

ASK THE MLA

## How do I cite generative AI in MLA style?

The MLA’s method for citing sources uses a [template of core elements](#)—standardized criteria that writers can use to evaluate sources and create works-cited-list entries based on that evaluation. That new technologies like *ChatGPT* emerge is a key reason why the MLA has adopted this approach to citation—to give writers flexibility to apply the style when they encounter new types of sources. In what follows, we offer recommendations for citing generative AI, defined as a tool that “can analyze or summarize content from a huge set of information, including web pages, books and other writing available on the internet, and use that data to create original new content” (Weed).

You should

- cite a generative AI tool whenever you paraphrase, quote, or incorporate into your own work any content (whether text, image, data, or other) that was created by it
- acknowledge all functional uses of the tool (like editing your prose or translating words) in a note, your text, or another suitable location
- take care to vet the secondary sources it cites (see example 5 below for more details)

See below for specific examples. And keep in mind: the MLA template of core elements is meant to provide flexibility in citation. So if you find a rationale to modify these recommendations in your own citations, we encourage you to do so. We’ve opened this post up for commenting, so let us know what you think and how you’re using and citing generative AI tools!

### Using the MLA Template

Author



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We do not recommend treating the AI tool as an author. This recommendation follows the [policies](#) developed by various publishers, including the MLA's journal *PMLA*.

### **Title of Source**

Describe what was generated by the AI tool. This may involve including information about the prompt in the Title of Source element if you have not done so in the text.

### **Title of Container**

Use the Title of Container element to name the AI tool (e.g., *ChatGPT*).

### **Version**

Name the version of the AI tool as specifically as possible. For example, the examples in this post were developed using *ChatGPT 3.5*, which assigns a specific date to the version, so the Version element shows this version date.

### **Publisher**

Name the company that made the tool.

### **Date**

Give the date the content was generated.

### **Location**

Give the general URL for the tool.<sup>1</sup>

## **Example 1: Paraphrasing Text**

### **Passage in Source**



In the novel *The Great Gatsby*, the green light represents various symbolic meanings, including:



1. **Hope and Promise:** The green light is first seen at the end of Daisy's dock across the water from Gatsby's mansion. For Gatsby, the green light symbolizes his hopes and dreams of being reunited with Daisy and winning her back.
2. **Illusion and Deception:** The green light also symbolizes the illusory nature of the American Dream and Gatsby's belief that he can attain it by acquiring wealth and social status. The green light represents the idea that achieving the Dream is like chasing a mirage or a ghost, something that always remains just out of reach.
3. **Money and Materialism:** The green light also represents the materialistic values of the wealthy characters in the novel. For example, the green light serves as a reminder of the wealth and privilege that Daisy and her social circle enjoy, and that Gatsby is striving to attain.
4. **Envy and Jealousy:** The green light also symbolizes Gatsby's envy and jealousy of Tom Buchanan, Daisy's husband, who represents the established wealthy class that Gatsby is trying to break into.

Overall, the green light in *The Great Gatsby* is a powerful symbol that conveys the themes of hope, illusion, materialism, and envy that run throughout the novel. It serves as a reminder that the American Dream is often an elusive and unattainable goal, and that wealth and status do not necessarily bring happiness or fulfillment.

## Paraphrased in Your Prose

While the green light in *The Great Gatsby* might be said to chiefly symbolize four main things: optimism, the unattainability of the American dream, greed, and covetousness (“Describe the symbolism”), arguably the most important—the one that ties all four themes together—is greed.

## Works-Cited-List Entry

“Describe the symbolism of the green light in the book *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald” prompt. *ChatGPT*, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

## Example 2: Quoting Text

### Passage in Source

LK

In 200 words, describe the symbolism of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*.



The green light in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* represents a multitude of symbolic meanings that are essential to the novel's central themes. The light first appears to the narrator, Nick Carraway, as a distant and alluring beacon across the water, situated at the end of the dock on the other side of the bay. The light belongs to Daisy Buchanan's mansion and is interpreted by Gatsby as a signal of his love for her.



The green light is a symbol of Gatsby's ambition, longing, and desire for the unattainable. It represents the American Dream, which Gatsby pursues relentlessly, even though it always seems to elude him. The light symbolizes the hope that he can regain Daisy's love and that they can be reunited, just as the green light represents the hope that America offers for those who work hard and strive for success.

The green light is also a symbol of the corruption and decay of the American Dream. It represents the shallowness and emptiness of material wealth and the failure of human relationships to provide genuine satisfaction and happiness. Gatsby's obsession with the light and his inability to attain it underscores the emptiness of his pursuit of wealth and status and the ultimate futility of his quest.

