

UNLV | WRITING CENTER

TYPES OF SOURCES

Understanding the type of source you have can help you to decide whether to use it in your paper and to evaluate its reliability. Information about reliable sources can be found in our **Evaluating Sources** handout.

HOW TO KNOW WHAT TYPE OF SOURCE YOU NEED

The topic and purpose of your paper will determine what kind(s) of sources you need to include. For instance, if you are writing a paper analyzing how Twitter users respond to a current event, you will need to include tweets (primary, popular sources). You may also find it useful to include some formal analyses of the same Twitter trend, which you would find in journal articles (secondary, academic sources).

However, if you are building a literature review about trends in soil analysis techniques, you may cite recent research in the field (primary, academic sources). Then you might also add background information about the relevance of soil analysis to construction workers from a news article (secondary, popular source).

FOUR PRIMARY TYPES OF SOURCES

Primary Sources

A primary source is a first-hand account of information, data, or an event. A primary source can include research articles, literary texts, autobiographies, personal correspondence, government and historical documents, and social media posts.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are accounts of events that are written after the fact. The author of a secondary source may analyze or discuss a primary source. A secondary source can include literary and scientific reviews, magazine articles, biographies, documentaries, and written interpretations of historical events.

Note: The genre of a text doesn't necessarily identify if it is a primary or secondary source. How you use it matters. For example, a biography detailing the life of Zoë Kravitz is a secondary source. However, it would function as a primary source if you are analyzing the rhetoric of biographies.

Academic/Scholarly Sources

Academic sources are written by researchers in a specific field. These sources go through a peer-review process when published and include a reference list. Academic sources are written for other researchers and experts in the field. Examples include books, academic journal articles, and published technical reports.

Popular Sources

Popular sources are written for a general audience and usually do not go through peer-review or include a reference list. Examples include newspaper and magazine articles, book reviews, blog posts, and websites.

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