Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources

When you are conducting research for class assignments, your instructor may request primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.

**Primary Sources**
Primary sources are original materials containing firsthand information or original data on which other research is based.

**Primary Sources Include:**
- Original manuscripts, autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, letters, journals, photographs, drawings, posters, news film footage, sheet music, songs, interviews, government documents, public records, eyewitness accounts, newspaper clippings, internet communications on email, listservs, speeches, survey research, original documents i.e. birth certificate, will, marriage license, trial transcript, pictorial works, poetry, pamphlets, cartoons, dissertations or theses, minutes.

**Secondary Sources**
Secondary sources is information about primary sources, usually a compilation or synthesis of various ideas and data describing, summarizing, analyzing, evaluating, derived from, or based on primary source materials.

**Secondary Sources Include:**
- Bibliographies, biographical works (only if it's describing a biography), commentaries, criticisms, dictionaries, encyclopedias, histories, journal articles (depending on discipline can be primary), magazines, newspaper articles, monographs.

**Tertiary Sources**
Tertiary sources consist of information which is a collection of primary and secondary sources.

**Tertiary Sources Include:**
- Almanacs, bibliographies, chronologies, dictionaries and encyclopedias, directories, fact books, guidebooks, indexes, manuals, textbooks, abstracts, registers, statistics, tables.

The definition of a primary source may vary depending upon the discipline or context.

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