Overall, the green light is a powerful symbol that embodies many of the novel's central themes and serves as a poignant reminder of the dangers of pursuing an unattainable dream.

LK

What scholarly sources were used to generate that description?



As an AI language model, I do not have the ability to conduct research or cite sources independently. However, I can provide a list of scholarly sources related to the symbolism of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*:



1. Brucoli, Matthew J. "F. Scott Fitzgerald's American Dream." In *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*, edited by Scott Donaldson, 83-95. G.K. Hall & Co., 1984.
2. Johnson, Claudia Durst. "Seeing and Believing: The Great Gatsby." In *Understanding The Great Gatsby: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*, edited by Dalton Gross and MaryJean Gross, 71-87. Greenwood Press, 1998.
3. Lee, A. Robert. "Gatsby's Green Light: The Emanation of a Dream." In *Twentieth Century Literature* 1, no. 1 (1955): 1-6.
4. Lydenberg, Robin. "The Symbolic Landscape of *The Great Gatsby*." In *F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Perspectives*, edited by Jackson R. Bryer, 153-70. University of Georgia Press, 1982.

These sources and others like them offer detailed analysis and interpretation of the green light as a central symbol in *The Great Gatsby*.

## Quoted in Your Prose

When asked to describe the symbolism of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*, *ChatGPT* provided a summary about optimism, the unattainability of the American dream, greed, and covetousness. However, when further prompted to cite the source on which that summary was based, it noted that it lacked "the ability to conduct research or cite sources independently" but that it could "provide a list of scholarly sources related to the symbolism of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*" ("In 200 words").

## Works-Cited-List Entry

"In 200 words, describe the symbolism of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*" follow-up prompt to list sources. *ChatGPT*, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 9 Mar. 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

While we've provided fairly detailed descriptions of the prompts above, a more general one (e.g., Symbolism of the green light in *The Great Gatsby* prompt) could be used, since you are describing something that mimics a conversation, which could have various prompts along the way.

### Example 3: Citing Creative Visual Works

If you are incorporating an AI-generated image in your work, you will likely need to create a caption for it following the guidelines in [section 1.7](#) of the *MLA Handbook*. Use a description of the prompt, followed by the AI tool, version, and date created:



Fig. 1. “Pointillist painting of a sheep in a sunny field of blue flowers” prompt, *DALL-E*, version 2, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, labs.openai.com/.

You can use this same information if you choose to create a works-cited-list entry instead of including the full citation in the caption (see *MLA Handbook*, sec. 1.7).

### Example 4: Quoting Creative Textual Works

If you ask a generative AI tool to create a work, like a poem, how you cite it will depend on whether you assign a title to it. Let's say, for example, you ask *ChatGPT* to write a villanelle titled “The Sunflower” that—you guessed it!—describes a sunflower and then quote it in your text. Your works-cited-list entry might look like this:

“The Sunflower” villanelle about a sunflower. *ChatGPT*, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

If you did not title the work, incorporate part of or all of the first line into the description of the work in the Title of Source element:

“Upon the shore . . .” Shakespearean sonnet about seeing the ocean. *ChatGPT*, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

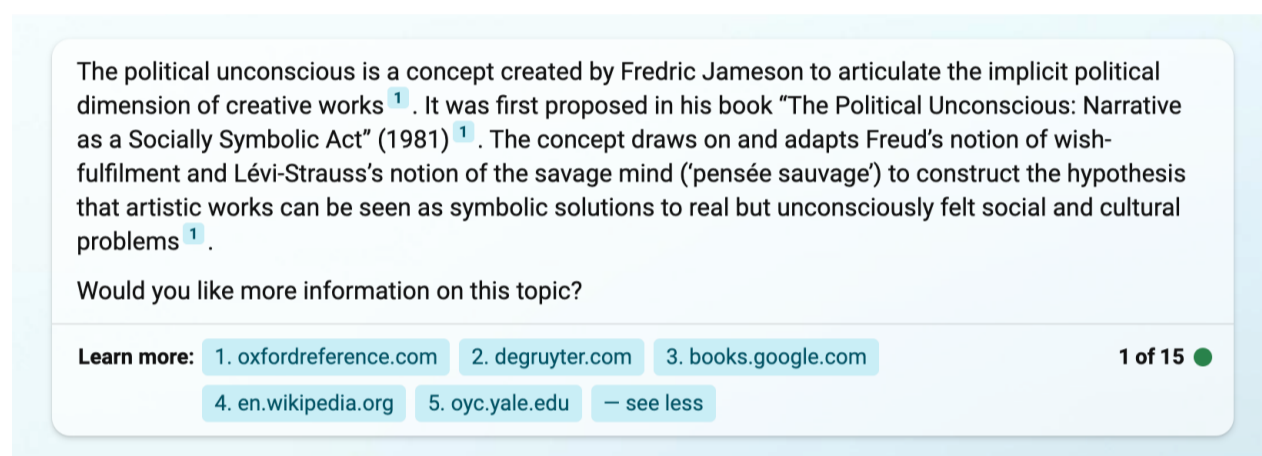


For guidance on using descriptions and text from the work itself in the Title of Source element, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.28 and 5.29.

