

Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources

Scope: As you conduct research, you will consult different sources of information. A professor may request **primary**, **secondary**, or **tertiary** sources. What does that mean? This guide explains the terms and gives examples of some primary, secondary and tertiary sources. These sources may vary depending on the subject.

Primary Sources

Primary sources are original materials. They are from the time period involved and have not been filtered through interpretation.

- Diaries
- Interviews (legal proceedings, personal, telephone, e-mail)
- Letters
- Original Documents (i.e. birth certificate or a trial transcript)
- Patents
- Photographs
- Proceedings of Meetings, Conferences and Symposia.
- Survey Research (such as market surveys and public opinion polls)
- Works of Literature

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are accounts written after the fact with the benefit of hindsight. They are interpretations and evaluations of primary sources. Secondary sources are not evidence, but rather commentary on and discussion of evidence.

- Biographies
- Commentaries
- Dissertations
- Indexes, Abstracts, Bibliographies (used to locate primary & secondary sources)
- Journal Articles
- Monographs

Tertiary Sources

Tertiary sources consist of information which is a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources.

- Almanacs
- Encyclopedias
- Fact books

Searching the Catalog

You can search the online catalog to find primary, secondary and tertiary sources. Here are some sample **word/s anywhere** searches in the Catalog:

Primary	<i>diaries</i> civil war Spain Latin American history sources
Secondary	<i>biography</i> civil war Spain
Tertiary	<i>encyclopedia</i> civil war Spain