

Evans Library

Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources

ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science (<http://lu.com/odlis/>)

defines **primary sources** as:

“in scholarship, a document or record containing firsthand information or original data on a topic, used in preparing a derivative work.”

Some examples of primary sources are:

- articles of woven clothing
- autobiographies
- data, such as census statistics
- diaries, memoirs, journals, oral histories
- dissertations or theses
- Internet communications (email, listserv, or and newsgroup)
- interviews, survey results, questionnaire feedback
- letters
- quotes from historic (or un-historic) figures
- original documents, such as birth certificates or trial transcripts
- original works of art, photographs
- patents
- poems
- proceedings of meetings, conferences, and symposia
- scientific journal articles that report experimental research results
- speeches
- technical reports

A **secondary source** is ...

...“any published or unpublished work that is one step removed from the original source.” It usually analyzes, describes, evaluates, or summarizes primary sources.

Some examples of secondary sources are:

- articles from newspapers and popular magazines
- bibliographies
- biographical works
- criticisms (art, literature) and interpretations
- dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks
- dissertations or theses
- history
- journal articles, especially in the humanities
- monographs
- review articles and literature reviews
- second-person accounts
- textbooks
- treatises

A **tertiary source** is defined as:

...”a written work, such as a chapter in a textbook or entry in a reference book, based entirely on secondary sources, rather than on original research involving primary documents.”

- almanacs and fact books
- bibliographies
- dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks, directories, manuals
- indexing and abstracting tools used to locate primary and secondary sources
- textbooks

“Whether a source is secondary or tertiary can be determined by examining the bibliography (if one is provided). Another clue is that secondary sources are almost always written by experts, but tertiary sources may be written by staff writers who have an interest in the topic but are not scholars on the subject.”

Some examples of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources from Evans Library’s collections are:

Topic	Primary Source	Secondary Source	Tertiary Source
Edwin A. Link	an original (1957) letter to Ed Link from Paul Oehser, Smithsonian Institution (link)	<u>Sea Diver: A Quest for History Under the Sea</u> by Marion Clayton Link (F2161 .L54 1964)	<i>Biography Index</i> , volume 24, gives reference to an article in volume 1 (1981-1985) of the 1998 <u>The Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives</u>
Florida Applesnail (Pomacea Paludosa)	“Effects of submergence on embryonic survival and developmental rate of the Florida applesnail, <i>Pomacea paludosa</i> : implications for egg predation and marsh management” by R. L. Turner, in <i>Florida Scientist</i> 61: 118–129 (1998)	“Annotated bibliography of the Florida Applesnail, <i>Pomacea paludosa</i> (Say) (Gastropoda: Ampullariidae), from 1824–1999” by R.L. Turner and P.M. Mikkelsen, published in <i>Nemouria</i> 48: 1–187 (REF QL430 .A57 T87 2004)	<i>Zoological Record</i> , 2006, volume 142 section 9, leads to 2 bibliographic citations for scholarly articles on the Florida Applesnail