

Understanding Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources

Primary Sources

- The raw material or first-hand evidence associated with events or research
- Help you draw conclusions and generate ideas

Arts and Humanities Examples:

Diaries
Works of Art
Speeches
News Articles / Broadcasts
Government Documents

Natural and Social Sciences Examples:

Data Sets
Journal Articles Presenting Research Results
Interviews
Lab Notes
Empirical Studies

Empirical Studies are qualitative or quantitative research results from an experimental or direct observation. They are often found in scholarly articles or papers delivered at conferences.

Secondary Sources

- Recount and interpret information from primary sources
- Provide analysis and opinion that must be evaluated for bias

Examples:

Biographies
Documentaries
Literature Reviews

Commentaries
Criticisms
Analytical Journal Articles

Analytical Journal Articles contain summaries of information for multiple primary sources and opinions about what that information means.

Tertiary Sources

- Compile and summarize primary and secondary sources
- Present definitions and background information

Examples:

Encyclopedias
Almanacs

Dictionaries
Databases