

Guide to Primary and Secondary Source Material Definitions/Test for Accuracy/Examples

- A. What are the definitions of primary and secondary source?
1. A primary source is an artifact, image or document. Primary sources are created by people who actually saw or participated in an event. Primary source artifacts are those artifacts that were made during the time period studied. Primary source images (artist rendering or photography) are those that were created or photographed by a person who witnessed the event. A primary source document is a first person account of an event or that which was created during the event. (See examples below.)
 2. A secondary source may be a document, replica of an artifact, or image produced by a person who was not present at the event, but who studied background information on the document, artifact or image. Secondary sources are created to be a likeness or to provide interpretative information based upon the creator or author's interpretation. NOTE: Secondary sources sometimes have primary sources quoted within.
- B. What questions should be asked to test for accuracy of a primary source?
1. Who wrote or made it?
 2. When, where and why was it written or made? For whom was it written?
 3. Does this artifact, image or document fit into the time period?
- C. What are examples of primary and secondary sources?

Primary Sources	Secondary Sources
Books, magazines, newspaper articles written at the time of the event by a witness to the event	Interpretation of a primary source in the form of an analysis; reporting with comments
Personally written documents such as journals, diaries and letters	Documents that were not written during the time period of the event therefore not written by one who witnessed the event
Original artifacts from a particular time period such as furniture, domestic tools, weapons, navigational tools, farming implements, toys and quilts, clothing	Newspaper or magazine articles about a time period that may quote primary source material accompanied by an interpretation
Government documents such as census and immigration records	Replicas or models of an artifact such as a miniature Liberty Bell
Autobiographies, memoirs, first person accounts or interviews by one who witnessed the event	Newspaper article written about a time period, years after the event happened and by a person who was not present to witness the event
Archives of an organization such as gavel of a lodge and sign-in log of members	Biography of person who lived during a specific time period
Official letters, speeches, manuscripts	
Religious documents or records such marriage certificates, baptismal records	
Clubs and organization records and minutes	
Ships logs and manifest	
Photographs, documentary movie or video	

