



## Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources

Your research assignment says you need to have primary and secondary sources, but you aren't sure out of the list you have generated which is which. Listed below are some hints for determining what type of source you are looking at. If you're still not sure, stop by the reference desk and ask the librarian on duty or send us an email at [Ask A Librarian](#) or ask your professor for assistance.

### Primary Sources

- are works that contain original information on which other research is based
- record what is happening when or approximately when it is happening
- present original thoughts or discoveries
- share new information

Such as:

scientific journals reporting on  
research results  
works of literature (fiction, poetry  
and creative non-fiction)  
interviews

speeches  
newspaper articles reporting on  
events  
photographs  
government documents

### Secondary Sources

- are works that analyze, evaluate and interpret primary sources
- tend to be argumentative
- are removed from the original event by time or place
- can be difficult to distinguish from primary material

Such as:

scholarly journals reporting on findings  
from primary sources  
commentaries  
newspaper or magazine articles that  
analyze an event

review articles  
literary reviews  
textbooks  
works of criticism and interpretation

### Tertiary Sources

- compile and analyze primary and secondary sources for a specific subject area
- index and organize citations
- show you how to use secondary or primary sources

Such as:

encyclopedias and dictionaries  
bibliographies

directories  
handbooks or guidebooks