

EVALUATING & DISTINGUISHING PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIAL

Writing in the Disciplines (WID)
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EVALUATE SOURCES WISELY



1. What are the author's credentials?
2. Is the author an authority on the subject?
3. Who published the work?
4. Is the work current?
5. How accurate is the information?
6. Is the information reliable?
7. Is research objectively presented?
8. Who is the intended audience?

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RELIABLE SOURCES

- ◆ Scholarly articles
- ◆ Peer-reviewed journals
- ◆ Works published/sponsored by a university
- ◆ Textbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, & library reference books
- ◆ News sources
- ◆ Trade publications

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UNRELIABLE SOURCES

- ◆ Blogs
- ◆ Personal Web sites
- ◆ Unpublished texts
- ◆ Wiki sites (Wikipedia, etc.)
- ◆ Movies
- ◆ Historical and Fictional Novels

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DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES

Note: Definitions may vary depending on discipline or context

- ◆ Primary sources are original, factual, and contemporary accounts written, experienced, or created during an event or time period
- ◆ Secondary sources analyze, interpret, and draw conclusions about events reported in primary sources

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PRIMARY VS. SECONDARY RESEARCH

- ◆ Primary Research
 - Firsthand observations or investigations
 - Original and new information
- ◆ Secondary Research
 - Evaluations and discussions of primary sources
 - Existing information presented from other sources

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DEFINING PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Was the author present at the time of the event?
2. Is the report an eyewitness account?
3. Is the work original? Was it written or created at the time of the event?
4. Does the information come from personal accounts, experiences, or reports?
5. Are conclusions drawn from first hand evidence?

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DEFINING SECONDARY SOURCES

1. Does the author present second-hand accounts of events?
2. Does the source interpret information offered by primary sources?
3. Does the information offer judgments, conjectures, and/or conclusions about events reported in primary sources?
4. Does someone other than the creator interpret the creative work?
5. Are theories, facts, results, or discoveries analyzed, evaluated, and/or interpreted second-hand?

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PRIMARY RESEARCH: FIRSTHAND AND ORIGINAL ACCOUNTS



- ◆ Raw data, original documents, eyewitness accounts, and authentic artifacts
 - Laboratory experiments
 - Surveys, questionnaires, personal interviews
 - Literary/historical text analysis
 - Performance, artwork, or artifact

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EXAMPLES OF PRIMARY RESEARCH SOURCES



* May be primary or secondary

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Advertisements | • Fiction |
| • Artifacts (coins, fossils, specimens from a particular time) | • Letters |
| • Autobiographies | • Memoirs |
| • Audio/Video recordings | • Meeting proceedings |
| • Cartoons | • Photographs* |
| • Legal documents (cases, certificates, wills, regulations, transcripts) | • Records and reports |
| • Diaries | • Speeches |
| • Emails | • Statistical data* |
| | • Survey research* |
| | • Works of art, architecture, literature, music |
| | • Web sites* |

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SECONDARY RESEARCH: SECONDARY ACCOUNTS DERIVED FROM OTHER SOURCES

- ◆ Interpretations, opinions, commentaries, and reports on primary source findings
- ◆ Analyses, evaluations, and syntheses of other works
- ◆ Discussions of previously established facts, ideas, and theories

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SECONDARY SOURCE EXAMPLES

* May be primary or secondary



- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Atlases | • Historical texts |
| • Bibliographies | • Journal articles* |
| • Biographies | • Magazine articles* |
| • Book/article reviews | • Manuals |
| • Databases | • Newspaper articles* |
| • Dictionaries | • Reference books |
| • Encyclopedias | • Textbooks |

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REVIEW



- ◆ Always evaluate research sources wisely
- ◆ Avoid unreliable sources
- ◆ Determine whether a source is primary or secondary
- ◆ Primary sources provide first-hand information
- ◆ Secondary sources provide second-hand information

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IMAGE SOURCES

Archaeologist: <http://www.nps.gov/fofr/parknews/on-saturday-may-3rd-2008-learn-about-archaeology-at-fort-frederica.htm>

Artifact: <http://artifactsclipart-b.blogspot.com/>

Books: http://www.clipartpal.com/clipart_pd/education/teachingsupplies2.html

Experiment: <http://www.clker.com/clipart-3264.html>

Globe: <http://www.delosgaia.nl/science.htm>

Magnifying glass: <http://www.clipartof.com/portfolio/julos/illustration/3d-blue-bob-character-using-a-magnifying-glass-version-2-57785.html>

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