What Is an MLA-Style Essay?

MLA (Modern Language Association) style is used mostly for analyzing documents in English and other humanities courses. When using material from a source, MLA style emphasizes identifying the author of the source.

The MLA document format requires the following elements (fig. 1):

1. *A running header* right-aligned in the top right margin: your last name, a space, and the page number.

2. Below, **on the first page only**, is *the heading* (left justified and double spaced):

> Your Name
> Instructor's Name
> Class
> Date

3. On the next line, *the title of the essay* is centered. Capitalize the first and last words of your title and all the words in between **except** articles, prepositions, FANBOYS, and *to* in infinitive verbs.

Fig. 1. Example of first page of MLA paper.

4. Everything else in the body is *double-spaced, left-justified, with one-inch margins.* Use plain 12-point Times New Roman or Calibri, no decorative fonts, not even for your title.

5. Press the "Tab" key to indent the first line of each paragraph .5 inch, with no extra line spacing between paragraphs.
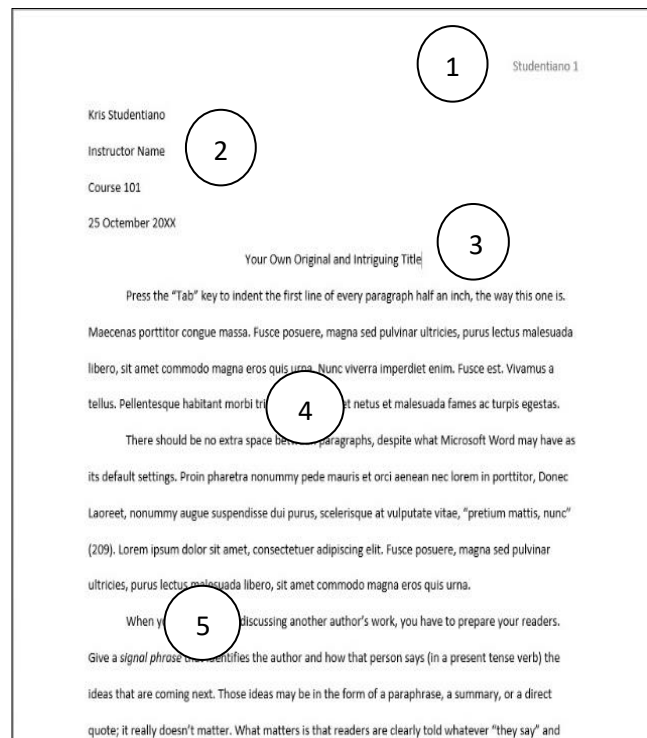
MLA In-text Citations

Being Clear About Who Says What

The **first time you introduce a text**, give the full name and credential of the author (X), the title, and name the genre of the work (article from famous newspaper, trade journal, academic journal, TED Talk, university course website, conference presentation, etc.) in **a signal phrase**. Use a **present tense** or **present perfect verb** that indicates how the author says the information. The page number, if applicable, is given in parentheses **before** the period:

In his/her/their *named genre,* "Title,"   X **argues** that _____ (page #).

In her *Times* article "Insurance Reform," journalist Mary Moe **argues** that_____ (57).

After that first time, you may refer to the same author by just their family name.

Sample In-Text Citation Templates in MLA Style

Source without a Named Author:
- *Booktitle: Subtitle of a Book* argues that "_____" (##).
- Despite arguments to the contrary, there are those still saying "_____" (*Booktitle* ##).

Source with One Author or an Organization as Author:
- X states, "_____" (##).
- As the prominent philosopher/businessperson/. . . X puts it, "_____" (##).
- Even an esteemed philosopher/businessperson/. . . has said, "_____" (X ##).
- In the web page section titled "_____," the Government Agency as Author notes that "_____."
- Different populations experience different inequities in the ecological environment: "_____" compared to other populations (Government Agency as Author).

Source with Two Authors:
- According to X and Y, "_____" (##).
- A number of critics/studies/researchers/. . . have recently suggested that Z's work has several fundamental problems (X and Y ##).
- In their recent work, Title of Source, X and Y have offered harsh critiques of Dr. Z for _____.

