

Helping Humanities Faculty **Impart Skills** for Today's **Workforce**

Teaching tools from the Modern Language Association

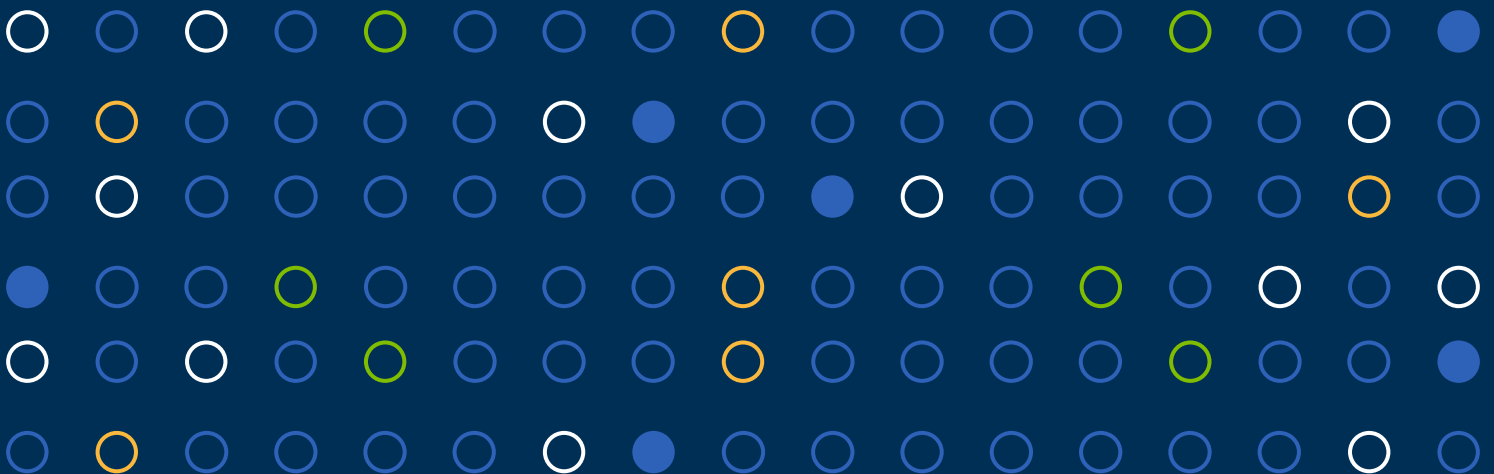


Introduction

The humanities are critically important to higher education, with employers placing a high value on the core competencies students gain through humanities study.

Humanities faculty are facing many challenges. STEM fields are often given higher priority, leaving humanities programs open to budget cuts. Students come to class with a wide range of skills and competencies. Instructors work hard to develop teaching strategies that keep students engaged, and like faculty in all disciplines, humanities faculty are called upon to retool curricula for in person, remote or hybrid situations.

In line with its mission to **“strengthen the study and teaching of language and literature,”** the Modern Language Association (MLA) creates tools for teaching and learning – many of which are freely available. As the MLA’s Executive Director, Paula Krebs, **has said**, the association’s role is to support teachers “so that the humanities will remain an important and vibrant part of our communities . . . and so that future generations can bring critical analysis, language mastery and writing skills to bear on their civic and professional lives.”



Humanities Skills Are Important to Employers

In surveys of employers conducted by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences (AAAS), a majority of respondents placed importance on skills associated with a humanities curriculum: critical thinking; communicating effectively through writing, speaking and presenting; communicating and working with people from different cultural backgrounds; locating, evaluating and using information in decision making; and integrating ideas/information across different settings and contexts. But, significantly fewer indicated that they found graduates to be well prepared in these areas.

Employer Assessment of Importance of Humanities Skills and Recent College Graduates' Preparation, 2020

