What are Secondary Sources?

Secondary sources are accounts of historical events written after the event took place and by individuals who did not personally witness them.

They are based on primary sources and backed up by other secondary sources.

Often, the term “secondary source” is used interchangeably with the terms “academic source” or “scholarly source.”

You should usually interpret instructions that ask for secondary sources as asking you for a peer reviewed journal article or book.

Where do I find Secondary Sources?

Secondary sources are the product of the analyses of primary sources, with context provided by secondary sources.

They are generally written by professional historians or students to build on the work of other historians.

What separates a Secondary Source from a

Primary Source?

Secondary sources and memoirs and oral history interviews are all created after a historical event happened.

The important difference is that secondary sources are not first-hand accounts, like memoirs or oral history interviews.

What about textbooks and encyclopedias? Are they Secondary Sources?

Textbooks, encyclopedias and other reference works, and most documentaries and educational websites are not secondary sources because they are based only on secondary sources. They are called tertiary sources.

Although they provide some good general information that can help students begin the research process, they are generally not acceptable for use in university-level work.