

# Working with Primary and Secondary Sources



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Thank you for choosing the Wylie Campus Anthony Peterson Center for Academic Assistance. The following presentation explores working with primary and secondary sources in MLA and APA writing.

# Why Include Sources?

- ▶ To indicate to an audience you are not just providing your opinion
- ▶ To show you have done your research and are informed about the topic and what others have said about it

You may disagree with some sources, and that is okay!



Most papers students write during their academic careers require they research a topic, including what others have said about that topic. To prove they have done their research and can talk about the topic in an informed way, students will often be required to include reputable sources and citations that direct the target audience to those original sources.

When conducting research, students may disagree with some sources, and that is okay! Learning what others are saying about a topic and developing reasons why they disagree helps students to better understand both the topic and their position on it.

# Quality Sources

Before you begin to search for reliable sources, ask yourself:

- ▶ **WHO** is communicating? Trustworthy? Expert?
- ▶ **WHAT** are they saying? Facts or Opinions?
- ▶ **HOW/WHY** is this material important/relevant to the topic?

Wikipedia & SparkNotes



So what do we look for in quality sources? When including sources, consider three main aspects: First, **WHO** is communicating? Why should we listen to this source and not another? Is the speaker an expert in the field about which they are writing? Next, **WHAT** is the source saying? Does it include facts that can be proved through reasons and evidence, or just opinions? Could its ideas be incomplete, outdated, or biased? Finally, **HOW and WHY** is it important or relevant to the chosen topic? Students choose sources for a reason. Does the source strengthen what you have to say? How and why?

Using some sources, such as Wikipedia or Sparknotes, is not recommended, since these sources can easily be changed to include incomplete, misleading, or false information.

Writers of research papers depend mainly on two types of sources:



**PRIMARY  
SOURCE**



Secondary  
Source

There are two main types of sources you might use in your research: primary sources, and secondary sources. Each come in a variety of forms. Let's take a closer look at the differences between these sources, and what some examples might include.

# What is a primary source?

**A primary source includes all material still in its original form. For example, bills, speeches, diaries, letters, interviews, records, manuscripts, and autobiographies.**

A **primary** source must first be imagined and then created **before** others can talk about and evaluate it.



So what is a primary source? **A primary source includes all material still in its original form. For example, bills, speeches, diaries, letters, interviews, records, manuscripts, and autobiographies.**

The word “primary” tells us that this information is original thought. A **primary** source must first be created **before** we can talk or write about it.

# Primary Source Examples



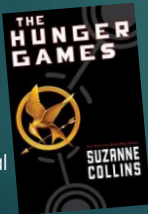
Historical documents



Diaries



Photographs



Original texts



Speeches



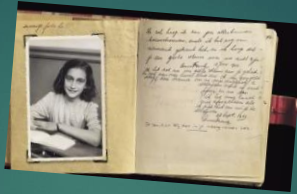
Data

Examples of primary sources may include historical documents, diaries, photographs, original texts, speeches, or data.

# Primary Source Examples



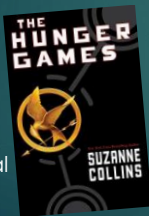
Historical documents



Diaries



Photographs



Original texts



Speeches



Data

Er, that is, statistical data.

# What is a secondary source?

Meanwhile, secondary sources typically borrow material from primary sources as support for claims or to add further to a discussion already in progress. A written study of Darwin's theories that uses quotes from Darwin's original writings would be considered a secondary source.

Said simply, a **secondary** source examines, discusses, and/or evaluates a primary source. Without primary sources, secondary sources wouldn't exist.



Meanwhile, secondary sources typically borrow material from primary sources as support. A study of Darwin's theories that uses quotes from Darwin's original writings would be considered a secondary source because that study references an older primary source, Darwin's theories.

Said simply, a **secondary** source talks about and/or makes use of the primary source as support for claims and arguments. Without primary sources, secondary sources wouldn't exist.



