

Types of Sources

- primary sources
- secondary sources



Bill Komanecki, Librarian
Saint Francis College of Nursing

PRIMARY LITERATURE



- Original research and/or new scientific discoveries

- Immediate results of research activities
- Often includes analysis of data collected in the field or laboratory

EXAMPLES:

- Original research published as articles in peer-reviewed journals.
- Dissertations
- Technical reports
- Conference proceedings

SECONDARY LITERATURE

- Summarizes and synthesizes primary literature
- Usually broader and less current than primary literature



EXAMPLES:

- Literature review articles
- Books

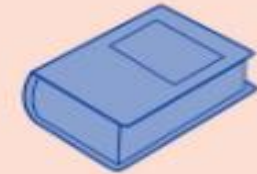
Since most information sources in the secondary literature contain extensive bibliographies, they can be useful for finding more information on a topic

TERTIARY LITERATURE

- Summaries or condensed versions of materials
- Usually with references to primary or secondary sources
- Good place to look up facts or get a general overview of a subject

EXAMPLES:

- Textbooks
- Dictionaries
- Encyclopedias
- Handbooks



What is a Primary Source?

- Raw or original records created as first-hand events
- Interpretation of events made after the fact by others
- Documents that are closest to the topic of investigation
- Person with a direct knowledge of a situation
- First-hand accounts of a past event

What is a Secondary Source?

- Written after an event or development has occurred
- Work that provides information about a primary source, but does not have first-hand information
- Academic works, such as articles and books, that summarize existing research on a topic

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

- Primary sources are first-hand accounts, while secondary sources are second-hand accounts
- Example - A patient writing about their own experiences with an illness is a primary source, because that person is the one describing what happened. If another author writes a book about the symptoms of an illness from the perspective of an outsider, that is the secondary source

Source: UC Santa Cruz Libraries Lib Guides, <https://tinyurl.com/4uredknv>

Primary and Secondary Similarities

- Both are sources of information
- Both are written by experts with verifiable information
- Both primary and secondary sources are referenced in research

Source: University of Connecticut Library Lib Guides, <https://tinyurl.com/3eea4ypu>

Primary and Secondary Differences

Primary Source

- Original document or first-hand account
- Written at the time of the event
- Based on actual occurrence of an event
- Used in research papers

Secondary Source

- Second-hand account of information
- Interpretation of the primary source
- Based on analysis, criticism, or evaluation of an event
- Not normally used in research papers

Primary and Secondary Usage

Primary

- Used to provide a closer look at what actually happened
- Written contemporaneously, not after the fact

Secondary

- Used in research as a way to add context to primary sources
- Helpful when you want to understand how other people interpret and analyze something