

Homeschool Encouragement

Why Teach MLA Style Writing?

By Jamy Gearhart

In most universities today, incoming freshmen are expected to learn to write in a formatting style called MLA (Modern Language Association). MLA is the primary writing style for the liberal arts and humanities that creates guidelines for referencing their sources. According to the Purdue OWL website, "writers who properly use MLA also build their credibility by demonstrating accountability to their source material. Most importantly, the use of MLA style can protect writers from accusations of plagiarism, which is the purposeful or accidental uncredited use of source material by other writers."

For those who are not familiar with the MLA style of writing, the task of teaching a child this style can be daunting, but not to worry, there are many resources out there to help. The Purdue OWL website is considered the definitive word on MLA formatting by most university professors. There are also numerous handbooks available. As long as your student has a very recent edition of the handbook, it can be a very useful tool. Be certain you have a recent copy, however, because sometimes the rules, like our language, can change.

The best thing about MLA formatting is that it is fairly user friendly. Students can begin using this formatting on a basic level as young as middle school. If your child is old enough to write essays, they are old enough to learn at least the very basics of MLA. You can start with something as simple as teaching your child to format their paper with 1" margins all the way around, use only "Times New Roman" 12 pt. font, and italicize all book or movie titles. If you still don't feel comfortable teaching your child the MLA style, there are tutors and instructors who will be happy to assist. The bottom line is that it can be taught at an earlier age than many people think. If they start early, build on their skills, and become proficient in this style, then it will be one less college stress they have to face later.

Jamy Gearhart is a lifelong logophile, who lives in Winston-Salem, with her son, Max; dog, Lila; and cats, Irma and Cinnabon. She is a single, homeschooling mom who believes that just about anything is possible, if only you believe you can do it and are willing to work hard to achieve it. Jamy has been writing since she was a child and finally decided, in her mid-thirties, to get a Master's degree in English. She is the author of the short story, Rainmaker, which is currently available on Amazon. She also teaches at the college level, tutors students in English, and proofreads depositions.

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