

# CATEGORIZING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

## Primary Sources

Resources directly associated with the time period in which they were created and with the creator.

## Secondary Sources

Scholarship that discusses and presents original research and synthesizes other secondary and primary sources.

**Books.** Broader treatment of subject; research several years old by time of publication.

Online Catalogues:  
 \* University of Toronto Library Catalogue  
 \* Union catalogue , i.e. WorldCat

**Journal articles.** Narrower focus than books; reflects more recent research.

\* Specialized vs General Index (ie. Historical Abstracts vs Humanities Abstracts  
 \* Full-text archive collections (JSTOR , Project Muse)  
 \* Find relevant journal and browse issues (Colonial Latin American Review) – more time-consuming

**Internet.** Encyclopedic, quick facts; often lacks synthesis.

\* Search engine such as Google  
 \* Human organized directory or webliography

**Published**—printed, more than one copy

\* Book  
 \* Journal  
 \* Newspaper  
 \* Magazine

\* Find U of T Libraries online collections.  
 \* Search Library catalogue (i.e. limit by date of publication or use "Sources" as subject heading)  
 \* Check subject guides on library website

**Unpublished**—unique source, held in an archive

\* Correspondence, diaries/journals  
 \* Oral histories  
 \* Images

\* Find online text collections using library catalogue or subject/course guides  
 \* Locate an likely archive by inspecting online finding aids

# RESEARCHING AT LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Libraries tend to collect **published material** while archives focus on collecting **unpublished material**. In reality, the boundaries between the two are often blurred. Here are some other differences between libraries and archives.

Archives	Libraries
Closed stacks	Open stacks
Collect original, unpublished material (e.g. letters)	Collect published material (e.g. books, journals)
Material may be organized in the way the collector organized his/her collection	Material is organized within a classification system such as Library of Congress call numbers
Unique material	Other copies of the material may be available in other libraries
Group of material is described on a number of different levels: fonds level, series level and item level	Material is described on an individual level (e.g. catalogue record for a single book)
Items do not circulate; you cannot take the material home	Items circulate; you may take the material home
You search for materials on your subject using finding aids (listing of everything in the fonds).	You search for materials on your subject using an online catalogue.

Source: Sherlock, Lisa. *Using Special Collections and Archival Resources*. Fall 2015.

Library and archive materials also differ in the following ways:

**Intent of Creation.** Books are meant to be read so the author has the researcher in mind. Archival materials are the by-products of everyday activity.

**Specificity of Subject.** Books are usually about a specific subject but archival materials from the same author may deal with more than one subject.

**Accessibility.** Library materials are arranged to facilitate browsing (hence open stacks) but researchers are not able to browse archival holdings (closed stacks).

**Self-Contextual.** Everything you need to understand a book is contained within itself, but archival records derive their meaning from their context so you may need to read other documents to understand the one in question.

Source: Carmichael, David W. *Organizing Archival Records*. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2012.