Source with Three or More Authors:
- Writing in the journal *Commentary*, X and colleagues complain that "_____" (##).
- Writing in the journal *Commentary,* X and others complain that "_____" (##).
- A notable complaint about _____ has been "_____" (X et al. ##).

If the source information is not in the sentence, put the author's last name and the page number in parentheses after the quotation or paraphrase. You do not need to write the title within the parentheses unless there is no author or you cite more than one work by the same author in your paper. (For authors with the same surname, use their full name for all in-text citations.) If you cite several facts from the same source with numbered pages, one after the other, you should include the author's last name and the page number in the first citation; in the following citations, use only the page number. However, if you switch between sources, then you need to write the previously mentioned author's name again:

A) First source

B) Same author, different source.

People who grew up there complain that Seattle is a damp city to live in (Wetly, **A** *Memoirs* 219). This dampness, in fact, leads to frequent minor illnesses among the population in general **B** (Wetly, *Dripping* 204). Often, these illnesses can last through the winter, and in at least one case, a common cold "dragged on for an entire hanky-soaked year" **C** (274).

C) Same source as B, different page

Cite both a quotation and the author of the work in which it is found when they are different people; use "qtd. in" when the source author is not mentioned in the sentence:

> Peter Whybrow, a neuroscientist who examines America's economy and culture in his book *American Mania,* says "'Operating in a world of instant communication with minimal social tethers, **. . .** America's engines of commerce and desire [have become] turbocharged'" (qtd. in McKibben 123).

As in the above example, if you need to omit part of a quote, use three spaced periods to show where the words were left out. If you need to insert or substitute a word or words in a quote to make it grammatical in your paper, put square brackets around the substitution.

If your **source is electronic and has no page numbers**, you may identify the author in your sentence and omit a parenthetical citation. However, if your source is a video, the parenthetical citation for a quote will use a time stamp, using numbers in the format (Hours:Minutes:Seconds):

> Carli Yip, in the *YouTube* video "Works Cited Entries in MLA," says to "use DOIs if they're available" (00:01:29).

Furthermore, if your **source has no author**, you may put a shortened version of its title, punctuated according to the source type, in the parentheses.

Tables and Figures

Table 1

Degrees in Modern Foreign Languages and Literature Conferred by Degree-Granting Institutions of Higher Education in the United States[a]

Year	Bachelor's Degrees	Master's Degrees	Doctor's Degrees
1996-97	13,053	2,470	793
1997-98	13,618	2,367	819
1998-99	14,163	2,228	757
1999-2000	14,186	2,224	804

Adapted from: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2007 ed., June 2007, table 297, nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_297.asp.

a. These figures include degrees conferred in a single language or a combination of modern foreign languages and exclude degrees in linguistics, Latin, classics, ancient and Middle and Near Eastern biblical and Semitic languages, ancient and classical Greek, Sanskrit and classical Indian languages, and sign language and sign language interpretation.

Fig. 2. Example table in a research paper.

For **tables** referred to in your document, label each one "Table" and number it. Put the label *above* the table. (Even if you have only one table, go ahead and number it Table 1.) On the next line under the label, give it a title using title capitalization. If you are borrowing the table from a source, give the source of the table and any notes in a caption right below the table, double-spaced as in the rest of the document.

Figures are any visual material other than a table. Label each figure "Fig." with a number and a period after the number, plus a caption with a period at the end, all *below* the figure. Captions take sentence capitalization. For borrowed figures, if you give complete source information in the caption and do not cite the figure in the text, then no works cited entry for the figure is needed, just write the caption like a works cited entry but with the author name provided in the typical style, not inverted; if you have room for only a short caption to cite the source, punctuate the author, title, and year of publication with commas, a period at the end, and put a full entry for the source in the works cited list.

