MLA In-Text Citations and Parenthetical References: An Overview

Background Information:

Writers must include an MLA in-text citation or a parenthetical reference in any sentence that has borrowed information: a quotation, information in the form of a paraphrase or summary, statistic, fact not considered common knowledge, or visual such as a graph or photograph.

Within a sentence, an in-text citation provides readers with the first word or phrase in a corresponding works cited entry (an author’s surname, for example) to direct them to the correct works cited entry, whereas a parenthetical reference supplies the same information but at the end of a sentence and within parentheses.

Illustration 1:

This sentence has an in-text citation:

Of the Ringling estate in Sarasota, Florida, Aaron De Groft, who holds a Ph.D. in Art History from Florida State University and has written about John Ringling, writes, “Even though John Ringling equipped his [estate] with the first Otis electric elevator ever installed in a private home in Florida, he knew that the central, dramatic effect of an elaborate sweeping staircase was vital to the Beaux-Arts House” (42).

The corresponding works cited entry appears this way:

De Groft, Aaron. *Ca d’Zan: Inside the Ringling Mansion*. Sarasota, FL: Serbin Printing, 2004.

Illustration 2:

This sentence has a parenthetical reference:

Of the Ringling estate in Sarasota, Florida, a noted art historian writes, “Even though John Ringling equipped his [estate] with the first Otis electric elevator ever installed in a private home in Florida, he knew that the central, dramatic effect of an elaborate sweeping staircase was vital to the Beaux-Arts House” (De Groft 42).

The corresponding works cited entry appears this way:

De Groft, Aaron. *Ca d’Zan: Inside the Ringling Mansion*. Sarasota, FL: Serbin Printing, 2004.

Some Points to Consider:

1. Note the highlighting in both illustrations. Within the text of the sentence or within the parentheses, the first word in the corresponding works cited entry appears so that readers can locate the correct works cited entry. Without that item, readers cannot locate it.
2. In some instances, an in-text citation functions more effectively than a parenthetical reference. For example, in the first illustration, use of an in-text citation enables a writer to introduce the author of the quotation and establish that author’s credibility.

Illustration 3:

For an in-text citation for a source without an author and page numbers, writers must include the first word or phrase appearing in the corresponding works cited entry (the name of a short work from a Web site, for instance).

The number of slaves working on a plantation often increased dramatically within a relatively short span of time. At Monticello, the estate of Thomas Jefferson, the number rose from 50 in 1770 to 125 just thirteen years later (“Crops at Monticello”).

The corresponding works cited entry appears this way:

“Crops at Monticello.” *The Jefferson Monticello*. Monticello.org, n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2014.

Illustration 4:

If writers opt to include someone’s picture within an essay, it needs an in-text citation or a parenthetical reference and a corresponding works cited entry.

Many tourists to Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello are surprised to learn that there are two vineyards on the property. This photograph shows the smaller of the two (“Northeast Vineyard”).



“Northeast Vineyard.” Photograph. *The Jefferson Monticello*. Monticello.org, n.d. Web. 9

Feb. 2014.

Illustration 5:

If the first item in a works cited entry is long, writers may abbreviate it when composing the parenthetical reference.

“1500 Years of the Holy Music at Notre Dame.” *Cathedrale Notre Dame de Paris*. Cathedrale

Notre Dame de Paris, 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2014.

Of the choirs, organists, choir masters, and the cantor, a historian notes, “These both humble and superb means give genuine soul to this grand building, created to lift humans upwards towards the absolute, the universal, and the sublime” (“1500 Years”).

 Concluding Comment:

This document presents only five illustrations. For additional ones, consult pages 121-130 in *A Pocket Style Manual*.