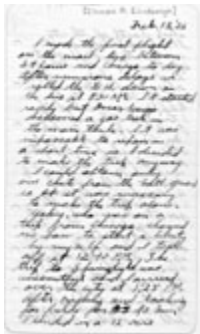


Primary vs. Secondary

Primary sources are original documents that are records of events as first described without interpretation or commentary. These are “raw” material in the sense that they have not been summarized or processed. In the humanities, primary sources enable the researcher to get as close as possible to what actually happened during an historical event or time period. In the sciences, often primary literature refers to the first place a scientist publishes the results of scientific investigations.

Often primary sources are created at the time when the events or conditions are occurring, but primary sources can also include autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories recorded later. Primary sources are characterized by their content, regardless of whether they are available in original format, in microfilm/microfiche, in digital format, or in published format.

Examples: diaries, letters, ledgers, emails, photographs, statistics, court records, interviews, memoirs, autobiographies, surveys, scientific research reports, weblogs.



Census Data

The number of people, sex listed

| | United States | Texas |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------|
| 1910 - Cont. | | |
| Number - Cont. | | |
| Female | 111,491,446 | 56,738,961 |
| Under 5 years | 7,984,290 | 2,232,287 |
| Under 1 year | 1,721,234 | 474,849 |
| 1 year | 3,964,492 | 1,112,954 |
| 2 years | 3,278,752 | 1,134,906 |
| 3 years | 3,333,708 | 1,135,467 |
| 4 years | 2,531,934 | 1,160,587 |
| 5 to 9 years | 8,140,216 | 2,832,954 |
| 10 years | 1,144,183 | 1,752,847 |
| 11 years | 1,574,144 | 1,981,254 |
| 12 years | 860,463 | 1,125,950 |
| 13 years | 1,121,042 | 1,175,892 |
| 14 years | 827,490 | 1,205,962 |

How to locate primary sources

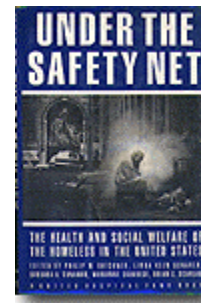
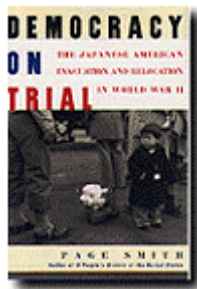
The Repository of Primary Sources at the University of Idaho (<http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html>) contains a list of over 5000 websites describing holdings of manuscripts, archives, rare books, historical photographs, and other primary sources for the research scholar.

Another site for primary sources is the Library of Congress American Memory site (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>)

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are material that has taken a primary source and summarized it, analyzed it, combined it, rephrased it and interpreted it. It is at least one step removed from the event or phenomenon under review. A secondary source may try to persuade or argue a position. Much of what you find as sources will be secondary.

Examples: Reports, summaries, textbooks, speeches, articles, encyclopedias and dictionaries



Primary Source vs. Secondary Source Examples

| Discipline | Primary Source | Secondary Source |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Art | Original artwork | Article critiquing the piece of art |
| Architecture | Architectural drawing | Book on architectural style and design |
| Geology | Map | Interpretation of geologic features and history for a given location |
| Graphics | Poster, computer-generated graphics, photographs | Book critiquing the photographs and graphics |
| Music | Song | Review of the song |
| History | Explorer's diary | Book about exploration |
| Journalism | Newspaper from 1920 | Article describing how reporting of the news has changed over time |
| Literature | Poem | Criticism on a particular genre of poetry |
| Political Science | Government documents (i.e. text of laws) | Article reviewing a law and its effects on the citizenry. |
| Religion | Tablets, ancient manuscripts | Interpretation of the meaning of document created in the ancient world |
| Science | Original journal article | Biological Abstracts |
| Theatre Arts | Videotape of a performance | Biography of a playwright |

Primary Sources

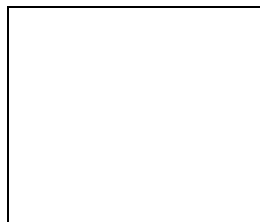
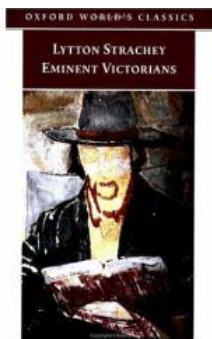
Person
Interview
E-mail contact
Event
Discussion
Debate
Community Meeting
Survey
Artifact
Observation of object (animate and
Inanimate)

Secondary Sources

Reference Material
Book
CD ROM
Encyclopedia
Magazine
Newspaper
Video Tape
Audio Tape
TV

Can a source be both primary and secondary at the same time?

From one vantage point, books are the classic secondary source: scholars use primary source materials such as letters and diaries to write books, which are in turn secondary sources. Books can also be a rich source of primary source material. In some instances, as in the case of published memoirs, autobiographies, and published documents, it is easy to determine when a book functions as a primary source. But even secondary source materials can function as primary sources. Take, for instance, Lytton Strachey's famous history of nineteenth century England, *Eminent Victorians*, first published in 1918. On the one hand, *Eminent Victorians* is a secondary source, a history of English society and culture in the 1800s based on Strachey's research and analysis of primary sources. On the other hand, a present-day scholar could treat *Eminent Victorians* itself as a primary source, using it to analyze the mores and attitudes of Lytton Strachey and the early twentieth century English intelligentsia of which he was a part.



Primary or Secondary?

The following sources could be considered either primary or secondary:

Internet Web Site

Graph

Chart

Diagram

Table