Long Quotes

In 1986, Random House published a compendium of all of Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide* novels. In Chapter 1 of *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish,* Adams wrote,

Of course, no one ever has the slightest notion what size or shape different species are going to turn out to be, but if you were to take the findings of the latest Mid-Galactic Census report as any kind of accurate guide to statistical averages you would probably guess that the craft would hold about six people, and you would be right. You'd probably guessed that anyway. The Census report, like most such surveys, had cost an awful lot of money and told nobody anything they didn't already know—except that every single person in the Galaxy had 2.4 legs and owned a hyena. (476)

Adams pointed out the failings of surveys and poor statistical analyses in an affable, breezy style.

Fig. 3. Example of a long block quote.

If you have a prose quotation that is more than four lines long, or a poem or song lyric more than 3 lines long when typed into your essay, write an introduction to the quote, then start the quote on the next line; if your introduction is a sentence, end it with a colon. **Indent all lines of the quotation half an inch from the left margin**. Put the parenthetical citation after the period *only at the end of a block quote*. Do not use quotation marks.

MLA Works Cited Page

      After your essay, on a separate page, list the works that are cited in the paper. While other documentation styles call the list of sources by other names, MLA style calls this list "Works Cited" and works in the list must be summarized, paraphrased, quoted, or otherwise used in the paper to deserve citing in the text and the list at the end; if you only read the work but didn't use it in the body of your paper, then it doesn't belong in the works cited list.
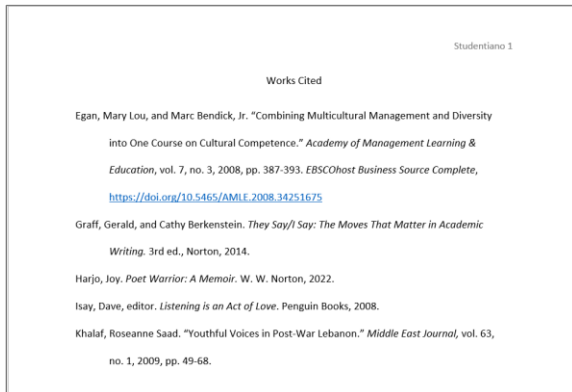

Center the heading "Work Cited" if only one source is used in your whole paper, or "Works Cited" if multiple sources at the top of the page. Then type out the entries for each work and arrange them in alphabetical order by each primary author's family name. If there is no author named, use the title (not including *a, an,* or *the)* for the alphabetizing.

Fig. 4. Example of MLA works cited page format.

Start a new paragraph for each work, but keep everything the same double-line spacing as the rest of the paper. Format the entries with "hanging indents"; methods of creating hanging indents vary according to which word processing application you are using.
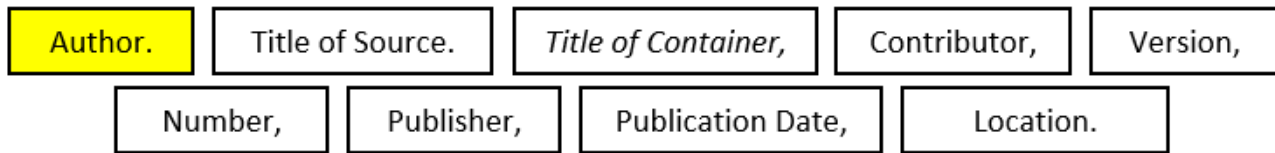
Works Cited Entries in MLA 9th Edition Style

The *MLA Handbook* 9th edition continues to use a template of nine "core elements" and the idea of "containers" to organize the information to provide in your list of works cited. Each core element is separated from the next by a period or a comma.
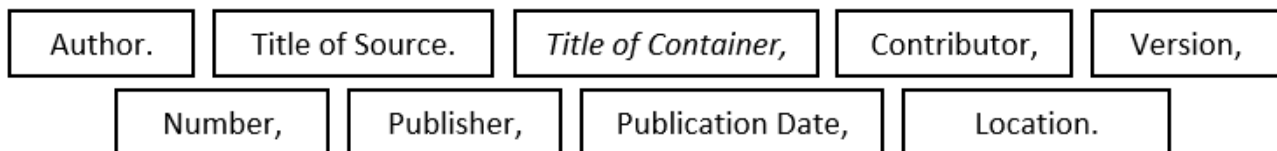
The goal is to clearly provide identification of your source, regardless of its medium, with information relevant to your work.