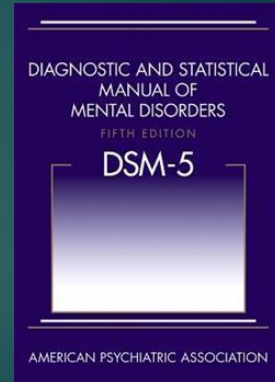
# Secondary Source Examples



Textbooks



Journal articles

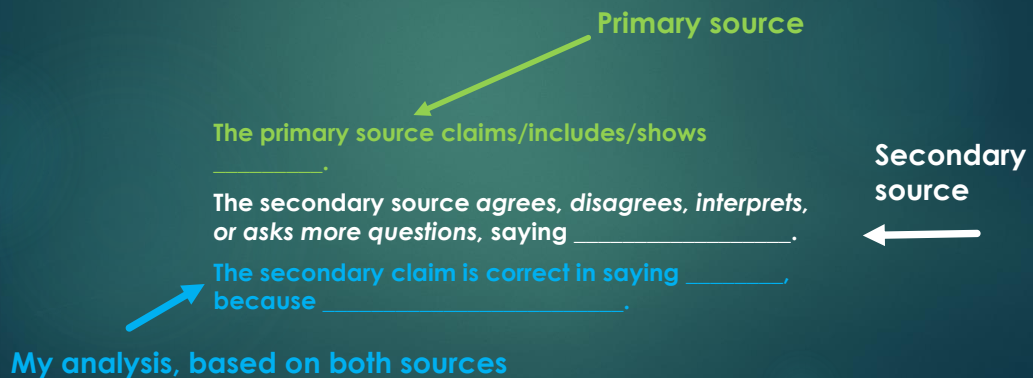


Reference books



Examples of secondary sources may include textbooks, journal articles, or reference books. Secondary sources make use of primary sources in research to clarify, to support, to show faults or weaknesses in an argument or study. Secondary sources may also indicate where primary sources are weak or not fully developed. Primary sources are frequently included in research papers (secondary sources) to support claims a writer makes about a subject. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is a primary source; an article that delves into totalitarian governments using examples from the novel would be considered a secondary source. Also, if a researcher includes material from that article, the researcher's written information is also considered a secondary source.

# How to format sources according to the Modern Language Association (MLA)



A simple way to think about sources would be to start by providing a little background information about the primary source, its subject or argument, as shown in green above. Next, follow with any secondary sources, shown in white. Finally, in blue, offer the paper's main argument. Following is a more detailed example.

## Using Both Sources: MLA

Primary source

Secondary source

Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* does not provide clear physical descriptions of the size and shape of its animal characters, focusing instead on sensory pleasures to connect reader and narrative. Critic Cynthia Marshall explores Grahame's choices of representation and proposes that physical ambiguity creates fluidity among the characters' body sizes and abilities. In largely ignoring physical description, Grahame instead focuses on "pleasures without bodies," emphasizing the animals' love for food, home, and nature with which audiences can connect (60). These unclear physical descriptions, however, create another problem because...

The writer's analysis, based on both sources

Here is an example written for an English class, using MLA style.

Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* does not provide clear physical descriptions of the size and shape of its animal characters, focusing instead on sensory pleasures to connect reader and narrative. Cynthia Marshall explores Grahame's choices of representation, and proposes that physical ambiguity creates fluidity amongst the characters' body sizes and abilities. In largely ignoring physical description, Grahame instead focuses on "pleasures without bodies," emphasizing the animals' love for food, home, and nature with which audiences can connect (60). These unclear physical descriptions, however, create other problems because...

The three separate examples above (two sources and a claim) are presented in unique colors so students can easily see how the three components compliment one another and support the main idea. Green introduces the primary source: *The Wind in the Willows*; white introduces the secondary source, Cynthia Marshall's "Bodies and Pleasures in The Wind in the Willows" about *The Wind in the Willows*; and finally, the blue begins the writer's analysis of both Grahame and Marshall's ideas, indicating

how proper research can lead to one's own critical thinking on a subject.

# MLA Rules: Using Both Sources

- ▶ Include quotation marks around words, phrases, or sentences copied or paraphrased from the original source.
- ▶ End sentences with in-text citations, in parentheses, that include the author's name and the page number (if available).
- ▶ End sentences with a period after the (in-text citation).

**Example: One author claims that Grahame focuses on “pleasures without bodies,” emphasizing the animals’ love for food, home, and nature with which audiences can connect (Marshall 60).**



When working with quoted or paraphrased material, writers must include in-text citations, as described here. These citations identify the last name of a source's original author and, if available, the page number from which the quote was copied. Electronic sources, such as webpages or ebooks, may not include page numbers, in which case the citation would include only the author's last name, or a signal phrase that helps the reader identify the original source.

# Paraphrasing Sources

## Quoted:

Critic Cynthia Marshall claims that Grahame focuses on "pleasures without bodies," emphasizing the animals' love for food, home, and nature with which audiences can connect (60).

## Paraphrased:

Critic Cynthia Marshall claims that Grahame emphasizes the animals' love for other necessities of life and he uses their connections to natural elements to characterize them rather than providing clear physical descriptions (60).



Consider these two examples. The first provides a direct quote, shown in yellow from Marshall's essay "Bodies and Pleasures in The Wind in the Willows", a secondary source. The second example does not use a direct quote, but does rely on Marshall's ideas. Writers must include in-text citations in both examples to indicate the use of someone else's ideas, even when only paraphrasing and not directly quoting from the original source. Since the writer here paraphrases an idea from the source, the page number is still included within the citation. Notice also that since the *sentence* provides the author's name, that name may be omitted from the in-text citation.