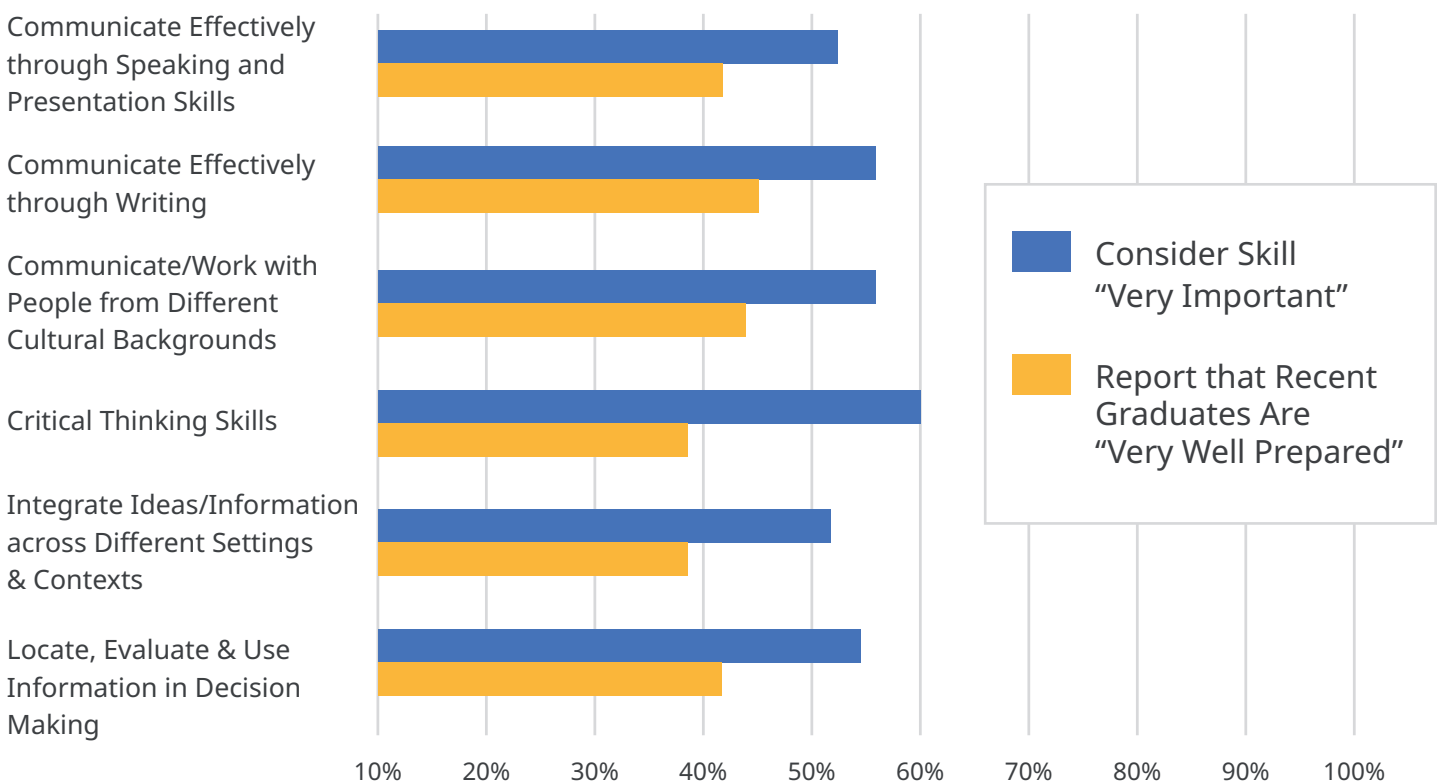


Fig 1. Chart of humanities skills. Adapted from Employer Assessment of Importance of Humanities Skills and Recent College Graduates' Preparation, 2020, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/humanities-workforce-beyond/section/16>, American Academy of Arts & Sciences

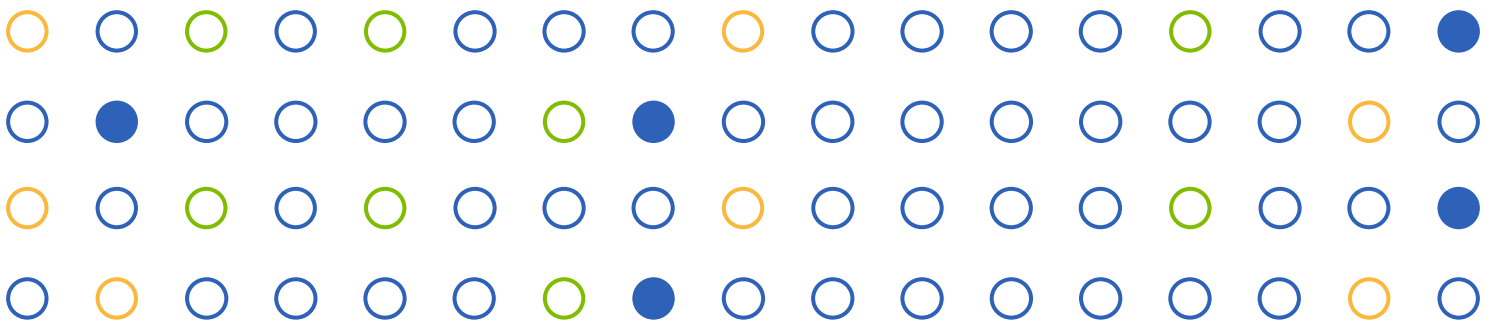
Modern Language Association Supports Humanities Faculty

