

## Module 2.4. Primary and Secondary Sources

The University Libraries offer a vast amount of information in many diverse disciplines. These sources of information can be described not only in terms of their subject matter, but also in terms of their distance from the topic at hand, making them either primary or secondary sources. A source is often deemed primary or secondary depending on how it is used.

Primary sources are artifacts that provide first-hand knowledge and first evidence of something. Primary sources are original materials or building blocks and can vary depending on the field of study, but they are always created at or close to the time of an event. Primary sources can take many forms: diaries, letters, speeches, interviews, newspapers, photographs, art, maps, videos, creative writing, original research, etc...

Secondary sources, on the other hand, are created after and often use or refer to primary sources. Authors of secondary sources do not have first-hand knowledge of the event(s) or topic discussed and depend on primary sources to build their research. Secondary sources can be textbooks, biographies, journal articles, books, art, videos...

When determining whether a source is primary or secondary and verifying its authenticity, as primary sources are sometimes fakes, ask yourself the following questions.

- What: What is the source's format? For example, a manuscript letter, a black and white video recording...
- Who: who created the object? Can you verify its authenticity?
- When: when was the document created?
- Where: where was the document created?
- Why: why did the source come into being?

Knowing the kind of source you are consulting and its authenticity will help you interpret its message accurately.