

Primary and Secondary Sources

What's the difference?

Primary sources are considered to be "raw material." These types of sources originate from the time and place of the events.

Primary sources can include:

- ❑ contemporary letters, documents, prints, paintings and photographs;
- ❑ newspapers, books and material published at the time;
- ❑ recordings of radio broadcasts
- ❑ remaining body parts, sources of DNA, finger prints and foot prints;
- ❑ artifacts such as tools, pottery, furniture;
- ❑ testimonies and witnesses;
- ❑ the raw data from experiments;
- ❑ autobiographies;
- ❑ material on the Internet if the Internet or materials on it are the focus of the study;
- ❑ individual responses to surveys and questionnaires.

Secondary resources are "materials written or produced about the event."

Secondary resources can include:

- ❑ books, articles, web pages, documentaries about an event, person or item;
- ❑ interviews reporting what they heard from witnesses;
- ❑ biographies;
- ❑ articles in magazines;
- ❑ papers and reports using the results of surveys, questionnaires and experiments.

There are occasions where the lines of primary and secondary sources blur. For example, a biography is considered a secondary source but it may contain original letters, which would be primary resources. A magazine article about the feminist movement in 1974 would have been considered a secondary source in 1974, but if you were doing a research paper on feminism in the 70's the article would be considered a primary source. The article would give you historical insight on the feminist movement.