The Modern Language Association produces the MLA International Bibliography, the leading library database for research in the areas of languages, literature, and related humanities fields including rhetoric and writing studies; linguistics; folklore; film, theater, television, and teaching of language. Hosted by EBSCO, the bibliography is also available with an extensive full-text component.

In addition to its usefulness as a research tool, the bibliography is increasingly used by instructors in the classroom, where it has proven to be an excellent tool for

- **enhancing** key information literacy skills, such as understanding different types of publications, recognizing and understanding the purpose of scholarly conventions, and evaluating secondary sources
- **engaging** students in the scholarly conversation
- **stimulating** classroom discussion and
- **developing** students' understanding of disciplinary histories and practice

To support the effective use of the bibliography and its companion database, the MLA Directory of Periodicals, in both teaching and research, the MLA has developed a suite of free teaching tools. According to Mary Onorato, Director of Bibliographic Information Services at the MLA, "Recognizing the importance of information literacy, and knowing that librarians and faculty were already using the bibliography to impart information literacy skills, we started thinking about ways we could facilitate their work."



Free Online Course: Understanding the MLA International Bibliography

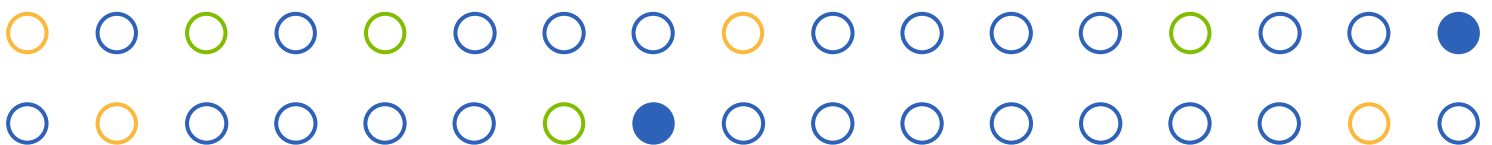
In 2017, the MLA launched a free, self-grading online course, "**Understanding the MLA International Bibliography**." While designed to be used with the MLA International Bibliography, it teaches broadly applicable skills such as devising effective searches, using filters and database thesaurus tools, interpreting search results and understanding peer review. The five-unit course takes about 90 minutes to complete. Students earn electronic badges as they complete each unit. Additional, shorter modules provide more in-depth instruction for conducting research in specific disciplines, such as Literary Criticism, Rhetoric and Composition, Folklore, Linguistics, and Film, Theater and Television.

The course was created with faculty in mind. Instructors can use the various units and modules in class, or simply assign the course and require students to provide their electronic badges as proof of completion. Students get access to the course by creating free online accounts using their email addresses. In each unit, students watch one or two instructional videos, then answer progression questions that reinforce the lesson through active engagement with the bibliography before taking a quiz. Course-takers can save their progress at any time and return to complete the course later.

Faculty are also free to use, download and customize the course under a Creative Commons license. The course is designed to be accessible: Closed captioning is available and there is a toolbar that enables students to adjust font sizes and colors for readability.

To further support faculty who are using the online course, additional resources are available in the **MLA International Bibliography section** of the MLA Style Center, a free companion site to the "MLA Handbook." In addition to an **instructor's guide**, these resources include lesson plans for using the course in both **first-year** and **more advanced classes**, as well as two project-based research assignments.

These resources are also available on the course website to instructors who register for the course.