# How to format sources according to the American Psychological Association (APA)

- ▶ When writing, APA requires that researchers focus more on year of publication, i.e. how new/recent a paper may be.
- ▶ Unlike with MLA, APA standards require that writers include the publication year in parentheses within a sentence when introducing authors identified with a particular source.

**Example: Stark and Banner (2015) propose that robots may replace some human jobs.**



Writing in APA style is quite similar to MLA; however, many scientific fields, such as medicine, place greater importance than the humanities on how recently a source was published because reading and quoting up-to-date material is critical in advancing scientific research. Science and the social sciences are the main fields that use APA style. For this reason, APA papers include the publication year the first time a source is introduced in the body of the paper to indicate how new the study or material is for readers interested in the most relevant information about a subject.

Let's take a look at a more in-depth example.

## Using Primary and Secondary Sources: APA

The measles virus is highly contagious and transmits [via] the mucous membrane through airborne transmission (CDC, 2019). The CDC reports up to 90% of vulnerable individuals who come into contact with an infectious person will develop measles. Measles is not a zoonotic disease, in that it is only transferable from human to human and cannot be transferred between different species (Parker, 2016). Prior to the development of the measles vaccination in 1963, there was an average of 549,000 cases annually reported across the United States alone and estimated between three to four million cases worldwide per year (CDC, 2019). To further this research, more needs to be conducted in the following areas...

Primary source

Secondary source

The writer's analysis, based on both sources

This example uses APA citations, and is therefore structured a little differently than MLA. The sample explains a disease and evaluates the science surrounding a search for a cure.....

In this example, the author still uses primary sources (in green), though now the sources come from a database—the Centers for Disease Control website—rather than a book. The reason someone writing in the social sciences might prefer a database is because many, particularly government databases are maintained daily and can be assumed to be up-to-date, a necessity when writing about scientific studies. Next, the author follows with a secondary source (in white) that adds more information to compliment the primary source. Notice that this example indicates that primary and secondary sources may be presented in the most effective order as determined by the writer or repeated. So, as with MLA, source order is not strictly primary—secondary—claim.



## Using Both Sources: APA

- ▶ Include quotation marks around words, phrases, or sentences copied or paraphrased from the original source.
- ▶ End sentences with in-text citations in parentheses that include the author's name, the publication year separated by a comma, and the page number (p.) if available.
- ▶ End sentences with a period after the (citation).

**Example:** The authors further explain that some robots may malfunction (Stark and Banner, 2015, p. 73).



Because research in the sciences requires the most current information, APA citations require more specific details than MLA citations. Always include the author's last name, followed by the year, and finally the page number. Unlike MLA, APA separates different elements with commas, and includes p. before the page number, as shown in yellow in this example.

## APA Style Adds Structure to Scientific Writing.



Scientific papers might be *structured* differently, but in essence they are similar to papers in the humanities. Students use a primary source (such as a data set), secondary sources (such as academic journals), and then develop a hypothesis, which is another way of saying an argument or opinion, that tries to interpret the data and present reasons to explain the outcomes. By its nature, science writing must be more precise in its descriptions and citations than writing in the humanities.

# Summing it up...

## Primary Sources

- ▶ The origin of an idea or concept.
- ▶ Used to support claims with reasons and evidence.
- ▶ Might be in book form, data, a speech, a legal document, or any other format containing innovative information.

## Secondary Sources

- ▶ Add more information about the primary source and/or topic.
- ▶ Support claims with reasons and evidence.
- ▶ Might be a journal article, a reference or text book.



Today we looked at primary and secondary sources, what types of resources they might include, and a few ways we might use them to write about our ideas. Keep in mind that students should always collect their primary and secondary sources and study them, making notes and annotations to use later when composing a first draft. Becoming a “mini-expert” on one’s subject before attempting to write about it is a key to academic success when conducting research for an assigned writing. The Collin College Libraries conduct what is called R.A.P.S appointments to help students sort through sources before they begin to write and helps them to identify trustworthy information. The Wylie library’s contact information to set up a R.A.P.S appointment with a reference librarian is [wyliereference@collin.edu](mailto:wyliereference@collin.edu).

## Summing it up...

### MLA

- ▶ Used primarily for the humanities.
- ▶ Citations include author and page number (Ginsberg 9).

### APA

Used primarily for the sciences and social sciences.  
Citations include author, year, and page number separated by commas (Ginsberg, 2020, p. 9).

## Works Cited

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Parker, N., Schneegurt, M., Thi Tu, A., Forster, B. M., Lister, P., and OpenStax. (2016).  
*Microbiology*. OpenStax.

To set up a R.A.P.S. appointment to find trustworthy sources for research papers with a reference librarian at Wylie, write to [wyliereference@collin.edu](mailto:wyliereference@collin.edu)

To set up a Writing Center appointment to discuss your draft, go to [wylie.wconline.com](https://wylie.wconline.com) and register for our online appointment system or simply come to Wylie Library room 217 to schedule an appointment with an expert today.



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