

APSU Writing Center

Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary Sources

- Original materials or firsthand accounts (eyewitnesses) created during the historical event or phenomenon.
- Provides firsthand perspectives.
 - **Examples:**
 - Documents (letters, diaries, speeches, memoirs, personal journals)
 - Records (government documents, legal proceedings)
 - Research reports, studies, and experiments
 - Audio, video, or photographic recordings of events
 - Interviews and oral histories

Secondary Sources

- Materials were created after the fact by someone who had not directly experienced or witnessed the events.
- Provide analysis and interpretation from a distance.
- The author researched existing sources to gather information for their work, similar to how you often conduct research for your essays.
 - **Examples:**
 - Books, articles that interpret or review research works
 - histories, biographies, literary criticism, and interpretation
 - reviews of law and legislation, political analyses, and commentaries

Questions to Consider

- Was the source created by someone who witnessed or participated in the described events?
- Does the source offer analysis, interpretation, or commentary on primary sources or historical events?
- What motivated the writer to compose this document?
- What contradictions do other sources offer? How credible are they?

Summary

Primary sources are crucial for original research and firsthand evidence, while secondary sources are helpful for analysis, interpretation, and contextualization. Researchers often begin with secondary sources to gain an overview of the topic before delving into primary materials to deepen their understanding and develop original insights.



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References

Alvarez, C. (2023, April 4). *What's the difference between a primary and secondary source?* WGU Blogs. <https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-difference-between-primary-secondary-source2304.html>.

University of Kansas Writing Center. (2022, June). *Primary vs. secondary sources*. <https://writing.ku.edu/primary-vs-secondary-sources>.