

KNOWING YOUR SOURCES:

Tips for Distinguishing Different Types of Research Sources



PRIMARY vs. SECONDARY SOURCES

- ❖ **Primary Sources** are *original, first-hand information*. Examples include: original research data or published findings; original published works or manuscripts; transcripts of public proceedings (speeches, trials, minutes of meetings, etc.); diaries and correspondence; original audio recordings or visual footage of an event.
- ❖ **Secondary Sources** are works that *summarize, report on, analyze, evaluate or interpret* primary sources. Examples include: reviews and criticism; editorials; articles or reports that discuss an event, topic or research. Most magazine and journal articles are secondary sources, in that they report on or analyze a primary source.

TYPES OF INFORMATION SOURCES

- ❖ **Encyclopedias** - Encyclopedias are reference works published in alphabetical volumes that contain articles of general information on select subjects. They may be general encyclopedias (such as *Encyclopaedia Britannica*), or specialized (such as the *Encyclopedia of Psychology*).
- ❖ **Books** - Books give broad, thorough information on a selected subject. Books may be written for a general audience, or for specialists in a given field. Depending on the subject, the date a book was published may be important as some information can become outdated (such as with scientific theories and practices).
- ❖ **Serials** - A serial is a work issued in multiple parts, usually without a definite end-of-publication date. This includes **periodicals** (magazines and journals), as well as yearbooks and almanacs, indexes, etc. (See below: "*What are serials and periodicals?*").
- ❖ **Electronic Resources** - Including online library catalogs, databases of magazine and journal articles, electronic texts, e-books and Web sites on the World Wide Web. Remember that when doing research on the World Wide Web, it is extremely important to check *sources, citations, references and dates*, as there is no guarantee that information found on the Web is current, valid or authentic.

WHAT ARE SERIALS AND PERIODICALS?

- ❖ **Serials** are publications that are issued in successive or multiple parts, usually as installments without a definite end-of-publication date. Magazines and journals are serials, but so are yearbooks and almanacs, indexes, annual reports and conference proceedings, etc.
- ❖ **Periodicals** is a general term used to describe certain serials such as magazines, scholarly journals and trade journals that are published at regular intervals, such as weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.

TYPES OF PERIODICALS

Magazine - A commercial publication, intended for a broad or popular audience.

- ❖ Articles are usually written by a reporter or member of the editorial staff.
- ❖ The language of the articles is geared toward a general audience, with no assumption of specialized knowledge or subject expertise.
- ❖ Articles are often heavily illustrated, and rarely contain footnotes or a bibliography. There is no peer review process.
- ❖ Examples include: *Newsweek*, *Psychology Today*, and *Harpers*.

Scholarly Journal - A specialized publication for a specific academic discipline.

- ❖ Includes academic, scientific, refereed and peer reviewed journals.
- ❖ Articles are written by specialists in the field, and must undergo a peer review process before being published.
- ❖ Articles report on original research or experimentation, and include specialized jargon and terminology.
- ❖ Authors always cite sources with footnotes, endnotes and/or a bibliography.
- ❖ Examples include: *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *Exceptional Children*, and *Journal of Accountancy*.

Trade, Subject and Professional Journals - These publications fall somewhere between general or popular magazines and scholarly journals.

- ❖ Articles report on areas of interest to a specific field or industry, but are focused more on product and business information and reporting industry news.
- ❖ The articles are often written by specialists, and may include specialized jargon and terminology
- ❖ Examples include: *Teaching K-8*, *Police Chief*, and *Service & Contracting*.

* Document courtesy of Prairie State College Library

* Young, rosemary. Working with Faculty to Design Undergraduate Information Literacy Programs. New York: Neal-Schuman, 1999.

* Getting Help Page. Nova Southeastern University. April 1, 2003. <http://www.nova.edu/library/main/tutorials.html>