Primary Sources in STEM-H Fields

Primary sources are the original materials or evidence to be analyzed, evaluated, contextualized, or synthesized in the research process.

In STEM-H Fields

Primary sources in STEM-H fields are the first articles published formally describing a research project or study. They often look like secondary sources from the humanities and social sciences fields.

Classic Examples

- Articles describing the research design and findings of original studies
- Articles describing new experiments or sets of experiments
- Reports on original research or observations
- Technical reports addressing an engineering or technological assessment
- Patents, industrial designs, and blueprints

Where can I find primary sources?

General purpose databases (Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Research Library, JSTOR) and specialized or discipline-specific databases (SAGE Historical Documents, Early English Books Online, and Early American Imprints) include primary sources. They also can be found at the Library of Congress and in the Mason Libraries Special Collections Department.

Identification in Context

Sources that are secondary or tertiary in one context might be primary sources in another.

For instance, if your research design called for a content analysis of the coverage of gender roles in high school health textbooks, then these textbooks would be your primary, rather than tertiary, sources.

Likewise, if your research question was “How did 19th-century newspapers in the American Northeast address the publication of Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species?” then book reviews from that era might be one type of primary source you would want to consult, rather than a secondary source.