

# Primary and Secondary Sources



**What are they?**

# Primary sources

- A primary source is an original object or document; first-hand information.
- Primary source is material written or produced in the time period that you may be investigating.
- Primary sources enable the researcher to get as close as possible to what actually happened during an historical event or time period.



# Primary Source

- **Diaries and journals**
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    - Example: Anne Frank was a teenager during World War II. She kept a diary or journal the years before she died in a concentration camp. Her diary was later published as the “[Diary of Anne Frank](#)”. This is a primary source.
    - Example: Sarah Morgan was young woman during the Civil War. She wrote in her diary or journal what happened to her and her family during the war. This is a primary document because it was first hand. She wrote it at the time it happened.
    - [Sarah Morgan Dawson: A Confederate Girl's Diary](#)



SARAH FOWLER MORGAN

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# Primary Source

- **Autobiographies**

- An autobiography is when you write a story or book about yourself.
- Example: Nelson Mandela wrote his autobiography about events in his life called “Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela. This is a primary document because he wrote his first hand experiences.



# Primary Source

- **Speeches** are considered primary sources.
  - Examples of Speeches:
    - Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address"
    - Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream"
    - All of the President's Inauguration Speeches.



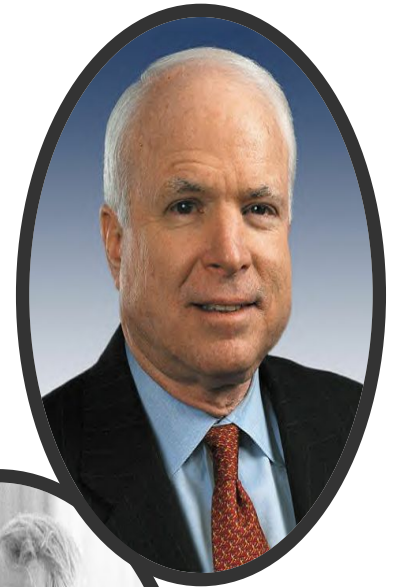
# Primary Source

- **Historical documents**
  - Examples: Declaration of Independence or the Magna Carta are primary documents. They were drafted and signed.
  - Other Primary Sources would be
    - Birth Certificates
    - Government records
    - Deeds
    - Court documents
    - Military records
    - Tax records
    - Census records
    - Art
    - Laws



# Primary Source

- **Published first-hand accounts**, or stories are considered primary resources.
  - Example: 2008 Presidential candidate Senator John McCain talked about his “own” experiences as a Vietnam prisoner of war. It is a primary source because he was there, experienced the events and shared it first hand.
  - The television stations found footage of Senator McCain at the time that he was released. Those videos are also considered primary sources because it was filmed when it occurred.



# Primary Source

- **Sound Recordings** and **interviews** are considered primary resources.
  - Example 1: During the Great Depression and World War II, television was not widely available. People would often sit around the radio to listen to President Roosevelt's war messages.
  - Example 2: The 73rd session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (UNGA 73) will open on 18 September 2018. Some of these meetings will be televised.





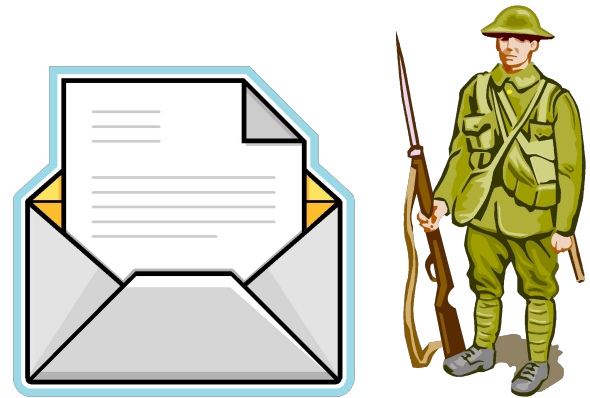
# Primary Source

- **Photographs** and **videos** can be primary sources.
  - Example 1: Photographers during World War II took photographs of battles and/or events during the war. Those were taken during actual events.
  - Example 2: The same holds true for videos or film created during an event. A film was made interviewing President Vladimir Putin.



# Primary Source

- **Letters** are considered primary documents.
  - Example: Soldiers during wars wrote to their families about war events they experienced.



# What is a Secondary Source?

- **A secondary source is something written about a primary source.**
  - Secondary sources are written "after the fact" - that is, at a later date.
- Usually the author of a secondary source will have studied the primary sources of an historical period or event and will then interpret the "evidence" found in these sources.
- You can think of secondary sources as **second-hand information.**



# Secondary Source

- Think about it like this....
  - If I tell you something, I am the primary source. If you tell someone else what I told you, you are the secondary source.
  - Secondary source materials can:
    - articles in newspapers
    - magazines
    - books
    - articles found that evaluate or criticize someone else's original research



# Secondary Source

- Almanacs, encyclopedias, history books (textbooks), etc. are all secondary sources because they were written “after” the these events occurred.



# Secondary Source

- **Biography**

- Example: A biography is when you write about another person's life. Alice Fleming wrote a biography on the life of Martin Luther King Jr. It was written about him after he died.



# Primary or Secondary Sources?

- **Newspaper and Magazine articles** can be a primary or secondary sources.
  - If the article was written at the time something happened, then it is a primary source.
  - Example: The articles written on Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009 are primary sources.
  - However, if a reporter in 2009 wrote about George Washington's inauguration using information written by someone else (1789), that would be a secondary source.



# Advantages & Disadvantages of Primary Sources

## Advantages:

- Primary sources provide a window into the past—unfiltered access to the record of artistic, social, scientific and political thought and achievement during the specific period under study, produced by people who lived during that period
- these unique, often profoundly personal, documents and objects can give a very real sense of what it was like to be alive during a long-past era.

## Disadvantages:

- Questions of creator bias, purpose, and point of view may interfere with the truth.
- Primary sources can be limited
  - Example: artifacts are found but historians cannot decipher writing on the artifact
  - Example: Evidence is only available from the winners of a battle



# Advantages & Disadvantages of Secondary Sources

## **Advantages:**

- Secondary sources can provide analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of the original information.
- Secondary sources are best for uncovering background or historical information about a topic and broadening your understanding of a topic by exposing you to others' perspectives, interpretations, and conclusions
- Allows the reader to get expert views of events and often bring together multiple primary sources relevant to the subject matter

## **Disadvantages:**

- Their reliability and validity are open to question, and often they do not provide exact information
- They do not represent first hand knowledge of a subject or event
- There are countless books, journals, magazine articles and web pages that attempt to interpret the past and finding good secondary sources can be an issue

# Citations

- Alleman, Melanie. "Elementary Lessons for Primary and Secondary Sources." *Digital Wish*. Digital Wish, n.d. Web. 19 Nov. 2014.  
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