

When searching for information on a topic, it is important to understand the value and possible drawbacks of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.

Criteria	Primary Sources	Secondary Sources	Tertiary Sources
Description	Direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object, person, or work.	Describe, interpret, or analyze a primary source. Discussion, commentary, or argumentative.	Assembles, analyzes, and digests primary and secondary sources. Tend to be factual.
Timing of Publication	Created during the time period involved.	Accounts written after the fact; after the event or subject matter has occurred.	Info compiled after publication of primary & secondary sources.
Pros	Not altered by misrepresentation. Purest form of data. Often provides detail missed in other sources.	Summarizes information from primary sources. Provides a variety of expert perspectives and insights.	Reflects an overall understanding. Quick introduction to a topic. May point to other authoritative sources.
Cons	May contain bias. Can be difficult to collect. Limited scope. May be limited to a small audience.	Subject to bias. May be misrepresented. Possibly based on sources that are no longer valid.	Not ideal to cite. May be more prone to include errors. Far from first-hand information.
Examples	Historical and legal documents, eyewitness accounts, diaries, speeches, statistical data, personal narratives, interviews	Scholarly articles discussing someone's original research, review of an historical document; Analysis of statistical data	Almanacs, encyclopedias, dictionaries, manuals, bibliographies, abstracts, indexes, directories

For further assistance, contact the Bryan Librarian at: library@bryanuniversity.edu or 602.838.7312.