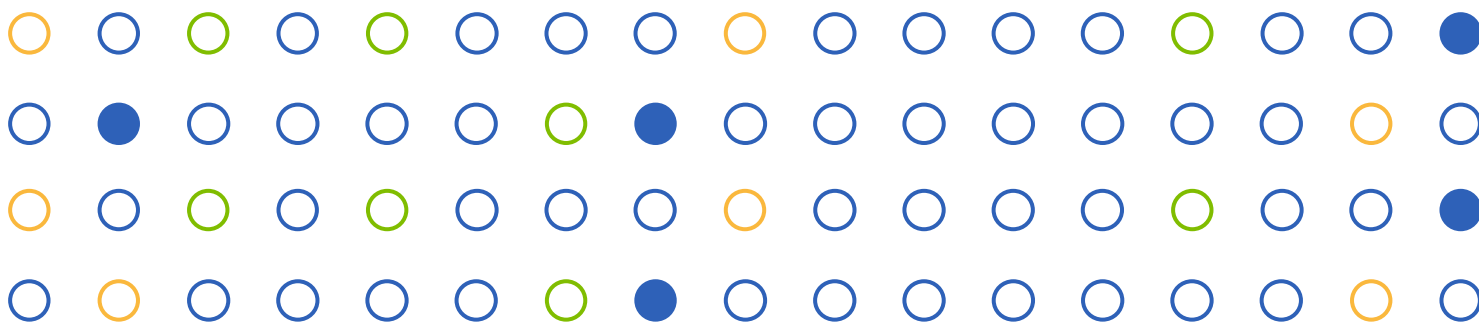


Project-Based Research Assignments

The MLA has developed **The History of Scholarship Project** and **The Scholarly Conversation Project**, which are project-based research assignments faculty can use to teach a specific competency. Through the History of Scholarship Project, students apply research skills from the online course to develop a presentation that demonstrates their understanding of how scholarship on a single work of literature changes over time. In the Scholarly Conversation Project, students use the research skills acquired in the course to learn how serial publications are presented in databases and how to read them chronologically. They then use this knowledge to gather evidence about changes in the “literary conversation” over the last 60 years.

Lesson Plans for Teaching Writing and Research

“Locate, Evaluate & Use Information in Decision Making” and “Integrate Ideas/Information Across Different Settings & Contexts” were two of the humanities skills that employers identified as important in the AAAS survey. In addition to offering lesson plans and other materials to support the “Understanding the MLA International Bibliography” course, the MLA Style Center publishes lesson plans aimed at helping undergraduates and high school students evaluate the reliability of research sources and incorporate those sources into their own writing with the necessary attribution. The site includes lessons on **evaluating sources**, **cross-referencing web sources**, **integrating quotations into research papers**, and **paraphrasing sources responsibly**. These teaching resources complement The MLA Style Center’s guidance about creating works-cited-lists and in-text citations, and its **posts about the mechanics of writing**.



Video Tutorials

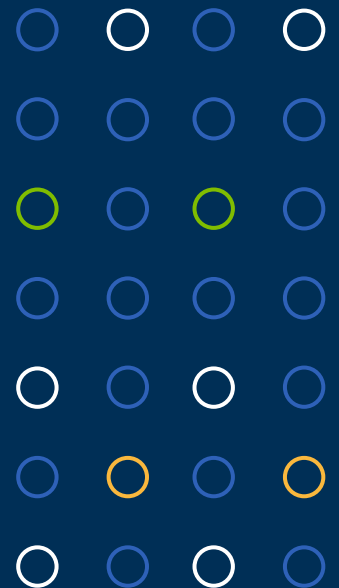
The MLA also provides a free library of brief instructional tutorials demonstrating various features and uses of the MLA International Bibliography. The tutorials range from basic to advanced and are hosted on Vimeo so faculty can easily share video links with students. Several of the tutorials reinforce critical thinking skills, such as “When and why to use the database,” “Peer review” and “Understanding search results.” A number are available in languages other than English. Some of these tutorials have been integrated into the online course.

MLA-EBSCO Collaboration for Information Literacy Prize

To support and promote the work of faculty and librarians in teaching information literacy, in 2021 the MLA and EBSCO introduced **two annual awards of \$500** each for coursework in literature, language or related disciplines developed in collaboration between faculty members and academic librarians. The award recognizes successful integration of the disciplinary objectives of the course with learning objectives in information literacy as defined in the Association of College and Research Libraries’ **“Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.”**

Conclusion

Coursework in the humanities helps students develop skills that are important in the workplace, regardless of their majors or type of institution. Using the teaching tools developed by the Modern Language Association, faculty members in the humanities can use the MLA International Bibliography and the MLA International Bibliography with Full Text to develop these competencies.



Interested in learning more about the MLA International Bibliography with Full Text on EBSCOhost or EBSCO Discovery Service? **[Visit our website today.](#)**