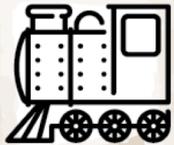


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Principles for Conducting an Oral History Interview

Module 3, Unit 4: Sourcing and Authenticating Primary Sources

What are Primary Sources?



Louis Gottschalk, Understanding History (1950)

“

“Most human affairs happen without leaving vestiges or records of any kind behind them. The past, having happened, has perished with only the occasional traces. To begin with, although the absolute number of historical writings is staggering, only a small part of what happened in the past was ever observed...and only a part of what was observed remembered by those who observed it; only a part of what was remembered was recorded; only a part of what was recorded has survived; only a part of what has survived has come to historians’ attention; only a part of what has come to their attention is credible; only a part of what is credible has been grasped; and only a part of what has been grasped can be expounded or narrated by the historian”



What are Primary Sources?

Some Definitions:

- ▣ "Sources are artifacts that have been left by the past. They exist either as relics, what we might call “remains,” or as the testimonies of witnesses of the past.”

Howell, M & Preveinier, W., From Reliable Sources: an introduction to Historical Methods

- ▣ “Primary sources record the actual words of someone who participated in or witnessed the events described or someone who got his or her information from participants.”

Benjamin, J., Student’s Guide to History

What are Primary Sources?

- “A primary source is firsthand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation. The nature and value of the source cannot be determined without reference to the topic and questions it is meant to answer. The same document or other piece of evidence may be a primary source in one investigation and secondary in another. The search for primary sources does not, therefore, automatically include or exclude any category of records or documents.”

Craver, K., Using Internet Primary Sources to Teach Critical Thinking Skills In History

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

- Primary Sources are immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic, from people who had a direct connection with it.
- Primary sources can include:
 - Texts of laws and other original documents.
 - Newspaper reports, by reporters who witnessed an event or who quote people who did.
 - Speeches, diaries, letters and interviews - what the people involved said or wrote.
 - Original research.
 - Datasets, survey data, such as census or economic statistics.
 - Photographs, video, or audio that capture an event.

Source: UMASS Boston, Healy Library



Primary vs. Secondary Sources

- Secondary Sources are one step removed from primary sources, though they often quote or otherwise use primary sources. They can cover the same topic, but add a layer of interpretation and analysis.
- Secondary sources can include:
 - Most books about a topic.
 - Analysis or interpretation of data.
 - Scholarly or other articles about a topic, especially by people not directly involved.
 - Documentaries (though they often include photos or video portions that can be considered primary sources).

Source: UMASS Boston, Healy Library



Primary vs. Secondary Sources

▣ Examples of Primary and Secondary Sources:

Primary Sources:	Secondary Sources:
1. Artwork	1. Article critiquing the piece of art
2. Diaries	2. Book about a specific subject
3. Interviews	3. Biography
4. Letters	4. Dissertation
5. Performances	5. Review of play
6. Poetry	6. Treatise on a particular genre of poetry
7. Treaties	7. Essay on a treaty
8. Artefacts	8. Analysis of an artifact
9. Photographs	9. Research papers
10. Video footage	10. Re-enactments

Source: UMASS Boston, Healy Library



Primary Sources: Written

- ▣ Books
- ▣ Journals
- ▣ Letters
- ▣ Annals
- ▣ Public records
- ▣ Census data
- ▣ Eyewitness accounts
- ▣ Scriptures
- ▣ Inscriptions
- ▣ Newspapers
- ▣ Diaries
- ▣ Chronicles
- ▣ Government documents
- ▣ Personal or institutional papers
- ▣ Genealogies
- ▣ Manuscripts
- ▣ Laws
- ▣ Scrolls
- ▣ Period literature and poetry

*From Using Internet Primary Sources to Teach Critical Thinking Skills
in History* Craver, Kathleen, D 16.2 .C79 1999, p.18



Primary Sources: Visual

- ▣ Sculpture
- ▣ Photographs
- ▣ Portraits
- ▣ Maps
- ▣ Coins
- ▣ Videotapes
- ▣ Films
- ▣ Posters
- ▣ Engravings
- ▣ Woodcuts
- ▣ Architecture
- ▣ Etchings
- ▣ Relics
- ▣ Historical paintings
- ▣ Artifacts
- ▣ Posters
- ▣ Propaganda
- ▣ Engravings

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in History Craver, Kathleen, D 16.2 .C79 1999, p.18*



Primary Sources: Oral

- Speeches
- Anecdotes
- Oral histories
- Music
- Interviews (not videotaped)
- Ballads
- Telephone conversations
- Recordings (tape & records)

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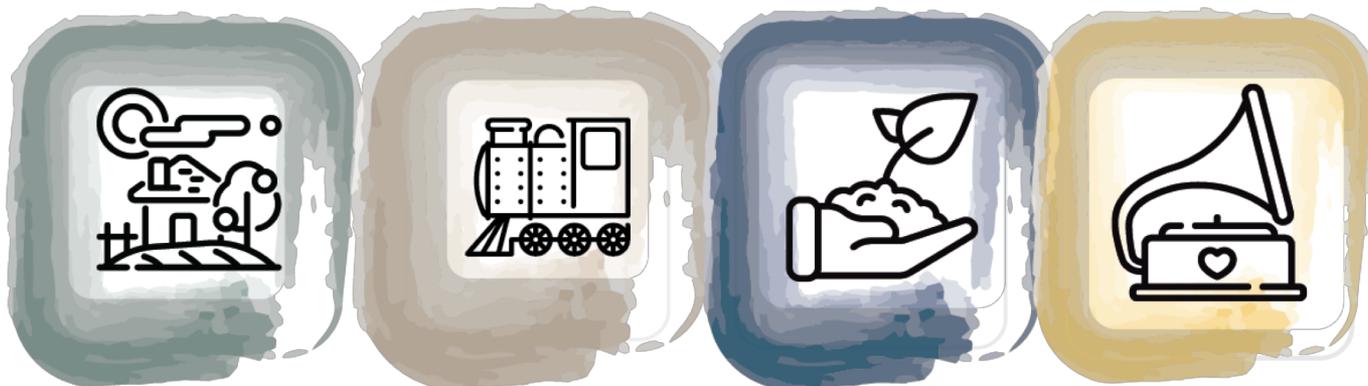
Over to you!

**Where can you go to find Primary
Sources to support your research?**

Sourcing Primary Sources

- ▣ Libraries
- ▣ Museums
- ▣ Library Databases
- ▣ Census Reports and Database
- ▣ Newspaper Archives
- ▣ Diaries
- ▣ Government Documents
- ▣ Online Archives
- ▣ Catalogued Databases

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S V E B ■
F S E A ■



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