Types of Sources

• primary sources

• secondary sources

Bill Komanecki, Librarian
Saint Francis College of Nursing
**PRIMARY LITERATURE**
- Original research and/or new scientific discoveries
- Immediate results of research activities
- Often includes analysis of data collected in the field or laboratory

**EXAMPLES:**
- Original research published as articles in peer-reviewed journals
- Dissertations
- Technical reports
- Conference proceedings

**SECONDARY LITERATURE**
- Summarizes and synthesizes primary literature
- Usually broader and less current than primary literature

**EXAMPLES:**
- Literature review articles
- Books

Since most information sources in the secondary literature contain extensive bibliographies, they can be useful for finding more information on a topic

**TERTIARY LITERATURE**
- Summaries or condensed versions of materials
- Usually with references to primary or secondary sources
- Good place to look up facts or get a general overview of a subject

**EXAMPLES:**
- Textbooks
- Dictionaries
- Encyclopedias
- Handbooks

Source: UC San Diego Lib Guides, https://tinyurl.com/yckwrmjx
What is a Primary Source?

• Raw or original records created as first-hand events
• Interpretation of events made after the fact by others
• Documents that are closest to the topic of investigation
• Person with a direct knowledge of a situation
• First-hand accounts of a past event

What is a Secondary Source?

• Written after an event or development has occurred
• Work that provides information about a primary source, but does not have first-hand information
• Academic works, such as articles and books, that summarize existing research on a topic

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

• Primary sources are first-hand accounts, while secondary sources are second-hand accounts

• Example - A patient writing about their own experiences with an illness is a primary source, because that person is the one describing what happened. If another author writes a book about the symptoms of an illness from the perspective of an outsider, that is the secondary source

Source: UC Santa Cruz Libraries Lib Guides, https://tinyurl.com/4uredknv
Primary and Secondary Similarities

• Both are sources of information
• Both are written by experts with verifiable information
• Both primary and secondary sources are referenced in research

Source: University of Connecticut Library Lib Guides, https://tinyurl.com/3eea4ypu
Primary and Secondary Differences

**Primary Source**
- Original document or first-hand account
- Written at the time of the event
- Based on actual occurrence of an event
- Used in research papers

**Secondary Source**
- Second-hand account of information
- Interpretation of the primary source
- Based on analysis, criticism, or evaluation of an event
- Not normally used in research papers

Source: Grammarly.com blog, https://tinyurl.com/drxndd7s
Primary and Secondary Usage

**Primary**
- Used to provide a closer look at what actually happened
- Written contemporaneously, not after the fact

**Secondary**
- Used in research as a way to add context to primary sources
- Helpful when you want to understand how other people interpret and analyze something

Source: University of California Santa Cruz Library, https://tinyurl.com/4uredknv