## Example 5: Citing Secondary Sources Used by an AI Tool

You should also take care to vet the secondary sources cited by a generative AI tool—with the caveat that AI tools do not always cite sources or, when they do, do not always indicate precisely what a given source has contributed. If you cite an AI summary that includes sources and do not go on to consult those sources yourself, we recommend that you acknowledge secondary sources in your work.

For example, let's say that you ask Bing AI to explain the concept of the political unconscious, citing sources, and it provides the following answer:



The political unconscious is a concept created by Fredric Jameson to articulate the implicit political dimension of creative works<sup>1</sup>. It was first proposed in his book "The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act" (1981)<sup>1</sup>. The concept draws on and adapts Freud's notion of wish-fulfilment and Lévi-Strauss's notion of the savage mind ('pensée sauvage') to construct the hypothesis that artistic works can be seen as symbolic solutions to real but unconsciously felt social and cultural problems<sup>1</sup>.

Would you like more information on this topic?

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Let's say that you then decide to quote from the final sentence. You need to click through to the source listed in the note in order to get more information than just a URL for the source. There, you will read the following:



Oxford Reference

Search

Subject Reference Type My Content (1) My Searches (0)

Sign in

Username

Username

Password

Password

Sign in Forgot password? Don't have an account?

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OVERVIEW

political unconscious

QUICK REFERENCE

A concept created by Fredric Jameson to articulate the implicit political dimension of creative works. First proposed in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), the political unconscious draws on and adapts Freud's notion of wish-fulfilment and Lévi-Strauss's notion of the savage mind ('pensée sauvage') to construct the hypothesis that artistic works can be seen as symbolic solutions to real but unconsciously felt social and cultural problems. The task of the cultural critic is then to find the means of reconstructing the original problem for which the text as symbolic act is a solution. This approach to textual criticism turns not so much on the question of what does a particular text mean as why it exists in the form that it does.

Now, you can treat *Oxford Reference* as your source since Bing AI was merely a research conduit to the source (see *MLA Handbook* 5.34 for more information). If for some reason you want to treat a source cited in a generative AI tool as an indirect source—and you know it is, in fact, the source for the information provided by the AI, follow the guidance in section 6.77 of the *MLA Handbook*.

## Note

1. At the time of writing this post, *ChatGPT* doesn't have a built-in feature to create a unique URL to the conversation. However, an outside tool like the Chrome extension *ShareGPT* can generate such a link. If you use that type of outside tool, include the unique URL that the tool generates instead of the general URL.

*DALL-E* allows users to download the AI-generated images they create or generate a publicly-available URL that leads to an image. If you choose to create a shareable link for an image you generate with *DALL-E* (or other similar AI image generators), include that unique URL that leads to the image instead of the general URL.

## Works Cited

*MLA Handbook*. 9th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2021. *MLA Handbook Plus*, 2021, mlahandbookplus.org/.

Weed, Julie. "Can ChatGPT Plan Your Vacation?" *The New York Times*, 16 Mar. 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/03/16/travel/chatgpt-artificial-intelligence-travel-vacation.html.

**FILED UNDER:** [AI](#), [digital sources](#), [works-cited lists](#)

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## 17 Comments

**Caitlin Ratcliffe** 21 MARCH 2023 AT 06:03 PM

Thank you for this guidance about ChatGPT! This is very timely and helpful. Can you please confirm the order of the core elements in your guidance here? Specifically the "Publisher" element and the "Date" element. Thank you!

[Reply](#)

**Laura Kiernan** 22 MARCH 2023 AT 12:03 PM

Thank you for your question about the order of the Publisher and Date elements. We have corrected this post to show that the Publisher element should be before the Date element in works-cited-list entries.

[Reply](#)

**Christiana Salah** 22 MARCH 2023 AT 06:03 PM

While you say to vet the sources, which broadly covers this, it might be helpful to explicitly state in your guide that ChatGPT will invent plausible-looking sources. These fake citations use the names of real publication venues and sometimes the names of real scholars in the correct field.

