the \LaTeX{} kernel.}, there is not only extra space after the figure but the inability to insert a figure within a paragraph. Miraculously, there is a fix for this\footnote{See David Carlisle’s answer on \TeX{} SE: \url{https://tex.stackexchange.com/a/310793}}.

```
\renewcommand{\float@endH}{\vspace{-12pt}\@endfloatbox\vskip\intextsep
\if@flstyle\setbox\@currbox\float@makebox\columnwidth\fi
\box\@currbox\vskip\intextsep\relax\@doendpe
```

```
\captionsetup{font={normalfont},
labelformat=simple,
labelformat=period,
position=bottom,
aboveshift=6pt,
beforeskip=-10pt}
```

Un-fancifying the caption is acheived using the `caption` package.
In the author’s personal experience, most MLA-style papers use “Fig.” and not “Figure”.

\captionsetup[figure]{name=Fig.}

5.6 Paper sections

5.6.1 Paper

\newenvironment{paper}{}{}

5.6.2 Endnotes

Endnotes can be typeset manually or with the supported enotez package\(^1\).

\newenvironment{notes}{\newpage\begin{noindent}\pdfbookmark[0]{Notes}{notes}\begin{center}Notes\end{center}\end{noindent}}{}

To correctly format endnotes per common practice\(^2\), a custom mlanotes list type will be created. This is acheived with the enumitem package.

\newlist{mlanotes}{description}{1}
\setlist[mlanotes]{parsep=0pt, itemsep=0pt, topsep=0pt, leftmargin=\MLA@indent}

The following initializes the enotez package to use the mlanotes list format.

\DeclareInstance{enotez-list}{mla}{list}{heading = {}, format = \normalsize\normalfont, list-type = mlanotes}
\setenotez{list-name={},list-style=mla,backref}

---

\(^1\)Refer to the enotez documentation for instructions.

\(^2\)According to the popular, oft-referenced OWL: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_endnotes_and_footnotes.html.
5.6.3 Bibliography

The bibliography can be typeset manually or with the supported \texttt{biblatex} package\textsuperscript{1}.

\begin{verbatim}
\newenvironment{workscited}{% 
  \newpage 
  \begin{noindent} 
  \pdfbookmark[0]{Works Cited}{workscited} 
  \begin{center}Works Cited\end{center} 
  \vspace{-16pt} % XXX to counter unexplained space 
}{
}
\end{verbatim}

The \textit{Handbook} prescribes a half-inch hanging indent on all bibliography entries. This is achieved by setting the \texttt{\bibhang} length defined by the \texttt{biblatex} package.

\begin{verbatim}
\setlength{\bibhang}{\MLA@indent}
\end{verbatim}

A Example usage

Following is a basic \LaTeX{} document using the \texttt{mla} class. The document is composed of a text file, \texttt{mla-example.tex}, and a \texttt{biblatex} bibliography file, \texttt{mla-example.bib}.

A.1 \texttt{mla-example.tex}

\begin{verbatim}
\documentclass[mla8,microtype]{mla}
\title{Sample MLA Document} 
\author{John Doe} 
\professor{Dr. Suzie Que} 
\course{\LaTeX{} 101} 
\date{\mladate} % see docs for \texttt{\mladate} 
\end{verbatim}

% The .bib file (explained later) must be included in the preamble 
\addbibresource{mla-example.bib}

\begin{verbatim}
\begin{document}
\begin{paper}
\begin{verbatim}
\begin{verbatim}
This is an example document using `mla.cls'. 
The header is automatically printed upon using the `\texttt{paper}' class, 
which is why there is no `\textbackslash{}maketitle'.' 
\end{verbatim}
\section{Professors who prefer sections}
\end{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{1}Refer to the \texttt{biblatex} documentation for instructions.
Sometimes, research papers can become unmanageably lengthy. In that case, section headings can help divide up the ideas to make it more accessible to the reader. Though this paper is short, section headings are employed as an example of the "mla" class' capabilities.

Some professors may explicitly require or denounce use of headings. Dr. Suzie Que of Anytown, PA requires they be used for anything longer than five pages:

\begin{blockquote}
John---so help me God---if you turn in another twenty-page research paper with no logical breaks I will hang you at the stake. Even though the MLA style guide doesn't say anything about section headings, they're not actually prohibited. So, if you turn in \texttt{anything} longer than five pages to me and there isn't a \texttt{single} break or section heading, I will dock your grade to an F. Capisce? \cite{que2019}
\end{blockquote}

Despite her language, she does have a point to say.

