

Primary & Secondary Sources

Primary sources are the original materials or evidence to be analyzed, evaluated, contextualized, or synthesized in the research process. **Secondary sources** analyze, evaluate, contextualize, or synthesize evidence. They often give secondhand accounts based on engagement with primary sources. This chart offers distinctions by discipline:

Discipline	Example Fields	Primary Source Examples	Secondary Source Examples
Arts	Visual Arts, Performing Arts	Sketchbooks, scripts, plays, sculptures, music	Critical reviews in journal articles, publications about the authors/artists and their works
Humanities	Philosophy, History, Literature, Languages	Speeches, diaries, narratives, artifacts, interviews, short stories, original research	Reviews of books, literary criticisms, topical monographs, journal articles, annotated bibliographies, documentaries
Social Sciences	Business, Psychology, Political Science, Education, Economics	Studies, lesson plans, case reports, surveys, market research and testing, statistical data, published results of clinical trials	Publications about the significance of research or experiments, reviews of results
Natural Sciences and Applied Sciences	Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Engineering, Medicine, Agriculture, Computer Science	Published results of experiments, observations, discoveries, technical reports, models, schematic drawings, specimens, designs	Publications about the significance of research or experiments, reviews of results

***Noting that the distinction between primary and secondary sources is contextual is important.** You may not be able to tell solely based on document type. A document may be considered a primary source in one context and a secondary source in another. For example, a speech about the Declaration of Independence by a notable orator would be a secondary source for a scholar studying the philosophical origins of the document, but a primary source when studying how the Declaration's meaning has changed over time.

