A primary source is information in its original form. It has not been previously published, interpreted or translated. Primary sources can include:

- people (an eyewitness who gives you an account of an event)
- newspaper articles (an account of an event by a reporter on the scene)
- letters and e-mails
- diaries
- speeches
- interviews
- documents such as treaties or laws
- artifacts (appliances, clothing, toys, tools)
- photographs, video or audio recordings
- laboratory and field reports
- raw data that has been collected but not analyzed
- surveys/public opinion polls
- works of art and literature

Technically, primary sources should be originals. However, in order to physically preserve such sources and make them accessible to more scholars, many are reprocessed or reproduced (typeset, digitized, filmed, etc.). Instructors at TCC accept these "reproductions" as primary sources. The form in which you find a primary source will be made clear through the citation in your bibliography/works cited list.

Here are two citations to the "Mayflower Compact," a primary source document that was originally written in 1620. The first citation is from a print collection of historical documents and the second is from a web site that collects and publishes such documents. I used MLA's rules for citing an anthology for the first entry and their rules for an online "scholarly project" for the second.


Secondary sources are "once-removed," providing analysis, interpretation and/or evaluation. Secondary sources are often based on primary sources. If you look at the bibliography or list of works cited in a secondary source, you will see among the entries, the primary sources that the author used to create the article or book. Secondary sources include:

- most books
- most magazine/journal articles
- reviews (of plays, films, museum showings, etc.)
- literary criticism
- editorials

Secondary sources may also include resources with the main objective of leading you to other information. These include bibliographies, research guides, or periodical abstracting and indexing services.