The Nine Core Elements with Punctuation

1) Author.

Author.	Title of Source.	*Title of Container,*	Contributor,	Version,

Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.

Authors may be individuals or organizations.

ONE AUTHOR:
Harjo, Joy. *Poet Warrior: A Memoir*. W. W. Norton, 2022.

TWO AUTHORS:
Suzuki, David, and Amanda McConnell. *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering our Place in Nature*.
Greystone Books, 1999.

THREE OR MORE AUTHORS:
Hartwell, Leland H., et al. *Genetics: From Genes to Genomes*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education,
2008.

EDITOR AS AUTHOR:
Isay, Dave, editor. *Listening is an Act of Love*. Penguin Books, 2008.

NO AUTHOR:
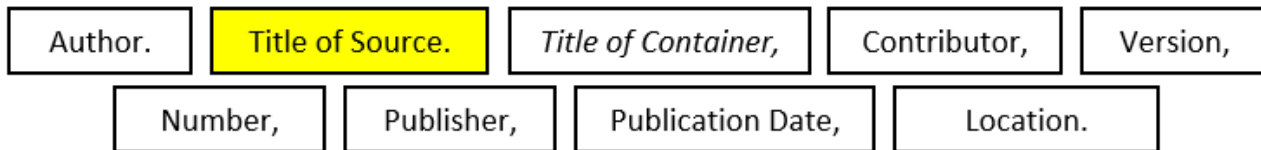Start the entry with the title of the source.

GOVERNMENT AGENCY AS AUTHOR:
Omit "The" before the name of any organization in the works cited list. If it is clear what the
government entity is that created the source, provide the name as it is given. If the author and
the publisher are the same organization, start the entry with the title of the source and put the
organization in just the publisher position. However, if the government author is not specified,
identify the full name of the government first, then the next smaller unit(s) that the agency is
part of, and finally the agency followed by a period.

Office of Equity and Environmental Justice. "Addressing Environmental and Health Inequities."
Washington State Department of Ecology, https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Who-we-
are/Our-Programs/Equity-Environmental-Justice. Accessed 25 Apr. 2022.
United States, Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Census
Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States.* 128th ed., Government Printing Office,
2009.

2) Title of Source.

Author.	Title of Source.	Title of Container,	Contributor,	Version,

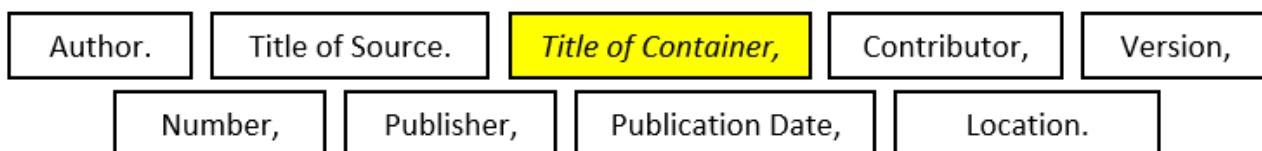| Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.

If the title of a source is for a shorter work—such as an article, an episode of a TV series, an email message, a song, a poem—contained within a larger work, it should follow standard title capitalization and be enclosed in quotation marks. If the source is a book or a movie, for example, then the title should follow standard title capitalization and be *italicized*. If your source has no title, put a description in the title spot in the works cited entry; for example, Slide of _____, or Booklet, or Text message to the author. The description should be formatted with plain text and sentence capitalization. The Title of Source element is punctuated with a period.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Berkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing.* 3rd ed., Norton, 2014.

"The C-Word." *House,* Directed by Hugh Laurie, FOX Television Network, 30 Apr. 2012.

McRae, Sheiresa. "Go Green!" *Black Enterprise,* Aug. 2007, p. 133, *EBSCOhost,* https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.bellevuecollege.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=25967990&site=ehost-live.

3) Title of Container,

Author.	Title of Source.	Title of Container,	Contributor,	Version,

Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.

