What is the difference between a primary and secondary source?

**Primary Source**

Primary sources, generally speaking, are original materials on a subject; however, each discipline may have a slightly different definition for primary source. Historians consider primary sources to be material written by the subject (if a person) or material that was written about a subject by someone who was alive during the time period. The types of primary sources can also vary widely depending on the discipline. The following are some examples of the different types:

- **Public Records**
  - Census Records
  - Church/Synagogue Records
  - Divorce Records
  - Education Records
  - Land Records
  - Military Records
- **Personal Papers**
  - Journals
  - Diaries
  - Correspondence
- **Organization Papers**
- **Newspaper Articles**
- **Original Research**
- **Original Works of Literature**


**Secondary Source**

Secondary sources are those in which the author gives a second-hand account of the information. For example, many books published about George Washington are secondary sources. The author may have studied original material, such as diaries, in creating an account of Washington's life, but if it is the author's account instead of the original diaries, documents, etc., then it is a secondary source.

For most research papers, secondary sources will probably suffice; however, if the professor requires the use of primary sources, this guide can be used to identify them.

**Tertiary Source**

Tertiary sources are "generalized surveys of a specific subject." They are even more removed from the original event than secondary sources. While authors of secondary source material gather their information directly from primary sources, authors of tertiary source material gather information from a variety of secondary sources. Examples of tertiary sources include textbooks, handbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. (From [http://www.kings.edu/history/sources.html](http://www.kings.edu/history/sources.html))

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Locating Primary Source Materials

Primary sources may be found through a variety of avenues, depending on the subject matter. Here are some sources for finding original material:

Original Research Articles
In some fields, a primary source is an original research article, making online article databases the best place to look for this type of material. The following databases, along with many others, are available via the Databases and E-resources page.

Examples:
- Academic Search Premier
- InfoTrac OneFile
- JSTOR
- Science Direct

Historical Sources

Library Catalog
Use a keyword search and type the following into the search field:

Keyword/s for your topic AND (diaries OR personal narratives OR sources)

Example: Washington George AND (diaries OR personal narratives OR sources)
Also try searching using your subject and the terms "archives" and "manuscripts."

American Memory from the Library of Congress
American Memory is "a gateway to rich primary source materials relating to the history and culture of the United States." According to the site information, there are more than 7 million digital items available, including print, audio, and photographs. Browse the different collections available, or perform a search for material on specific topics. This site is a valuable resource for anyone conducting historical research.

Documenting the American South
Documenting the American South is a site published by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library. It is a digital collection of primary source historical materials "on Southern history, literature and culture from the colonial period through the first decades of the 20th century." The collection includes sections such as "First Person Narratives of the American South" and "The Southern Homefront, 1861-1865." To find information, visitors to the site can choose between searching the collection and browsing by subject, author, or title.

Harper's Weekly
This is an electronic resource available via the USC Upstate Library web site. It features material from Harper's Weekly, a magazine published in the 1800s to the early 1900s that "provided detailed information and insights on political, military and social
issues and events prior to and during the Civil War and through the years of Reconstruction." The materials in the database are digitized articles, photographs, ads, etc. presented in their original format.

**The Historical New York Times**

Proquest Historical New York Times provides full-text and full-image articles for the New York Times dating back to 1851. For most dates, the collection includes digital reproductions of every page from every issue--cover to cover--in downloadable PDF files.

**The Making of America**

The Making of America, produced by the Cornell University Library, is a searchable site of digitized primary source materials from pre-Civil War to Reconstruction. It features "267 monograph volumes and over 100,000 journal articles with 19th century imprints." It is a rich source of historical information.

**National Union Catalog of Manuscripts (NUCMC)**

NUCMC is "a free-of-charge cooperative cataloging program operated by the Library of Congress." The site allows visitors to perform searches to determine the existence and location of primary source materials. For each item located, the catalog displays information about the material, including in which library it is housed.

**Spartanburg County Public Libraries - Kennedy Room**

The Kennedy Room at the Spartanburg County Public Library is a useful source for local history, particularly genealogy. The types of materials available include census records, land records, and obituary indexes. The obituary indexes may be searched by name on the Web site, but to access the full obituary, you must visit the library in person or have the information mailed to you.

**Other Sources**

**Papers First**

PapersFirst is an electronic resource that “indexes papers from every congress, exposition, workshop, symposium and meeting received at the British Library since October 1993." It encompasses a wide variety of topics such as medicine, psychology, and business, but does not contain full-text articles.

**Proceedings First**

ProceedingsFirst is an electronic resource that provides the tables of contents of papers presented at conferences worldwide. Each record contains a list of the papers presented at each conference. Like its companion, PapersFirst, ProceedingsFirst provides access to the British Library Document Supply Center's vast collection of conference proceedings. Also like PapersFirst, the material covers many subject areas, and it does not contain any full-text articles.
InfoMine

InfoMine is a database that contains links to a variety of academic resources. Additional primary source material may be located by searching InfoMine with the search phrase "primary source."

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Citing Primary and Secondary Sources:

Citing a primary source by itself is easy—cite the source in the text and on the works cited page by following the guidelines in the selected style manual. Citing a primary source that is discussed in a secondary source is not always as straightforward. Each style manual handles it differently. Some styles require documenting both the primary and secondary sources in the reference list, while others require citing only the source actually read (the secondary source).

Below are page numbers and sections in each style manual to find instructions and examples for how to cite this type of material. The most recent editions of these manuals are available at the library reference desk.

**APA:**
p. 245 and 247

**MLA:**
p. 252: Section 6.4.7 – Citing Indirect Sources

**Turabian:**
A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 6th ed.
By Kate L. Turabian
p. 198: Section 11.31

**Chicago:**
The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th ed.
p. 727 – Section 17.274