Primary Sources: Research Tips

Find and use primary sources in your research.

Overview  Definitions  Primary Sources  Digitized Sources  Locating Sources  Sources By Subject  Evaluating Sources

Documenting Sources / Copyright  Research Tips  Using Archives

Research Tips

Start your research early.

Read actively and critically.

Write as you go.

Think about your sources and evaluate them thoroughly.

Ask your librarian for help navigating collections.

Document your sources carefully.

Maintain a working bibliography as you do your research.

Use reference and secondary sources for background information and to situate your argument within a scholarly conversation.

Recommended Reading


This book is highly recommended for its clear and reasoned methodology and guidance on developing a tangible research thesis.


William Cronon. *Learning to Do Historical Research: A Primer for Environmental Historians and Others* 
http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/index.htm

Although this website was created with environmental historians in mind, it is intended to assist, “anyone seeking to learn the craft of doing historical research.” The website follows the steps outlined in *The Craft of Research*.


Every researcher should consult this excellent volume before embarking on a project. The Guide covers encyclopedias, subject headings and the library catalog, browsing, periodical indexes, keyword searches, citation searches, related record searches, review articles, published bibliographies, hidden resources, and more.


The compact format of this book belies its great value as a tool for researchers. It is especially useful for helping readers intelligently select, evaluate, and use primary and secondary sources. Presnell uses creative examples and well reasoned prose to illustrate the questions to ask before during and after the research process. Includes recommended resources, and documentation and writing guidelines.


This is extremely useful, exceedingly portable guide demystifies the research process and guides readers through the steps.

Research Help

Citation Help

Library FAQ’s—borrowing a computer, reserve a study room, etc.

Set up a research consultation—contact your subject librarian

Library Tutorials
In research activities, a primary source refers to information collected firsthand from such sources as historical documents, literary texts, artistic works, experiments, surveys, and interviews. It is also called primary data and is very different than a secondary source. (Natalie L. Sproull, Handbook of Research Methods: A Guide for Practitioners and Students in the Social Sciences, 2nd ed. Scarecrow Press, 2002). Methods of Collecting Primary Data. "If the information you need is unavailable or hasn't yet been gathered, you'll have to gather it yourself. Other methods of gathering primary data include historical research, analysis of existing statistics, . . . and various forms of direct observation." (H. Dan O'Hair et al. Business Communication: A Framework for Success. Primary Source Research. Getting Started. Finding Primary Sources. Ready-to-use Tools, Activities and Documents at DocsTeach. National Archives Catalog. National History Day Topic Resources. Getting Started with Primary Source Research for Teachers and Students. Resources for National History Day Research The National Archives recognizes this year-long competition as an exciting way for students to study and learn about historical issues, ideas, people, and events. Introduction to Documents Introductory Research Activity for Students. Beginning Research Activities Student activities designed to help you navigate the National Archives resources and web site. Research Tips Information on doing research at the National Archives. In primary research, as the researcher conducts the research, the data collected is always specific to the needs of the researcher. As opposed to secondary research, wherein the data lacks particularity, i.e. it may or may not be as per the requirements of the researcher. Primary research is an expensive process; wherein high cost is involved in the exploration of data and facts from various sources. Unlike Secondary research, is an economical process wherein the low cost is involved in acquiring pertinent information because the data is already collected by someone else.