Is it a Primary OR secondary source of history?





A primary source is an original material created during the time under study. Primary sources can be original documents (such as letters, speeches, diaries), creative works (such as art, novels, music and film), published materials of the times (newspapers, magazines, memoirs, etc.), institutional and government documents (treaties, laws, court cases, marriage records) or relics and artefacts (such as buildings, clothing, weapons, tools etc.).

Primary sources of information can include:

- literary works
- original documents such as diaries, letters, original manuscripts
- archival material, such as official documents, minutes, etc. recorded by government agencies and organizations
- original research studies, also called empirical studies
- first-hand oral accounts/interviews/testimony

Examples of primary sources include:

- Artefacts
- Books
- Diaries
- Ephemera
- Journals
- Ledgers
- Maps

- Letters
- Manuscripts
- Newsletters
- Pamphlets
- Photographs
- Videos
- **Secondary sources put primary sources in context.** They comment, summarise, interpret or analyse information found in primary sources.

Secondary sources are usually written by individuals who did not experience firsthand the events about which they are writing.

Examples of secondary sources include:

- academic books
- biographies
- journal articles
- magazine articles

- dissertations
- theses
- essays
- encyclopedia articles

Primary or Secondary Source?

A Questionnaire

Answer the questions below about your source. If you answer, "yes" to any of the following questions, there is a **good chance the source is PRIMARY**.

- Did the author personally witness or experience the subject in question?
- Does the author know about this subject because of personal experience rather than having just read about it?
- Is this source a diary, letter, memoir, autobiography, oral history, or interview of a person with first hand experience of the subject?
- Is this source an official document or record published at the time of the event by the government, courts, or another organisation?
- Is this source a newspaper or magazine article written at the time of the event?
- Is this a creative work such as a novel, poem, art or music piece created by a firsthand witness of the subject in question?
- Is this an excerpt from a primary source, such as the constitution, or a letter written by a First World War soldier that has been imbedded in a secondary source, such as a textbook? Remember, secondary sources may include reprints of primary sources.
- Is this an artefact or relic such as jewellery, pottery, clothing, music, art, architecture, dance or weaponry that was used by witnesses of the subject in question?
- Is this a compilation of raw scientific data or statistics, such as census statistics published by the ABS (for example) that is being published without commentary or interpretation?

Adapted from http://libguides.csufresno.edu/primarysources

