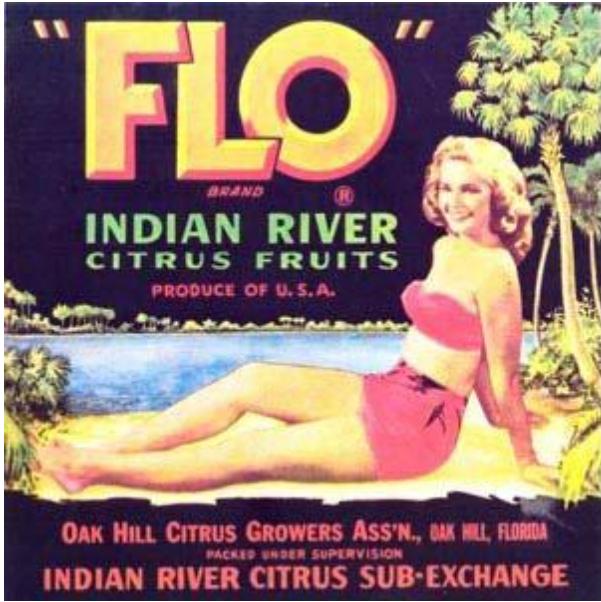


Primary and Secondary Sources

What is a primary source?



A primary source is original material that is not derived from another work; it is *first-hand* material.

A secondary source is a derived work that interprets primary sources in some way; it is *second-hand* material.

The image to the left is an example from an old advertisement from a citrus crate. Other examples of primary sources are: [letters](#), i.e. correspondence from one person to another, the [manuscript](#) of a novel (published or un-published), a [newspaper account](#) of a historical event around the time that it occurred, a [photograph](#), a [journal or diary](#), a speech or [interview](#), [artwork](#), [advertising](#), a [scientific report](#) or case study, etc.

Research using primary sources is much like assembling a puzzle, except that the pieces are not necessarily all in the same box, or even in one collection! Even when all the pieces are collected, they still need to be interpreted and synthesized into an argument. Used as building blocks, primary sources can be used to answer a wide variety of research questions.

Where can I find primary sources here at UF?

Depending on your subject area, you can also find primary sources in any of the [libraries on campus](#), in the Libraries' online [Digital Collections](#), and in the Libraries' [Special Collections Department](#), which has many primary source materials available. Registration and reference forms for Special Collections can be found [here](#). Email research requests for specific questions to [Special Collections](#) or call (352) 273-2755.

More about Primary Sources



Although many primary sources are *old*, a document does not have to be old and brittle to be a primary source. For instance, an email is a primary source, but an email forwarded from a third party is a secondary source.

A primary source in one subject may be a secondary source in another. A secondary resource like a textbook, a journal article or biographical work might contain historical facts or original research from another author that were *interpreted* by the author in a certain way, in order to further a particular argument. This is particularly true for

author in a certain way, in order to further a particular argument. This is particularly true for

materials in certain subjects, like history, anthropology and other social sciences. For the most part, secondary sources are derived works that interpret primary sources in some way.

Remember that a primary source for one discipline may not qualify as one in another subject. For example, an article in a scientific journal would be a primary source because it presents original data and research, but an article in a historical journal would not, since it is based on the conclusions or interpretation of the author.

Additional Information

Lyons, Kenneth. (2001-2005). *How to Distinguish between Primary and Secondary Sources*. Santa Cruz: University Library, University of California Santa Cruz. Retrieved 12 June 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://library.ucsc.edu/ref/howto/primarysecondary.html>

Whitson, B. and Phillips, M. (1998-2007). *Library Research Using Primary Sources*. Berkeley: Library, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved 12 June 2007 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/PrimarySources.html>