\subsection{Subsections}

Alongside regular top-level sections, one can use "\textbackslash{}
subsection" commands too\endnote{Section commands in "mla.cls" work identical to those of the "article" class.}.

\section{Lists}

Vertical lists are a rarity in MLA format, but if one so pleases, they can be used. The "itemize", "enumerate" and "description" lists work just as expected, even with sublists.

\begin{itemize}
\item A bogus item
\item Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet. This item has a bunch of text just so it covers more than one line in the paper and shows proper indentation.
\item Last item!
\begin{enumerate}
\item Just kidding; there's a subitem. And it's a number!
\end{enumerate}
\item Okay, now it's the last item.
\end{itemize}
\section{Figures}

On rare occasions, you might have to use figures or tables in your paper. Good news is the ‘‘figure’’ and ‘‘table’’ environments work exactly as expected! Just make sure to use ‘‘\textbackslash{}begin\{figure\}[H]’’ if you want the image to stay exactly where you put it.

\begin{figure}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\linewidth]{mla-example-image}
\caption{A scene from atop Spruce Knob, West Virginia}
\end{figure}

And yes, I shamelessly used my own image.

\section{Using endnotes}

As one may notice, the above subsection used an endnote. These can simply be cited with ‘‘Yada yada text\textbackslash{}endnote\{more info\ldots\}.’’ Endnotes can be easily printed in correct format by calling ‘‘\textbackslash{}printendnotes’’ within the ‘‘notes’’ environment.

\section{Using bibliographies}

Dr. Suzie Que was cited in the above blockquote. The ins-and-outs of ‘‘biblatex’’ will not be explained in this document, so please refer to online documentation such as the ‘‘BibLaTeX Cheat Sheet’’.

Just as with the endnotes, the bibliography can be easily printed in correct format by calling ‘‘\textbackslash{}printbibliography[heading=none]’’ within the ‘‘workscited’’ environment. (The ‘‘heading=none’’ part is important; the ‘‘workscited’’ environment already prints one.)

\end{paper}

\begin{notes}
\printendnotes
\end{notes}

\begin{workscited}

13
A.2 mla-example.bib

@article{que2019,
  author = {Suzie Que},
  title = {Notice to all students},
  journaltitle = {Anytown High School Homepage},
  publisher = {County Board of Education},
  date = {2019-04-20},
  howpublished = {Web},
  urldate = {2019-04-21}
}

@online{price2018,
  author = {Seth Price},
  title = {Spruce Knob Overlook},
  publisher = {Instagram},
  date = {2018-07-20},
  howpublished = {Web},
  url = {https://www.instagram.com/p/Bleocv-hknc/},
  urldate = {2019-05-29}
}

B Change history

v0.2

General:
- Added support for PDF metadata
  Hid hyperlink boxes in PDF output
- \section: Changed heading to small-caps
- \subsection: Changed heading to small-caps
- \subsubsection: Changed heading to small-caps
- Properly formatted

notes: Added environment

v0.3

General:
- Added mla8alt option
- Improved options parsing to avoid

14
v0.4

General: Added enumitem package
Added microtype package
Changed \linespacing to print 24 lines per page
Disabled microtype protrusion
enumerate: Added list type

notes: Changed default endnotes format to mla
Changed endnotes list type to custom mlaendnotes list
Removed extra \vspace
itemize: Added list type

v0.4.1
\makemlaheader: Changed date format back to whatever is inside \@date

v0.5

General: Changed options parser to use toggle-switch commands in the style of default \LaTeX classes
Moved header-printing process to \AtBeginDocument
paper: Removed \newpage
workscited: Moved \newpage to beginning of environment

notes: Moved \newpage to beginning of environment

v0.6

General: Added caption package
Added float package
Added graphicx package
Explicitly set \partopset to 0pt
\table: Properly formatted
caption: Properly formatted
\figure: Properly formatted

v0.7

General: Changed microtype package to only load through microtype class option
Changed options parser to use \ifMLA@... toggle format seen in other classes
Copied code from indentfirst to reduce dependency count
\blockquote: Changed length to use \MLA@indent
\MLA@indent: Added macro
\enumerate: Changed length to use \MLA@indent
\workscited: Changed length to use \MLA@indent
\notes: Changed length to use \MLA@indent