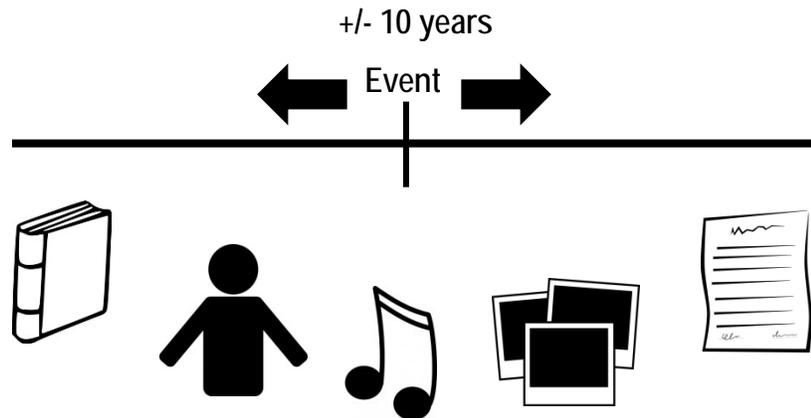


All About Primary Sources



Definition: anything from the time of the event or through first-hand experience

Examples: diaries, photographs, books published, newspapers, laws/government documents

What they are not: textbooks, the History Channel, a recreation of an event, or most websites

How to find them:

- ❑ Do a quick Wikipedia search.
 - Seriously—*only* use it to familiarize yourself with what your event is about.
 - NEVER CITE Wikipedia, only use it as an introduction.
- ❑ Look for a good book!
 - Explore where other authors get their information.
 - Look in the back at their citations or the bottom in the footnotes.
- ❑ Is there anyone still alive from that time?
 - There is no one left to interview on the Ancient Greeks, but what about the Vietnam War or how Hip Hop began?
 - Listen to interviews or interview someone yourself.
- ❑ How would people back then communicate?
 - Explore news reports, letters, pictures/drawings, music, or speeches.
 - Search newspaper databases, Library of Congress, and others.

Why are primary sources important?

You need primary sources to fully learn about the event. These sources also help you analyze secondary sources or other opinions. You are the historian! Gather as many of the facts as you can to develop your *own* interpretation of the topic/event. Once you do, you can add your own voice.

What if there is a primary source in a secondary source?

That can be a great find, but frustrating to cite. What you do is find the original document used in the secondary source (sometimes authors edit or cut out parts of the original). Cite the secondary source separate from the primary source. Explain this find in your annotations!

I found two primary sources that disagree, what do I do?

Have no fear! You have different points of view; explore why there is this disagreement. As a historian, it is your job to investigate these different histories and share your findings.

The primary source I need is in another city/state/country, what do I do?

Still cite it! You don't have to physically touch the source to cite it, but you do have to be able to read/view it somehow. For example, if your topic is on the Founding Fathers, definitely cite the Declaration of Independence even though you cannot touch it. Go to trusted websites to view these documents such as: loc.gov or wisconsinhistory.org

I can't visit the Wisconsin Historical Society, how can I still look at the archives?

Visit an Area Research Center (ARC) near you! ARCs are able to receive materials from the Wisconsin Historical Society, but be sure to plan ahead. Depending on location and time of year, materials may take a couple weeks-months to reach you. Search online here:

<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?page=home;c=wiarchives;cc=wiarchives>

I'm stuck, how do I take my research to the next level?

Visit a local or college library! There are more resources than school libraries such as microfilm, a variety of books, and search tools. Or visit a Historical Society to see if there are Wisconsin connections—you never know what you'll find or who you'll talk to!

How to cite them?

Separate your bibliography into primary and secondary sources. Keep in mind the purpose of an annotated bibliography is for someone to find your sources later if they wish.

Examples from National Qualifiers:

Citation	Rosenberg, Justus. "Oral History Interview with Justus Rosenberg." Interview. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed April 1, 2018. https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn513494 .
Annotation	I initially consulted this interview to get context about Justus Rosenberg in preparation for my interview with him the following day. However, as I continued listening to his story, I learned a significant amount of information of how Fry's team at the CAS came to be, how they met each, and some the relationship dynamics between members of the rescue operation.
Citation	"General Tung by Means of Strategy Badly Defeated the Western Troops." Digital image. National Archives. Accessed January 4, 2018.
Annotation	As many historians argue that the Boxers were uneducated therefore causing them to be poor soldiers, David Silbey told me that if you look at the strategy used by Qing Soldiers and Boxers in several battles, it may not be true that the Boxers were so uneducated. In this drawing, General Tung is shown to be badly defeating the Western Troops. This perspective changed my belief about the boxers, who are often portrayed as very weak and uneducated in secondary sources.