For example, I tested ChatGPT by asking for a paragraph on a recent novel citing a peer-reviewed source. It created a plausible citation for an essay in a paywalled new issue of a relevant journal. Only by

investigating the author's name and finding them not to exist was I able to tell the citation was invented. It appears ChatGPT will cite real sources when it finds such, but invent one if it does not.

[Reply](#)

**Diana Tsang** 22 MARCH 2023 AT 08:03 PM

Thank you for this timely reference!

Could you kindly confirm if the format of the Version Date (Feb. 13 version) is different from the MLA's usual format of Date (not "13 Feb." version) on purpose?

[Reply](#)

**Laura Kiernan** 23 MARCH 2023 AT 11:03 AM

Thank you for pointing out that error. We have corrected this post so the date in the Version element follows the day-month-year date style: 13 Feb. version.

[Reply](#)

**Diana Tsang** 22 MARCH 2023 AT 08:03 PM

As the Title of Container (e.g. ChatGPT) is not a just description. Shall it be italicized in the works cited entry?

[Reply](#)

**Laura Kiernan** 23 MARCH 2023 AT 11:03 AM

Thank you for pointing out that error. *ChatGPT* should be italicized because it is the name of a piece of software, so we have corrected this post to reflect that.

[Reply](#)

**Tarn** 28 MARCH 2023 AT 09:03 PM

Should DALLE-E be italicised in the above example too?

Fig. 1. "Pointillist painting of a sheep in a sunny field of blue flowers" prompt, DALLE-E, version 2, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, labs.openai.com/.

[Reply](#)

**Laura Kiernan** 29 MARCH 2023 AT 09:03 AM

Thank you for alerting us to that error. Yes, that AI tool name should be italicized, so we have corrected the post to reflect that. We have also corrected the spelling to be *DALL-E*.

[Reply](#)

**Amy Curtis** 24 MARCH 2023 AT 12:03 PM

How would you suggest to cite ChatGPT when using it to summarize personally generated data sets? For example in lab experiments, or observational data.

[Reply](#)



**Christian Schmidt** 03 APRIL 2023 AT 04:04 PM

Thank you for these guidelines. Question on Example 3 "Citing Creative Visual Works". You are NOT suggesting to include the link to a retrievable/published version of such an image, instead you advice to provide the general URL of the tool (here: labs.openai.com/). But: You are currently the only Style provider who has touched on the retrievability issue in a bit more differentiated way (in your note to Example 5). You are even mentioning workarounds like ShareGPT for text there, which is appreciated. But I don't understand, why you would not suggest the same for images, since some of the image creation tools even allow for publishing them - no workaround needed. OpenAI's DALL-E does it (example:

<https://labs.openai.com/s/jrbn6DI8aRTDvS4Kobny33n2>), and others like Midjourney allow for that, too. Any reason why that is not included here?

[Reply](#)

**Laura Kiernan** 04 APRIL 2023 AT 10:04 AM

Thank you for bringing that to our attention. We have updated the note in the post to acknowledge that if someone chooses to create a shareable link for an image generated with *DALL-E* (or other similar AI image generators), that unique URL should be included instead of the general one.

[Reply](#)

**Anna Mills** 11 APRIL 2023 AT 05:04 PM

Here's a suggestion for a way to foreground the human critics who are the real sources of the ideas about the symbolism of the green light in the above Fitzgerald example:

Unknown human authors statistically remixed by ChatGPT, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, chat.openai.com/chat. "Describe the symbolism of the green light in the book The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald" prompt.

[Reply](#)

**Thomas Basbøll** 12 APRIL 2023 AT 04:04 AM

Christiana's point above deserves an answer. In example 2, you provide a screenshot of such "hallucinated" references, but you suggest quoting GPT uncritically describing it as a "list of scholarly sources". Is this good practice?

[Reply](#)

**Davis Oldham** 17 APRIL 2023 AT 10:04 AM

I agree with Thomas and Christiana. The first source cited in Example 2, Brucoli, does not appear to exist, from what I can see in the table of contents for the cited container:

<https://worldcat.org/title/10020427>

Brucoli is an actual Fitzgerald scholar but the cited title does not appear in the cited collection of critical essays.

I think it's imperative that a resource on citing chatGPT should address this.

[Reply.](#)

**Rebecca Danielle Armentrout** 01 MAY 2023 AT 10:05 AM

Does google translate when I am writing my own words in google translate to translate it in English need to be cited?

[Reply.](#)

**Dirk** 09 MAY 2023 AT 09:05 PM

Hey, I was wondering, if students only used ChatGPT to rewrite their original work using more sophisticated academic terminology to express ideas more clearly and fix grammar and spelling mistakes. Do they need to cite this? If so, how do they need to do this?

[Reply.](#)

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