[All Styles] How do I distinguish between a primary source, a secondary source and a tertiary source?

Primary sources are the surviving original records of a period, eyewitness accounts and first-published documentation of new information. Examples of primary sources include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles about one's original research or ideas.
- Autobiographies, letters, diaries, and journals describing one's personal experience, activities, and the people, places and events at the time.
- Oral histories, interviews and ethnographic research records.
- Sound and video recordings of an event or people.
- Published material written at the time, such as newspapers, books and articles.
- Government or court records including birth and death certificates, deeds, trial transcripts, census records, patents, treaties and other documents.
- Business records such as reports, surveys and minutes of meetings and conferences that document contemporaneous activities, people and events.
- Art such as architecture, sculpture, photographs, drawings, maps, posters and cartoons.
- Written creations such as literary works, sacred texts and musical scores.
- Artifacts such as tools, weapons, crafts, furniture, buildings, roads, machines or other objects made by humans living at the time.

Secondary sources interpret the past and analyze primary sources. Examples of secondary sources include:

- Journal articles that review the original work of others.
- Biographies and histories written by people who did not experience events or the time first-hand.
- Commentaries and criticism of primary sources.
- Historical studies, literature reviews and textbooks.
- Magazine articles and Web pages which describe events or ideas a substantial time after they have occurred.

Tertiary sources are distillations and indexes of primary and secondary sources. Examples of tertiary sources include:

- Encyclopedias
- Textbooks
- Dictionaries
- Handbooks
- Almanacs
- Digests and abstracts
- Indexes and bibliographies