

## Tertiary Sources in STEM-H Fields

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Tertiary sources condense, summarize, and synthesize many primary and secondary sources.

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### In STEM-H Fields

Tertiary sources in STEM-H fields are designed to digest or synthesize a large number of complicated or technical papers, for general audiences or for practitioners or professionals who will apply scholarly knowledge. They provide background knowledge, which can be used to generate a list of keywords or refine an early version of a research question.

### Classic Examples

- Textbooks
- Specialized encyclopedias
- Manuals
- Specialized dictionaries
- Guides or guidebooks
- Fact books

### Where can I find tertiary sources?

There are many specialized STEM-H related manuals and encyclopedias available through *AccessMedicine*, *AccessEngineering*, and *AccessScience* databases. Literature review articles, survey articles, and systematic reviews can be found in many of Mason's general and subject-specific databases.

### 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.