The container may be any larger work that contains the source: e.g., a book, a periodical, a TV series, a web site, a blog; in turn, those "containers" may be inside larger containers with their own titles: a network of blogs (like *WordPress)*, or the network containing a TV series (like *Hulu,* or *Netflix,* or *Home Box Office*). The container title is followed by a comma. If a source has two containers, provide all the elements available to describe the first container and end that with a period, then repeat the process for the second container.

ONE CONTAINER:

Adams, Douglas. "Parrots the Universe and Everything." *YouTube,* 22 May 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZG8HBuDjgc.

Hacker, Diana, and Nancy Sommers. "Reading and Writing Critically." *A Writer's Reference,* contributing ESL specialist, Kimberli Huster, 8th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015, pp. 71-83.

TWO CONTAINERS:

Hernandez, Javier C. "Racial Imbalance Persists at Elite Schools**."** *New York Times,*
8 Nov. 2008, p. A23. *ProQuest National Newspapers Core Collection*.

In the above example, the first CONTAINER is ***The New York Times,*** and the version, number, publisher, publication date and location describe it. Then, in addition, this entire *New York Times* is located in ANOTHER CONTAINER, a database: ***ProQuest National Newspapers Core Collection.*** For sources that have a DOI, it can be included following the database.

4) Contributor,

Author.	Title of Source.	*Title of Container,*	Contributor,	Version,

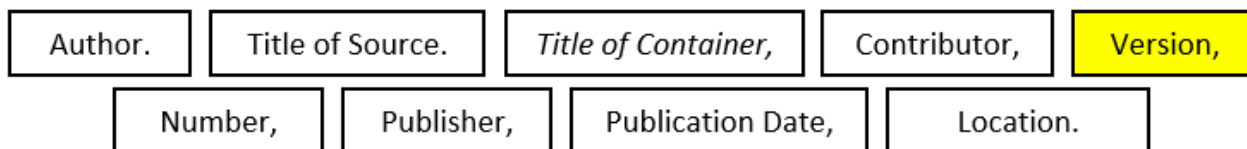| Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.
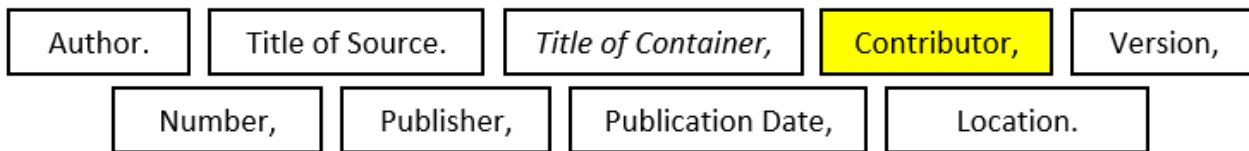
Abdullahi, Mohamed Diriye. "Mogadishu." *Encyclopedia of African History*, edited by Kevin
Shillington, vol. 2, Fitzroy Dearborn, 2005, pp. 989-990.

Galeano, Eduardo. *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent.*
translated by Cedric Belfrage, foreword by Isabelle Allende, 25th Anniversary Edition,
Monthly Review Press, 1997.

"2016 MLA-Prize-Winning Publications." *YouTube,* uploaded by ModernLanguageAssoc, 18 Jan.
2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKROuhFF9dU.

5) Version,

Author.	Title of Source.	*Title of Container,*	Contributor,	Version,

Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.

MLA Handbook. 9th ed., e-book ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2021.

Roddenberry, Gene, Alan Dean Foster, and Harold Livingston. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture.*
Director's edition, Paramount Pictures, 2001.

6) Number,

Author.	Title of Source.	*Title of Container,*	Contributor,	Version,
	Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.

Hoyle, Brian D., and K. Lee Lerner. "Enhanced Greenhouse Effect." *The Gale Encyclopedia of Science*, edited by K. Lee Lerner and Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, 5th ed., vol. 3, Gale/Cengage Learning, 2014, pp. 1609-1610, *Gale eBooks*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3727800909/GVRL?u=bellevue&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=c028b5fe.

Khalaf, Roseanne Saad. "Youthful Voices in Post-War Lebanon." *Middle East Journal,* vol. 63, no. 1, 2009, pp. 49-68.

