Tip Sheet: Using Sources, MLA

a. **Introduce your source in the present tense.** Introducing your source allows you to integrate source material with your own writing. It also allows you to provide evidence of your source’s credibility. Read the following examples:

- Clinical psychologist John Doe **argues** that . . .
  
- points out that . . .
  
- suggests . . .
  
- believes . .

- According to Jane Doe, an expert in medical ethics, this law . . .

- Recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that . . .

(Verb Tip: When introducing your source, it’s a good idea to avoid the verb “says.” It’s vague, and therefore weak.)

b. **Use your introduction to demonstrate your source’s credibility.** Notice the three examples above. In each, the writer tells us where the information or ideas come from: a clinical psychologist, an expert in medical ethics, and a widely known and well respected institution. This information helps us recognize the source’s authority, or credibility, and allows us to trust what we read.

c. **Quote or paraphrase your source accurately.** Quotes require you to use exact language, while paraphrasing requires you to convey borrowed ideas or information in your own words. Consult an appropriate text and/or your instructor for help with this, especially with paraphrase, to avoid plagiarizing.
d. **Use parenthetical citations effectively.** Parenthetical citations are necessary for print sources. However, when using electronic sources, they are sometimes necessary, sometimes not. Be sure you understand your instructor’s requirements regarding these citations, and consult an appropriate handbook (2009 or later) for help.

Note the following examples as illustrations of the principles listed above:

- John Doe, a clinical psychologist, points out that “diagnoses in this area are difficult to make, and incorrect diagnoses can yield serious consequences” (33). *(From a print source, with Doe appearing on the Works Cited page.)*

- One noted clinical psychologist points out that “diagnoses in this area are difficult to make, and incorrect diagnoses can yield serious consequences” (Doe). *(From an electronic source, with Doe appearing on the Works Cited page.)*

- John Doe, a clinical psychologist, points out that “diagnoses in this area are difficult to make, and incorrect diagnoses can yield serious consequences.” *(From an electronic source, with Doe appearing on the Works Cited page.)*

**NOTE:** There are several other ways to provide internal citations. See an appropriate text—e.g., your course text—for more information.

e. **Respond to the source material in your essay.** You might elaborate on it, explain it, refute it, and so on. Just be sure you respond. Read the following paragraphs, with the author’s response in bold print.

**Direct Quote**

Of course, the big question is whether executing convicted murderers is ever really justifiable. And some believe it is not. Noted ethicist Jeremy Anderson, for example, argues that “killing people who have killed is never appropriate in a society that deems itself civilized; no matter how we rationalize it, it compromises us as a people” (43). Anderson’s argument cannot be overlooked or cast aside, for it provides us with a fundamental truth about capital punishment—it requires the conscious taking of another human life and thus diminishes us as human beings.

**Non-quoted Information**

Capital punishment, however, may well be an effective deterrent. Recent statistics indicate that the murder rate in each of the seven states adopting capital
punishment in the last nine years has decreased, and these decreases adding up to a collective 27.3% (“The Death Penalty: A Raging Debate”). While the death penalty itself may not account for this entire decrease, it certainly seems apparent that it has been a contributing factor—that it is indeed serving as a deterrent.

f. Create a Works Cited entry for each source you use. See your course text for help with this.