



Primary and Secondary Sources

Confused about the difference between primary and secondary sources? Does your assignment require primary sources, and you are not sure how to locate such sources?

Defining primary vs. secondary sources

A **primary source** is a document created during the time period of your research subject, about your research subject. These documents are directly connected with the events or people being researched. A **secondary source** is a document created at a later time period, often much later than the time period of the event being researched, by someone who did not experience said event. These documents have no direct personal connection with the events or people being researched, but they may benefit from being able to put the event “in context” or perspective.

Below is a chart listing examples of primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources	Secondary Sources
Data and Original Research	Encyclopedias
Diaries and Journals	Chronologies
Speeches and Interviews	Biographies
Letters and Memos	Monographs (a specialized book or article)
Autobiographies and Memoirs	Most journal articles (unless written at the time of the event)
Books or articles or news stories written at the time of the event	Most published books (unless written at the time of the event)
Government Documents from that period	Abstracts of articles
Census Statistics	Paraphrased quotations
Organizational Records from that period	Dictionaries
Documentaries that rely on primary source materials	Textbooks
Photographs	Webpages
Art (from the time period)	
Maps (from the time period)	
Internet communications (including listservs and emails)	
Any of the above reprinted <i>in the original format and language</i>	

You may notice that the list of examples for primary sources is longer than for secondary. *Don't let that fool you.* While there may be more types of primary sources, secondary sources are the majority of documents you will come across in everyday life.

Where to find Primary Sources in Print?

You may wonder where and how to find primary sources. The Concordia University Texas Library offers some primary sources in print (and online) formats. To find such sources, a good way to start is by heading to the [online catalog](#) from our Voyager system. Try adding terms such as 'memoir' or 'diary' to your search query. Searching using the keyword 'autobiography' is also often helpful.

Print Primary Source Examples

Below are a few examples of print primary source materials found at the Concordia University Texas Library:

E 181 .W273 2001

Carroll, Andrew, ed. *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*. New York: Scribner, 2001. Print.

E 173 .M2

MacDonald, William, ed. *Documentary Source Book of American History 1606-1913*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921. Print.

Ref HA 202 .A385 1960

U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960. Print.

E 169.1 .P598

White, David Manning, ed. *The Great Contemporary Issues Series: Popular Culture*. New York: Arno Press, 1978. Print.

Where to find Primary Sources Online?

The Concordia University Texas Library also provides access to many digital primary resources. Some primary sources are freely available on the Internet. To view examples, visit our [Recommended Websites page](#).

CTX has its own digital archives and most of these materials are also primary sources from our institution's early years when we were primarily a boy's high school:

<http://libraryguides.concordia.edu/archivesonline>.

Other digital primary resources are available via online databases. You can find these databases by visiting the **Databases** tab on our "Jump Start" search box on our main Concordia University Texas [Library Website](#). You can search either by database title or by subject discipline. Either link is available there.

Online Primary Resource Examples

One example of the primary resources available is *The New York Times* Historical Database (1851 - 2014), available to you with a Concordia log-in [email and password] to authenticate you. You can find this link under either of the links above: Databases by Title, under "N"; Databases by Subject, under "Newspapers & Current Events." This database is a great place to find news articles written at the time of your research topic.

Below is an additional list of primary sources available on the Internet:

[Digital Collections](#) – Primary documents from the Library of Congress.

[Chronicling America](#) - The pages of a range of American newspapers from 1789-1963.

[The Portal to Texas History](#) and [Gateway to Oklahoma History](#) – Archival materials on Texas and Oklahoma (including small regional newspapers) digitized by the folks at the University of North Texas.

[George Washington Papers](#) - Largest Washington collection in the world, full-text primary sources.

[Making of America](#) - Full-text primary sources from American history.

[World History Matters](#) - Scholarly articles and primary documents on world history.

Need More Help? Just Ask!

Concordia University Texas Library

Call us at 512.313.5050 ; text us at 512.91.7550 ; email us at library@concordia.edu; chat 24/7.

We're here and want to help. **Whoosh!**