

Types of sources

Sources are usually classified into two different types, primary and secondary

Primary sources

There are different types of primary sources. The most common are diaries, letters, and newspaper articles. These are considered primary as they are “closest to origin” as they provide an account of someone’s life, correspondences, or reporting of events as they take place.

However, primary sources are found throughout scientific literature as well. Research journals are often comprised of primary sources. For example, a researcher that discovers something new and then publishes a paper on that discovery, that paper is considered to be a primary resource, as new information is distributed to the scientific community.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources are often analyses, critiques, reconstructs, summarizes, generalizes, or evaluates information already available, and does not contribute a new idea or discovery from the original information.

Secondary sources include: book reviews, reflective essays, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, textbooks, and encyclopedias.

A good way to understand the difference between primary and secondary source types is illustrated in an article by Alistair Duff in 1996:

A primary source is defined here as a source containing new information authored by the original researcher(s) and not previously published elsewhere; its paradigm is the research journal, and it enters the public domain at a comparatively early stage of the information chain. A secondary source is a source wherein another author or authors report, criticize, popularize, or otherwise reprocess primary information, as in professional journals and textbooks

Duff, Alistair (1996), "The literature search: a library-based model for information skills instruction", *Library Review* **45** (4): 14–18