

# LIBRARIES: SPACES TO FIND PRIMARY SOURCES IN THE SCIENCES VS. HUMANITIES

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## ABSTRACT

While primary sources refer to sources that contain original information, the distinction varies between subject areas and disciplines. Journal articles are considered secondary sources in the Humanities because they may discuss, critique, or analyze an author's original creative work, while they may be a primary source to a biologist. Similarly, many newspaper articles are considered primary sources within the discipline of History because they report events as they are happening, contrasting the sciences, where newspaper articles are never used as sources.

When identifying primary sources, it is important to remember that the various forms the source could take is not what matters, but whether it contains original information or creative works for that discipline. This poster explains the differences in primary and secondary sources across subject areas, focusing on contrasting the definitions within science and humanities disciplines.

## HUMANITIES

Primary sources are first-hand accounts of a topic, from people who had a direct connection with it, such as witnesses or people who were involved in the event. Many primary sources were created at the time of the event, but can also include memoirs, oral interviews, or accounts that were recorded later. They are the materials on a topic upon which later studies are based.

Secondary sources describe, discuss, interpret, comment upon, analyze, evaluate, summarize, and process primary sources. They will cover the same topic as the primary source, but add a layer of interpretation and analysis.

### PRIMARY

- Diaries, journals, letters, and speeches
- Newspapers and magazine articles (factual accounts)
- Government records:
  - census, marriage, military, court records
- Photographs, maps, postcards, posters
- Interviews with:
  - participants or witnesses (including surveys)
  - people who lived during a particular time
- Performances:
  - plays, songs
- Creative works:
  - paintings, drawings, and sculptures
  - poems, novels
- Ethnographies

### SECONDARY

- Biographies
- Histories
- Textbooks
- Encyclopedias
- Literary criticisms
- Reviews about:
  - Books
  - Art
  - Theater performances
- Newspaper articles (interpretive)
- Dissertations

## SCIENCES

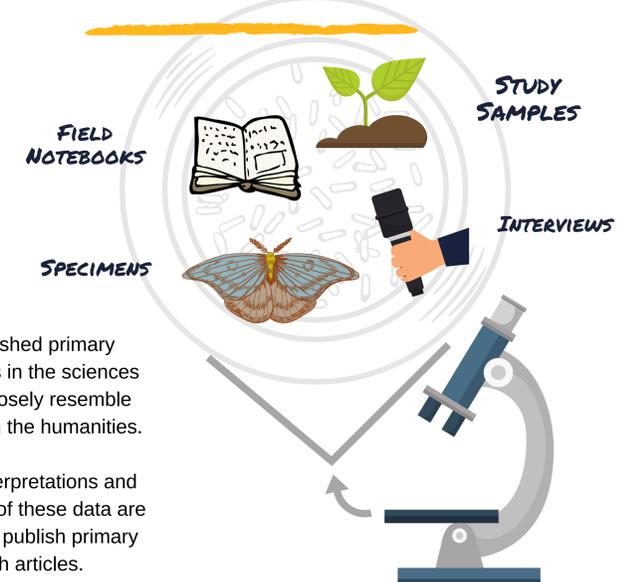
### PRIMARY



### SECONDARY



## UNPUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES



## WHAT ABOUT DATA?

**PRIMARY DATA** is data that is collected by the researcher using methods like surveys, interviews, or experiments with a specific research project in mind.

**SECONDARY DATA** is data gathered from studies, surveys, or experiments that have been run by other people or for other research.

With the growth of data repositories and funder mandates to share data associated with research, the availability of research data is at an all time high, and growing every day.



Sharing data benefits:

- individual researchers,
- research communities, and
- society

by increasing resources, improving future research, enabling replication, increasing collaboration, and reducing unneeded experiments.

Research using secondary data may still be considered primary, if the data that is used is in its raw format. If the analyzed data has already been published and is used, then the resulting publication would be considered secondary.

### REFERENCES

Carlton, M., (2019, February 22). Features of a primary article infographic (Version 1). figshare. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.7761302.v1>

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Mainous, A., & Hueston, W. (1997). Using other people's data: The ins and outs of secondary data analysis. *Family Medicine*, 29(8), 568-71.

## Identifying features of a Primary Article

Annotations for a Primary Article:

- The database may tell you.** (Points to the journal name: WILEY *Ecology and Evolution*)
- The language used in the paper.** (Points to the abstract text)
- If the author did the research, they will tell you how they did it.** (Points to the methods section)
- Even if they try to avoid saying 'we'.** (Points to the abstract text)
- Most of the references will be cited in the introduction, since that is where the background information is given.** (Points to the introduction section)

## Identifying features of a Secondary Article

Annotations for a Secondary Article:

- The title may tell you.** (Points to the title: Science of the Total Environment)
- Numerous citations throughout the paper.** (Points to the abstract text)
- A large reference list (bibliography).** (Points to the references section)
- Use this to find related primary articles.** (Points to the references section)