

## Primary Sources vs. Secondary Sources

**Primary sources** are original materials on which other research is based. They come from the time period that you are researching. They are usually the first formal appearance of results in physical, print or electronic format. They present original thinking, report a discovery, or share new information.

Examples:

- Literary creation: novels, short stories, poems, etc.
- Artifacts (e.g. Coins, plant specimens, fossils, furniture, tools, clothing, all from the time under study).
- Audio recordings (radio programs)
- Diaries
- Internet communications (email)
- Journal articles published in peer-reviewed publications
- Letters
- Newspaper articles (written at the time)
- Original documents (birth certificates, wills, marriage licenses, trial transcripts)
- Patents
- Photographs
- Proceedings of meetings, conferences and symposiums
- Records of organizations, government agencies (annual reports, treaties, constitution, government documents)
- Speeches
- Survey results
- Video recordings
- Works of art, architecture, literature, and music
- Websites
- Autobiographies or memoirs

**Secondary Sources** are less easily defined than primary sources. They are accounts written after the fact with the benefit of hindsight. They interpret, evaluate, analyze, summarize, process, discuss, and describe primary sources. They are not evidence but commentary on and discussion of evidence.

Examples:

- Bibliographies(also tertiary)
- Biographical works
- Commentaries or criticisms
- Dictionaries or encyclopedias(also tertiary)
- Histories
- Literary criticisms (journal articles)
- Magazine or newspaper articles
- Monographs, other than fiction and auto biography
- Textbooks (also tertiary)
- Website(also primary)

**Tertiary Sources** consist of information which is a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources.

Examples:

- Almanacs
- Bibliographies(also secondary)
- Chronologies
- Dictionaries and encyclopedias(also secondary)
- Directories
- Fact books
- Guidebooks
- Indexes, abstracts, or bibliographies used to locate primary and secondary sources
- Manuals
- Textbooks(also secondary)