

Primary vs. Secondary Sources: a Questionnaire

Answer the questions below about your source. If you answer, “yes” to **any** of the following questions, there is a good chance the source is PRIMARY.

?? Did the author personally witness or experience the subject in question?

Yes ? No ?

?? Does the author know about this subject because of personal experience rather than having just read about it?

Yes ? No ?

?? Is this source a diary, letter, memoir, autobiography, oral history, or interview of a person with first hand experience of the subject?

Yes ? No ?

?? Is this source an official document or record **published at the time of the event** by the government, courts, or another organization?

Yes ? No ?

?? Is this source a newspaper or magazine article **written at the time** of the event?

Yes ? No ?

?? Is this a creative work such as a novel, poem, art or music piece **created by a firsthand witness** of the subject in question?

Yes ? No ?

?? Is this an excerpt from a primary source, such as the constitution or a letter written by a Civil War soldier that has been imbedded in a secondary source, such as a textbook. Remember, secondary sources may include reprints of primary sources.

Yes ? No ?

?? Is this an artifact or relic such as jewelry, pottery, clothing, music, art, architecture, dance or weaponry that was used by witnesses of the subject in question?

Yes ? No ?

?? Is this a compilation of raw scientific data or statistics, such as census statistics published by the U.S. Census Bureau, that is being published without commentary or interpretation?

Yes ? No ?