

Secondary Sources in the Humanities

Secondary sources analyze, evaluate, contextualize, or synthesize evidence. They often give second-hand accounts based on engagement with primary sources.

In the Humanities and Social Sciences

Secondary sources in the humanities and social sciences comment on or analyze texts, oral communications, artifacts, or archives of primary sources. In certain instances, when archives and research materials cannot be accessed by the public, secondary sources may be the only means to the underlying evidence.

Classic Examples

- Scholarly journal articles
- Scholarly books or monographs
- Interpretive newspaper or magazine articles and editorials
- Interpretive blog posts
- Reviews of books, art, music, and theater
- Non-eyewitness record of an event written by someone without a close connection to the event

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.

Where can I find secondary sources?

Multidiscipline databases (*Academic Search Complete*, *ProQuest Research Library*, *JSTOR*) and subject-specific databases include secondary sources.