Primary and Secondary Sources

*A primary source is information and/or records that provide first-hand evidence that can be used to create a picture of what happened at the time. Primary sources may be unpublished. They do not speak for themselves: you have to interpret them.*

**Primary Sources:**

* annual report
* artefacts (e.g. fossils, clothing)
* artwork
* autobiography
* buildings, monuments
* census data
* certificates (e.g. birth, death, marriage)
* contemporary books from the era
* diary
* driving licence
* headstones, cemetery records
* interviews
* journal (from the time)
* letter
* manuscript
* memoirs
* minutes of meetings
* newspaper articles (report at the time of the event, not analysis of the event much later)
* oral histories
* original artworks
* pamphlets
* personal documents such as wills
* photographs
* primary research data (such as your own surveys or observations)
* radio programs
* records of information collected by government agencies (e.g. application for a driving licence, land title, deed of transfer)
* reports of events at the time of their happening (e.g. war correspondent’s video report)
* ritual, dramatisation, performance
* shopping list
* speech (recorded notes, press releases)
* tape recording
* video recordings

Depending on what you are investigating, you can collect some primary sources yourself. For example:

* an oral history or a survey that you conduct
* an interview or a video that you record
* scientific data through experimentation
* pamphlets, an annual report, or a program guide that you collect.

*Secondary sources can be thought of as second-hand information. Secondary sources analyse and interpret primary sources.*

*Secondary sources are accounts compiled by somebody who was not present at the time of the event or occurrence. They may write about the event in some later time, or from some other place. Writers of such books usually refer to other secondary sources as well, such as other books that have been written on the same subject, which have also drawn from primary and secondary sources.*

**Secondary Sources:**

* biographies
* history books
* text books
* journal / magazine articles
* school essays and projects
* documentaries
* legislation
* newspapers (particularly interpretations of primary sources)

Usefulnesses and Limitations of Types of Sources

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Usefulnesses** | **Limitations** |
| Primary | Gives information of first hand experience/knowledge of the subject | Not always directed at you as the audience; could be omitting information or skewing the truth from bias; is only one person’s point of view/experience. |
| Secondary | Gathers information from a number of primary and secondary sources | Will reflect the author’s point of view and maybe their bias: secondary sources are an *interpretation* of primary or other secondary sources so only as strong as the author. |
| Internet article | Gives information | May be one person’s viewpoint; may need to be balanced alongside other evidence; watch accuracy, bias of author/corporation and manipulation of the reader’s view. |
| Statistics/scientific study | Gives information; may be primary data | Data could be omitted/falsified/randomly selected; author may have particular purpose. |
| Interview/survey | Gives information and a person’s viewpoint, emotions, attitudes and reveals first hand knowledge of the information being discussed. | One person’s viewpoint; may need to be balanced alongside other evidence. |
| News article | Gives information | Watch accuracy, bias of author/paper and manipulation of the reader’s view. |

The Reliability Checklist

1. Who is the **author**? What are their qualifications for saying this? Does their context effect their view?
2. What is the **date** on the source? Is it out of date or from a context that will effect it’s content?
3. What **audience** was the source constructed for? Does this effect the way it was constructed?
4. What was the **purpose** for construction? Does this effect the message?
5. Has this source any **bias**? Are there underlying ideas and assumptions or emotive language?
6. Does the source **agree** with other sources?
7. **Evaluate** how reliable this source is.