MLA Format: Using Tables and Figures

This handout on **tables** is based on the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Seventh Edition, 2009. For guidance on figures in MLA, please see other side of handout.

The purpose of tables is to present data in the paper, especially directly relevant information that would be hard to explain in written text.

Tables in research papers may be **produced in three ways:**

- Create a table with original data
- Design a table from published data you have gathered
- Copy a table you have found in your research

Tables are characterized by a row-column formation. Some general terms and strategies can be helpful when using tables:

- **Table number:** Tables are numbered using Arabic numerals consecutively throughout the paper; e.g.: Table 1, Table 2, etc. Table numbers are located on the left **above the table and title** in non-italicized text.
- **Table title:** The title should concisely describe the content of the table. The title is located on the left above the table, with all important words capitalized; e.g.: Percentage of Students Seeking a Post-Graduate Education
- **Horizontal lines** are generally placed **above and below** the table, as well as below all **column headings**.
- Tables in MLA are generally placed as **close to the text** they correspond to as possible.
- **Notes** are used to clarify information in the table. Notes appear **below** the source citation, and are designated with a lowercase letter. See example below.
- Both the **note** and the **source citation** will be double-spaced; examples below are shown single-spaced to conserve space.

**Refer to tables within the text of your paper.** Provide a parenthetical insertion within the text of the paper at the point where you wish the reader to refer to the table; e.g.: (see table 1).

If you are not using original data, a **source citation must be included.** Include all source information with the table; if you do not use the source elsewhere in the text, you do not need to cite the source on the Works Cited page. See example below:

Table 1

Average Monthly Poverty in the United States in 2003 by Level of Education Achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment (People 18 and Over)</th>
<th>Total(^a)</th>
<th>Number in Poverty(^a)</th>
<th>Percentage in Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 4 yrs of high school</td>
<td>37,219</td>
<td>8,338</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate, no college</td>
<td>60,012</td>
<td>7,315</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more years of college</td>
<td>105,041</td>
<td>7,630</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^a\) Numbers for the categories “Total” and “Number in Poverty” are in thousands.
This handout on **figures** is based on the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Seventh Edition, 2009. For guidance on tables in MLA, please see other side of handout.

The purpose of figures is to present visual information directly relevant to the content of the paper, especially information that would be hard to explain in written text. A figure may be your own design, be based on your own original research, or present information from published sources.

**A variety of figures** can be used to clarify ideas:
- Bar graphs
- Line graphs
- Charts (pie charts, flow charts, organizational charts)
- Diagrams, maps and drawings
- Photographs

Some general terms and strategies can be helpful when using figures. Each figure should have a caption with three elements: a **figure number**, a **descriptive phrase**, and a **source citation**, if necessary.

- **Figure number**: Figures are numbered using Arabic numerals consecutively throughout the paper; e.g.: Fig. 1, Fig. 2, etc. Figure numbers are located below the figure in non-italicized text.
- **The caption’s descriptive phrase** concisely informs readers of the content of the figure. It is not italicized, and appears after the figure number, with only the first word and proper nouns capitalized; e.g.: South American literacy rates, 2008.
- **The source citation** is formatted like an entry in the Works Cited list, except that the publication facts go in parentheses and the periods are replaced by semicolons.
- Figures in MLA are generally placed as close to the text they correspond to as possible.

**Refer to figures within the text of your paper.** Provide a parenthetical insertion within the text of the paper at the point where you wish the reader to refer to the figure; e.g.: (see fig. 1).

If you do not use original content, a **source citation must be included**. Include all source information with the figure; if you do not use the source elsewhere in the text, you do not need to cite the source on the Works Cited page. See example below.

![Image of a room in a crisis center](image)

**Fig. 2.** A room in the crisis center of Covenant House in Detroit. Photograph by Amy E. Voigt, from "Offering Help for Former Foster Care Youths," by Erik Eckholm (*New York Times*; New York Times, 27 Jan. 2007; Web; 11 Aug. 2010).