

Northeast Lakeview College LRC

Resource Guide – Primary Sources

www.alamo.edu/nlc/library

What are Primary Sources?

Primary sources are firsthand, original accounts, created at or around the time an event actually occurred. Examples include autobiographies, original research, letters, memoirs, diaries, poems, novels, etc.

What are Secondary Sources?

Secondary sources offer interpretation, analysis, and/or commentary after an event occurred. The information is usually compiled from or based on primary sources or other secondary sources. Examples include literary criticism, biographies, reviews, analyses, etc.

How do I find Primary Sources?

Primary sources can be found in many different places and formats, so searching for them is not always straightforward. They may or may not be actually labeled as primary sources. Primary sources can be found in all of the following places:

- [Alamo Library Online Catalog](#)
- [Electronic Books](#)
- [Electronic Databases](#)
- Websites

How do I find Primary Sources in the Alamo Library Online Catalog?

Visit the ACCD Online Catalog at: <http://library.alamo.edu/search/X>

Option 1: Search for the keywords of your topic plus words like memoir, diary, letters, autobiography, etc.

Example:

You may have to look at the actual item to verify that it does contain primary source material.

Option 2: Search with the keywords of your topic only, then examine the actual item itself to see if it contains any primary source material. Sometimes the catalog record might not mention anything about primary source material, however, if you look at the actual resource, you might find appropriate content, such as an excerpt from a speech or diary.

Government documents can sometimes be good sources of primary material. A variety of online government documents are available via the ACCD Online Catalog. To locate them, just limit your search to **San Antonio College** and search with the keywords of your topic. Look for results with a Location of **SAC Documents Internet**; many of these will be government documents. Click on the title of the document, then click on the link under “Available online:” to open the document. Again, be sure to carefully examine the actual resource to determine if it contains primary source material.

Option 3: Search for an item which shows original research by someone in that particular profession or discipline. A book written by a particular person is often considered a primary source for that person, if he/she actually came up with the ideas or discovered the findings.

Example: (In this example, the two results found contain the original writings of Sigmund Freud.)

Libraries of the Alamo Community Colleges

Northeast Lakeview College

Keyword Title Author Subject Call #

Advanced Keyword Search

Please fill in the form, select limits, and click Submit.

Submit Clear Form

Northeast Lakeview College

Author: freud, sigmund And

Any Field: And

Any Field: And

Any Field:

How do I find Primary Sources in Electronic Books?

E-books are included in the ACCD Online Catalog, so if you’ve already searched the catalog as mentioned above, you’ve already searched the Electronic Books content as well! However, if you’re having trouble locating materials, you can try searching the entire **fulltext** of the E-book content by clicking on the [Electronic Books](#) link from the library home page.

Advanced Search

Search Terms

Subject And

Full-Text And

Keyword And

Publisher

English

Try searching for the keywords of your topic (as Keyword or Subject) plus words like diary, speech, excerpt, etc. Not all excerpts will be from primary sources; examine the actual e-book content closely to determine this.

How do I find Primary Sources in Electronic Databases?

Visit the NLC Library Electronic Databases page at:

http://www.alamo.edu/nlc/library/t_Electronic%20Databases.htm

In some databases, you can limit your search to a particular document or publication type, such as interview, letter, speech, or even “primary source document”. Remember that **original research** is usually considered to be a primary source as well, and is common in the scientific disciplines. Databases with primary sources include [Academic Search Complete](#), [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#), [JSTOR](#), [eLibrary Curriculum](#), [History Resource Center](#), and others.

Example #1: Academic Search Complete

On the Advanced Search screen (default), this database provides a limiter for **Publication Type** = Primary Source Document, as well as **Document Type** = Interview, Letter, or Speech. Enter your search term(s) at the top and select these limiters as appropriate. Note: Academic Search Complete contains the fulltext of *Vital Speeches of the Day* from 1934 – present.

New Search | Publications | Subject Terms | Cited References | More ▾ | Sign In to

Searching: **Academic Search Complete** | Choose Databases »

in

and in

and in [Add Row](#)

[Basic Search](#) | [Advanced Search](#) | [Visual Search](#) | [Search History/Alerts](#) | [Preferences](#) »

Publication Type

- Book
- Primary Source Document**
- Educational Report
- Health Report

Document Type

- Erratum
- Interview**
- Letter
- Literary Criticism

Example #2: [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#)

In this database, both the Basic and Advanced Search screens provide the option to limit your search by **content type** = Primary Sources. Examples of primary sources in Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center include government reports, excerpts from official documents, and court testimonies.

Basic Search ?

Find: "animal rights" **Search**

Search for words in: Subject Keyword Entire document

Limit the results:

to document with images

by content level

None selected
Basic
Intermediate
Advanced

by content type

<input type="checkbox"/> Academic Journals	<input type="checkbox"/> Magazines
<input type="checkbox"/> Multimedia	<input type="checkbox"/> News
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Primary Sources	<input type="checkbox"/> Reference
<input type="checkbox"/> Statistics	<input type="checkbox"/> Viewpoints
<input type="checkbox"/> Websites	

What websites can I use to find Primary Sources?

Many primary sources are available online, but be sure to evaluate the quality of any online source before using it. Websites which indicate they contain “**digital library collections**” often include primary sources. Government websites, such as GPO Access (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>) and other sites ending in **.gov** can also be good sources for primary documents.

Other helpful websites include:

- American Rhetoric - <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/>
- Library of Congress American Memory - <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>
- RUSA – Using Primary Sources on the Web - <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/usingprimarysources/index.cfm>
- Berkeley’s Primary Sources on the Web - <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/primarysourcesontheweb.html>
- The National Archives Educators & Students Primary Documents - <http://www.archives.gov/education/>
- Library of American Civilization Titles Online - <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1849.xml>