

Geisel Library Saint Anselm College

TYPES OF INFORMATION SOURCES: Primary, Secondary, Refereed/Peer-Reviewed

It is not always easy to discern the difference between types of information sources such as primary vs. secondary or peer-reviewed articles vs. popular articles. The following explanations may serve to assist in clarifying these concepts.

Primary Sources

These are original materials which have not been filtered through interpretation, condensation or evaluation by a second party; for example journal articles, monographs, reports, patents, theses, diaries, letters, photographs, poems.

To locate primary sources in the library's online catalog, you can add one or more of the following terms to your subject or keyword search: **correspondence, diaries, interviews, personal narratives, letters, memoirs, sources**. For example: **"Vietnam war and personal narratives"**.

Go to <http://www.anselm.edu/library/primary.html> to see examples of primary sources available in the collections at the Geisel Library.

"Using Primary Sources on the Web" (<http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/RUSA/>) will supply additional information about finding primary sources on the Internet.

Secondary Sources

A secondary source is information about primary (original) information, which usually has been modified, selected, or rearranged for a specific purpose or audience. Examples include biographies, histories, monographs, review articles, textbooks and any index or bibliography used to locate primary sources. See chart below for examples.

Tertiary Sources

These consist of information, which is a distillation and collection of primary and secondary sources. Twice removed from the original, they include encyclopedias, fact books and almanacs, guides and handbooks. Some secondary sources such as indexing and abstracting tools can also be considered tertiary sources.

Examples of Primary and Secondary Sources

	Primary Source	Secondary Source
Art	Original artwork	Article critiquing the piece of art
Engineering	Patent	Derwent Patents Index
History	Explorer's diary	Book about exploration
Literature	Poem	Treatise on a particular genre of poetry
Psychology	Notes taken by a clinical psychologist	Dictionary of psychology
Science	Original journal article	Report of experiment in <u>New Scientist</u>
Theatre	Videotape of a performance	Biography of a playwright

Refereed & Peer Reviewed Articles

Refereed articles are normally assumed to be substantial works of scholarship, which have gone through a peer-reviewing process before being published in a scholarly journal for a scholarly audience. Peer reviewing means that the paper is submitted to experts in the field for assessment (much like a thesis) before being accepted for publication, or rejected. Remember that not all articles published in refereed journals are themselves refereed.

Examples of articles, which are most likely to have been peer-reviewed, include:

- Commentaries on original research
- Critical scholarly texts
- Reviews of a field of research.

Examples of articles **unlikely** to have been peer-reviewed include non-scholarly, non-research articles, brief communications, editorials, letters to the editor; book, art, concert, theatre, cinema etc reviews. Articles in newspapers and popular magazines are rarely refereed.

Identifying a Refereed Journal

There are a number of criteria for identifying refereed journals. The most useful are:

- Journal is listed in a scholarly library index by subscription such as *PsycInfo*.
- The journal is classified as refereed in a periodicals directory (ask at the Reference Desk).
- There is a statement (usually hard to find) in the journal (or on the website) that papers are refereed.
- Journal has a list of editorial board members.
- Article has a "Submitted" and "Accepted" date shown.
- Peer-Reviewed designation shows up on an *Academic Search Premier* citation.

If in doubt, check with your professor. She may accept other criteria such as: 1) a substantial article with a bibliography in a journal published by a major university press, 2) a major research society or a publisher known to produce primarily scholarly titles (e.g. Blackwell, Academic Press, Elsevier, Wiley etc).

This guide has been adapted from "Types of Information Sources" at James Cook University by Nancy "Sam" Urtz, Geisel Library, Saint Anselm College, January 2004.