

Handout # 2: Types of Information

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION DO YOU NEED?

When you research a problem or assignment, you may need a different type. Think carefully about the following:

What is the problem or assignment?

Do you need to make a five-minute presentation, writing a short paper, a term project, or even an honors thesis?

How much information do you need?

Sometimes summaries, overviews or article abstracts may give you enough information. Other times, you may need more detailed and comprehensive information.

Do you need only the most up-to-date information?

Depending on your project, only the most current information will do or you may need historical information. If you are writing about scientific developments, currency is usually more critical than in the humanities – the newest Shakespeare criticism doesn't make older criticism obsolete in the same way new technology often makes earlier technology irrelevant.

Do you need information from a particular type of publication?

You may need to look at scholarly or professional journals and books for some projects, but others may require information from government publications, trade journals, or the popular press – magazines and newspapers, general interest books, and sometimes even tabloids!

Examples of the three main types of journals

<i>Scholarly</i>	<i>Trade</i>	<i>Popular</i>
<i>International Journal of Comic Art</i>	<i>Art Market Guide</i>	<i>Popular Photography</i>
<i>Journal of African American History</i>	<i>Publisher's Weekly</i>	<i>Scientific American</i>
<i>Political Science Quarterly</i>	<i>Advertising Age</i>	<i>National Geographic</i>
<i>Annual review of plant biology</i>	<i>Waterworks</i>	<i>Sky & Telescope</i>
<i>Research Journal of Water Pollution</i>	<i>Automotive Engineering International</i>	<i>Low Rider</i>

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Do you need primary sources?

You can use *secondary sources* – articles and books – for most projects, but sometimes only *primary sources* such as interviews, diaries, and raw data will do.

Primary sources are the raw materials, while secondary sources offer analysis or commentary.

Examples of primary and secondary sources

<i>Field</i>	<i>Primary source</i>	<i>Secondary source</i>
Art	Van Gogh's painting, "Starry night"	Article critiquing "Starry night"
History	Pioneer women's diaries	Book about the Oregon Trail
Literature	"The road not taken" by Robert Frost	Article on Robert Frost's poetry
Political Science	Lincoln's Emancipation Declaration	Book on the Civil War
Theater	Unedited video of a live performance	Review of a performance
Biology	Old growth redwood survey data	Report about old growth redwood health

Do you need information in a particular format?

Print may not be the only source of information you need. You might need information from the electronic sources, graphic/visual sources, numeric sources or audio sources.

Examples of the other types of sources

<i>Electronic</i>	<i>Graphic/Visual</i>	<i>Numeric</i>	<i>Audio</i>
BIOSIS [database of biological articles]	Topographic map of Rickenbacker Lake	Stream flow data from the Dept. of Fish & Game	Recorded interview with local prominent figure
Calif. Dept. of Fish & Game website	Art print of Monet's painting, "Water Lilies"	U.S. Census data	Performance of <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> (CD)
EnviroWater listserv	Photo of Rickenbacker Lake	<i>Dams in California</i> [data set]	<i>World's Best Poetry on CD</i>

Is point of view an issue?

Do you need more than one perspective on an issue? Some projects may only need a single point of view, but many (including debates and argumentative essays) may require opposing or a range of viewpoints.