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Primary sources are materials created contemporary to the time being studied. Through primary sources, researchers are able to get closer to the event or time period in question. Listed below are examples of primary sources.

- Original creations – diaries, email, letters, minutes, speeches, laboratory notes or reports, interviews and other documents in which individuals describe events they experienced.
- Creative materials – art, music, poetry, and fiction that are created in response or to describe an event.
- Autobiographies and memoirs – again, individuals describe events they experienced, but usually more time has lapsed between the event and the writing. Memory, bias, and hindsight may distort these materials.
- Government data – birth, death, marriage records, census data, and permit records provide documentation about society.
- Organizational records – minutes, memos, reports, and correspondence that documents business and agency activity.
- Audio-visual materials – photographs, film, and audio recordings which capture events at the time of occurrence.
- Published sources – newspaper, magazine and journal articles, and books written contemporary to the event in question provide insight into the thoughts and opinion of the time. These materials may be written by participants or third party observers, such as journalists. *What distinguishes primary sources from secondary sources is the recording or description of events in lieu of analysis.*
- Artifacts – architecture, furniture, clothing, jewelry, pottery, tools, appliances, toys, etc.

Secondary sources are usually one step removed from the event in question. These sources provide interpretation or analysis of either the historical event or of primary sources. Examples of secondary sources include:

- Encyclopedias and textbooks
- Research based on primary sources
- Newspaper, magazine and journal articles, and books written several years after the event or contemporary to the event by someone not directly involved in the event. *What distinguishes secondary sources from primary sources is the presence of analysis or interpretation of the events in question.*
- Literary criticism of short stories, novels, plays, or poetry.

If you have questions about primary and secondary sources or research in general,

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