

MLA CITATION DISSECTIONS

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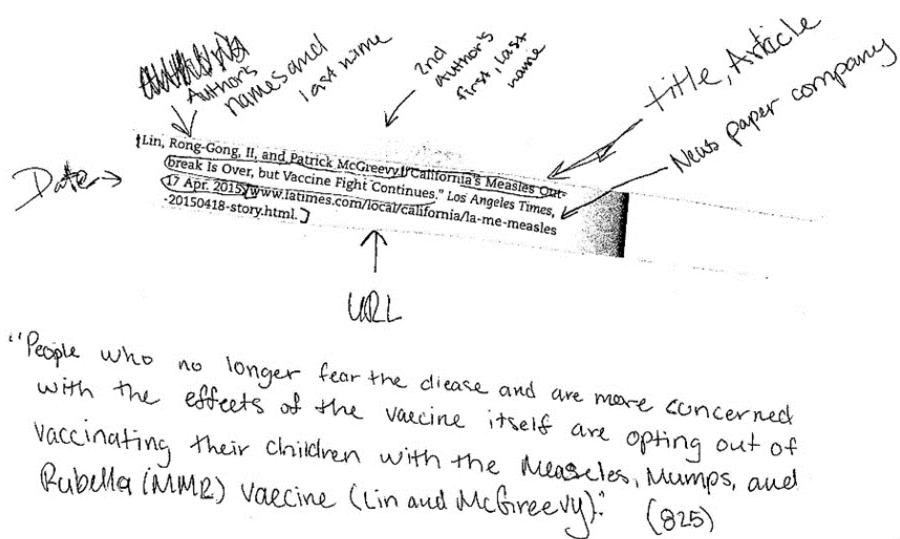
Abstract

The author describes an instructional strategy that deepens students' understanding of the elements of in-text and works cited page citation elements in an age of citation makers.

Keywords: works cited, references, citation makers, in-text citations, reading citations

In recent semesters, students in my first-year college writing courses have come to depend on citation makers such as EasyBib and Citation Machine instead of writing their own MLA citations. The same could be said about APA. This situation is citation style agnostic. The online citation makers have improved so much that it is hard to fault students for using them. In fact, students who do use them often create better in-text and works cited page citations. One unintended consequence of the rise of citation makers is that students are less familiar with what each element of the citation means and that knowing how to read the citations could help with their own research.

One strategy I have used with my students is something I call MLA Citation Dissections. I give small groups of students a works cited entry from an essay they read the night before. Next, I remind them of the section of the textbook that explains what each element of the citation corresponds to. For example, normally the first item is the first author's last name. Items in italics are titles of some sort, and so on. Then students need identify what sort of source the citation in front of them is, and then to label each element.



*Student example courtesy of Mia Villamar

After students have successfully labeled each element, they go back to the essay and find the spot inside the text where the author refers to the text. They write the quote, paraphrase, summary, and/or statistics under the dissected citation. Then they note whether the author quoted or used the source in some other way.

This exercise encourages students to use their textbook as well as to notice what kind of sources the essay author has used and how they have used them. While students continue to use citations makers, they at least have more understanding of what they are copying and pasting into their works cited pages.

Author Biography

Beth Gulley teaches first-year writing at Johnson County Community College. She has a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Kansas. Her research interests include active learning techniques and international education. She can be reached at bgulley@jccc.edu.