Hi guys!

Today I want to talk to you about MLA citations.

Now this is probably the thing I hear most from students that they have a difficult time with. So let’s talk for just a few minutes about why we cite sources and how we do it.

The first thing I want to talk about it that we need to avoid plagiarism. You have all heard that big, nasty word before and basically what it amounts to is a form of cheating. In my years of teaching, I have found many students plagiarizing on accident; they did not mean to cheat because some way, somehow, they heard that you can just rewrite somebody else’s ideas and put them in your own words. That’s not accurate, so every time you do research and put it in your own words, that is called paraphrasing. And paraphrasing still needs to have a citation. Without a citation, it’s considered plagiarism and cheating,

Having citations also allows the reader to look up and access your sources. So if you write a paper that I am really interested in and I want to read more about it, I can find your sources because you already referenced them in your paper.

It [having citations] also makes you sound more credible and more reliable. So if you have sources in a paper, we, the readers, can trust you that you have done your homework – you have done your research and are presenting accurate information.

Furthermore, it helps prove your theories. So if you tell me something like “the sky is purple,” it is going to be hard to believe you, right? But if you have credible sources, and valuable information in your paper, it’s going to make us, the readers, believe you more. So follow along with me…

(Looking at the paper) I need to remember what I wrote here.

“My teacher asked me to write a persuasive paper on a controversial subject.”

This is something that most of you do in a composition class – you write some type of persuasive essay or some type of response paper. Either way, a persuasive or analytical paper is going to be focused on your opinions. For the sake of this discussion, I picked capital punishment, also known as the death penalty.

The first thing I need to do when writing a paper, is brainstorm, so I thought about the pro’s and con’s of capital punsishment. Thoes who are in favor of capital punishment, they think about it being justice; they are seeking revenge. To quote from the Bible “An eye for an eye” I would need a citation there. It eliminates criminals; a lot of people do not want to pay for criminals to live in prison, they just want to get rid of them and ensure they never get back on the streets.

It is also a solution to overcrowded prisons; we all know that our prisons are very crowded at this point, so having the death penalty carried out frees up more space.

On the other side, we have the con’s, and we said that there are errors. There are obviously errors in the system and people have been put to death who were later proved innocent. Now, the cost of the execution, a lot of people say that it costs more to keep people alive in jail than it does to kill them, but that is actually incorrect. Of course, I would have to do my research, but from what I have read and studied in the past, it costs more money to go through with all of the retrials and appeals in a capital punishment case, than it does to keep a prisoner in prison for life.

Also, to use a cliché that my mom, and probably your mom always said “Tow wrongs don’t make a right.” So, killing someone because he or she killed someone is not really the accurate outcome.

Ok, so these are just my opinions, things I thought of off the top of my head, so I will weigh the pro’s and con’s, and I say “ok, I am going to write my paper against; I am going to stick with the con’s and write against capital punishment.”

So, I am going to start off by talking about errors (I’m not going to go through a full paper with you guys – this is just one examples if I was writing this essay) and I go online and I say to myself “I know there are errors in capital punishment cases, but what are they?” And I find this great quote: “courts found serious reversible errors in nearly 7 out of every 10 of the thousands of capital sentneces that were fully reviewed during the period.” Seven out of ten cases had an error, that is a huge statistc; that means some kind of error was made during the capital punishment case. (Now that does not mean 7 out of 10 people were later found innocent, it just means that there are errors in our system). Notice my big, green arrows – that’s my citation. I have the authors’ last names; there are 3 of them there (most of the time you will just find one author or a corporate author), you are going to put that author’s name in parenthesis. If the author’s name is not available, you are going to add the title of the source, and if there is a page number available, you will add that at the end there.

After I have found my research, I will write my own, unique paragraph (or two or three paragraphs), specifically on the errors of capital punishment. I will go into those other things [con’s] I discussed as well to create a full essay, but again, it is based on my opinions. In order to strengthen my opinions, I will add that quote, that way it will make me sound more credible, showing that I’ve done my homework, and it proves that there is something to consider regarding the errors in capital punishment cases.

I also wanted to point out that I cannot have more than 25% of a paper in quotes or even paraphrases from sources because 75% of a paper should be based on my own analysis – my own opinions.

At the very end of your paper, you are going to include a Works Cited page. This is where people get confused; again, I am going to go back in the text where I just have the author’s last names, but at the end, the Works Cited list refers to all the information about my sources. I am going to alphabetize my sources; I am going to use a different pattern [structure] for each type of source, so a book is going to be cited differently than a web page. A web page is going to be cited differently than a personal interview, and that will be cited differently than a movie or a documentary. You are going to have to look up the different formats for the different kinds of sources you use. I suggest you visit this web site: *OWL MLA Formatting and Style* web site; I frequently share this page all over our virtual classroom, so make sure you take a look at that web site. You can also use editors; there is a great tool in MS Word that will create a Works Cited page for you. I have also heard of a lot of online editors; I have not used those in the past, but I have heard good reviews on sites like <http://www.citationmachine.net/>. You can also go online and search on Google to try to find an MLA style editor – you just need to plug in the source information and you will be able to come up with a complete Works Cited entry.

That’s a lot of information listed, right? But again, you need that information so readers can find your source(s).

Here is a Works Cited entry for just one source. I have the authors; I have the title in quotation marks; in italics, I have the title of the web site (this was from Columbia Law School, so I know this source is credible); I have the date in which it was created or updated; the mode is a Web program, or web site; the date I accessed it; and the full URL. Not all teachers require the URL’s anymore, but I still like to see them, so I can check your sources if need be.

Alright, so that is how we create MLA citations. I know that is a lot to think about, but hopefully that helped a little bit; it is not so intimidating. You refer to a source, you add an in-text citation, you add that Works Cited at the very end, and that way, you are going to make sure that your sources are all accounted for and that your work is accurate and you are avoiding plagiarism.

Good luck guys; let me know if you need help!