7) Publisher,

Author.	Title of Source.	*Title of Container,*	Contributor,	Version,
	Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.

For publishers' names, omit articles and words like *Publishing* and *Company* or *Co*. If an academic press has the words *University* and *Press* or another language's equivalent, abbreviate it to UP. However, if the publisher name has only the word *Press*, then keep it. Change an ampersand (&) or plus sign (+) to the word "and." If a parent company is named with one or more divisions, give the division. If author and publisher are the same, start the entry with the title of the work, and list only the organization as the publisher.

Leonard, Robert Sean, performer. "Everybody Dies." *House,* FOX Television Network, 21 May 2012.

Londer, Olga M., and Penelope Coventry. *Microsoft SharePoint 2013: Step by Step.* Microsoft Press, 2013.

8) Publication Date,

Author.	Title of Source.	*Title of Container,*	Contributor,	Version,
	Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	Location.

The publication date may include one or more of the following: a year, a day and a month, a season, a time stamp, a range of dates or years. Months are abbreviated unless very short.

United States, Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Tropical Cyclone Climatology." *National Hurricane Center and Central Pacific Hurricane Center*, https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/climo/. Accessed 6 May 2024.

9) Location.

Author.	Title of Source.	*Title of Container,*	Contributor,	Version,

Number,	Publisher,	Publication Date,	**Location.**
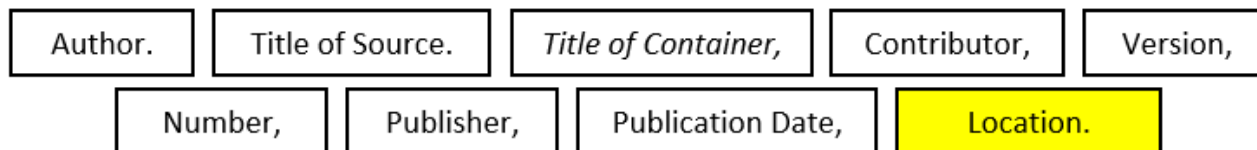
This is the element that still depends most on the medium of your source: for example, print and PDF sources have page ranges when they are inside containers; online sources can have DOIs, permalinks, and/or URLs; and DVD sets have disc numbers. DOIs are preferred over URLs, if a source has both. If the DOI for your source does not have http:// or https:// at its beginning, then add https://doi.org to the beginning of it for your list entry. When providing a URL, if it will not be a hyperlink, then you can omit "http://" or "https://" but many prefer links in digital documents. Avoid shortening services, as they hide the address in print documents and can end up as broken links. Even exhibits, artifacts in archives, performances, and lectures may be cited with their physical locations, if relevant to your writing.

Egan, Mary Lou, and Marc Bendick, Jr. "Combining Multicultural Management and Diversity into One Course on Cultural Competence." *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2008, pp. 387-393. *EBSCOhost Business Source Complete*, https://doi.org/10.5465/AMLE.2008.34251675

Gayle Buck, et al. "Science Role Models for Adolescent Girls." *Science Scope (Washington, D.C.)*, vol. 32, no. 4, National Science Teachers Association, 2008, pp. 40–43.

Supplemental Elements

Additional information that you decide is necessary may be added after the Title of Source element if it does not pertain to the whole entry. Otherwise, put it at the end. For example, with a reprint of a much older work, providing the original publication date right after the title can help give context for the contents of the newer publication. Similarly, if you used a transcript of another medium it can help to identify your actual source. If an online source does not have a publication date, or seems to have been altered or removed since you saw it, then an access date should be put at the end of the entry. Put a period after a supplemental element.

Franklin, Benjamin. "Emigration to America." 1782. *The Faber Book of America,* edited by Christopher Ricks and William L. Vance, Faber and Faber, 1992, pp. 24-26.

Fresh Air. Narrated by Terry Gross, National Public Radio, 20 May 2008. Transcript.

Office of Equity and Environmental Justice. "Addressing Environmental and Health Inequities." Washington State Department of Ecology, https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Who-we-are/Our-Programs/Equity-Environmental-Justice. Accessed 25 Apr. 2022.