

Primary and Secondary Sources in the Sciences

Primary Source

What is it?

- Researchers contribute new and original research, ideas, or scientific findings to their field

How do you recognize it?

- Reports original research, data or experimental findings by the authors
- Usually published as a journal article including an introduction, methods, results, and discussion sections

Why should you use it?

- Introduces new findings, theories, and research data
- Free from the interpretations of others

Examples

- Journal articles on original or experimental research
- Conference proceedings
- Technical reports
- Patents
- Experimental data
- Laboratory notes
- Theses/dissertations

Secondary Source

What is it?

- Authors summarize, analyze, or report existing work of other researchers

How do you recognize it?

- Describes, explains, interprets, summarizes, reviews, or analyzes published research by other authors
- Usually published as a journal article, book, or book chapter

Why should you use it?

- Provides an overview of current knowledge on a given research area
- Promotes deeper understanding of primary sources

Examples

- Literature review
- Review article
- Systematic review
- Scoping review
- Meta-analysis
- Textbooks

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