

Primary and Secondary Sources

Have you ever played the Telephone Game with your friends? (pause) The first person whispers something to the next person who continues to pass it on. The last person says what he or she heard. It is a fun game and the information at the end is usually very different from how it started.

There is information coming at us from so many sources. It can feel like information overload!

Anyone can create a website and put anything on it, so how do you know the information is accurate?

If information is in a book, does that mean it correct?

There are two types of information:

Primary and Secondary

Primary sources are from first-hand information. The author of a primary source writes about his or her own experiences.

Let's look at some examples of primary sources.

Speeches, interviews, and eyewitness accounts are primary sources.

Diaries, letters, and records are primary or original sources.

Other examples of primary sources include research articles, clinical reports and case studies.

Here is one more example. This is an autobiography. Benjamin Franklin wrote the book about himself. This is a primary source.

What is a secondary source? Secondary sources discuss information found in primary sources.

The author of a secondary source did not usually experience the event personally.

Let's look at some examples of secondary sources.

Textbooks, encyclopedias, and magazine articles are all secondary sources.

Book reviews and commentaries are also secondary sources.

Biographies are books written about other individuals. A book written by another author about Benjamin Franklin would be a secondary source.

Some sources can be either primary or secondary.

For example, if a newspaper article gives the facts of an event that just happened, it would be a primary source. But, a newspaper article that gives an opinion about an event would be a secondary source.

When you are learning new information, ask yourself if the source is primary or secondary.

The sky is the limit to how much you can learn!