

3ed Stage  
Methods of Research  
**Third Stage**  
**Third Lecture**

### **Identifying Sources**

Basically, the research process we recommend is this: Do some research about the books and articles you need. Then find those books, evaluate them, and take notes on the ones that do, in fact, have good material. Also go to the various bibliographies and indexes for magazines and newspapers to identify the articles you think might be helpful. Then find, evaluate, and take notes on those articles in magazines and newspapers.

And all the while, refine your thesis as you develop and expand an outline for your paper. For convenience, we've divided the research process into two parts, even though you'll work back and forth between them.

### **Gathering Support**

When you've identified possible sources for your paper, compiled bibliography cards, and actually found the items in the library, you're ready to gather support. **First**, you need to know how to evaluate your source; that is, does it actually cover your topic and is it reliable? **Second**, you need to know how to take notes efficiently so that you will have ready access to your material when you begin writing your paper. **Finally**, you need to know how to develop and refine a working outline in order that your research will always be properly directed.

### **Evaluating Your Sources**

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Some sources can be more valuable to you than others. For example, you should try to find as many primary sources as possible. A **primary source** is the origin of basic facts on your subject; a **secondary source** uses primary sources or other secondary sources as its basis. For instance, an 1865 accident report from a survivor of a mountain climbing tragedy on the Matterhorn that year is a primary source; a 1980 article in Climbing magazine about that tragedy is a secondary source. Here are some other examples: **Primary Sources** **Secondary Sources** **novel, poem, or story** **critical articles explaining these works** **Napoleon's diary** **biography of Napoleon** **article in Time** magazine about that trial transcript of a trial The distinction is not always simple, though. An 1867 newspaper article about the 1865 Matterhorn accident would have been considered a secondary source at the time it was published. Today we'd probably call it a primary source since it was written at a time much closer to the accident and probably captures the attitude of people then. 46

#### **PRIMARY SOURCES (ex. A novel or a play on which we do research)**

Since a primary source gives you the basic material on a topic, you're less likely to be affected by the biases of others who have filtered the material before presenting it. If, for instance, you're working with the transcript of a trial, you can decide whether the prosecutor's case is sound by tracing the arguments yourself. But if you're reading about the trial or its transcript in a secondary source, that source may slant our thinking by pointing out the "brilliance" of the prosecutor's case or by selecting certain passages from the transcript important to the prosecution but ignoring others essential to the defense. By going directly to basic sources, in other words, you'll be depending on your own judgment rather than on someone else's. One disadvantage of primary sources is that the scope of a single source may be narrow. Although a primary source

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such as a trial transcript brings together basic facts from the testimonies of several people, many other primary sources are more limited-an interview with one person, for instance, or a newspaper report quoting two people who witnessed an event. In addition, primary sources in general, and especially those for events in the past, often are hard to find. Therefore, accumulating facts and opinions from primary sources usually requires more time-consuming research than does working with secondary sources.

#### **SECONDARY SOURCES (ex. An article written about the novel or the play)**

The disadvantage of secondary sources that we mentioned-that they usually present judgments about the source material-is, at the same time, also one of their most important advantages. By reading a secondary source, you can find out what someone else thinks about your topic, and that's one of the reasons for conducting research. In addition many secondary sources compile details from several primary sources, providing scope often lacking in a single primary source. That's because secondary sources are themselves the result of someone else's research. Our recommendation? Try to find as many primary sources as you can instead of relying entirely on secondary sources.

Sources vary and each type has its own strengths. Also, each will help you evaluate the other: details from primary sources can help you determine the worth of the judgments in secondary sources; the secondary sources can help you understand the material in your primary sources and can identify where you might look for additional primary It must be related to research sources.