Primary Sources

Primary Sources vs. Secondary Sources

**Primary sources** provide direct or first-hand evidence about an event, object, person, or work of art.
- Usually contemporary to the events and people described
- Come in a variety of formats, not just text-based sources

**Secondary sources** lack the immediacy of a primary record.
- Produced sometime after an event happened
- Contain information that has been interpreted, analyzed, or processed
- Often based on primary sources
- Examples include:
  - history textbooks
  - interpretive journal articles
  - book reviews

Examples of Primary Source Types

Names for primary source types can be used for keyword searching.
- diaries
- works of art and literature
- speeches
- audio and video recordings
- photographs and posters
- newspaper ads and stories
- laws and legislative hearings
- plant and animal specimens
- original research studies
- songs and music

Searching for Primary Sources

Search Tips

- Choose a relevant database or digital collection to search.
- Enter relevant keywords.
- If possible, limit search by publication date and format (e.g. book review, photographs). Many databases have this option.
- Consult a librarian for recommended databases and resources.

Example Searches

Use search terms for names, events, topics, or document types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document collections</th>
<th>Speeches</th>
<th>Interviews, personal accounts, and letters</th>
<th>Commercial and advertising art</th>
<th>Film and documentaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feminism AND history AND sources</td>
<td>American AND speeches</td>
<td>novelistists AND correspondence</td>
<td>advertising AND catalogs</td>
<td>biographical films AND Mahatma Gandhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt Franklin AND archives</td>
<td>Douglass Frederick AND speeches</td>
<td>rap musicians AND interviews</td>
<td>advertising AND collectibles AND catalogs</td>
<td>documentary films AND race relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam AND foreign relations AND sources</td>
<td>statesmen AND speeches</td>
<td>working class women AND diaries</td>
<td>commercial art AND catalogs</td>
<td>documentary films AND sports</td>
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