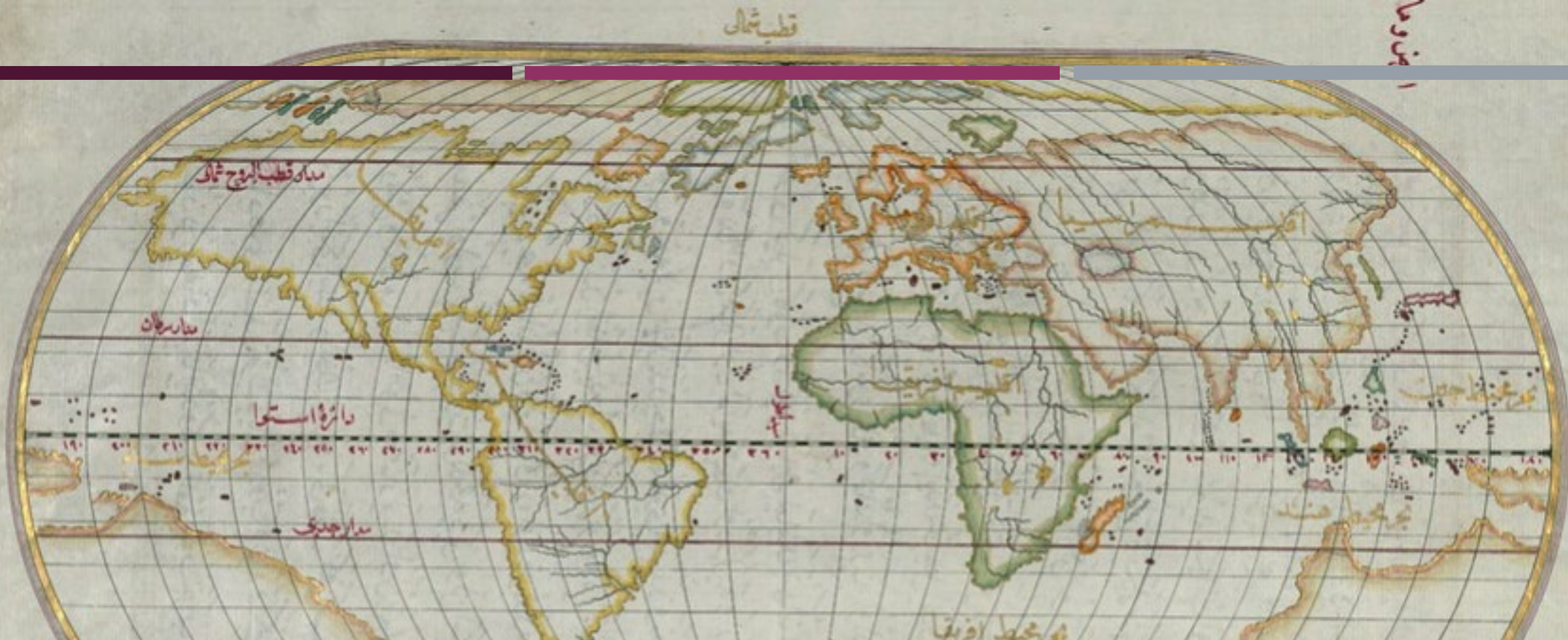


2022

## Primary Source Databases for Humanities Research

Beth Royall

Lynne Stahl



# PRIMARY SOURCE DATABASES FOR HUMANITIES RESEARCH

Beth Royall & Lynne Stahl

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES



DEFINE PRIMARY SOURCES  
AND USES IN RESEARCH

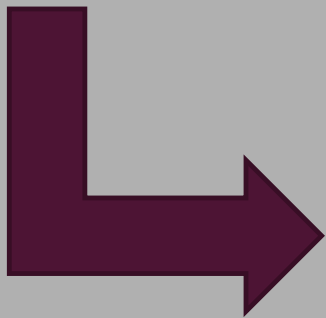
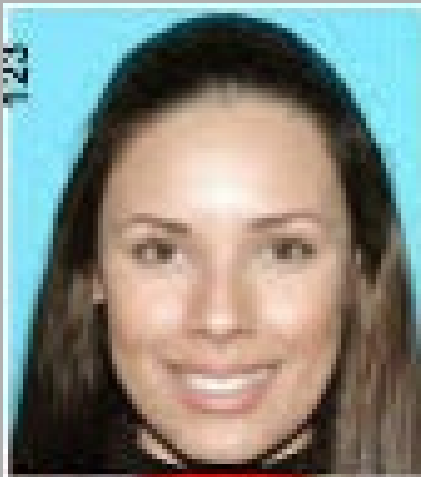


EXPLORE DIGITAL PRIMARY  
SOURCE DATABASES



LOCATE AND ACCESS RELEVAN  
T PRIMARY SOURCES

# Metadata



**Pennsylvania**  
visitPA.com

**DRIVER'S LICENSE**

123

No: **99 999 999** Dups: **00**  
DOB: **04/25/1974** Sex: **F**  
Class: **C** Eyes: **BRO**  
Endorse: Height: **5'04"**  
Com/Med Rstr: **"I"**  
Issued: **04/26/2012**  
Expires: **04/26/2016**  
*Evelyn T. Sample*

**ORGAN DONOR**

**EVELYN T. SAMPLE**  
1101 S. FRONT STREET  
HARRISBURG PA 17104

**DL**

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# Searching Metadata vs. Searching Full-text

- Secondary sources - typically search metadata
- For primary sources - search either metadata or full-text







## PRIMARY SOURCES

"Materials produced by people or groups directly involved in the event or topic under consideration, either as participants or as witnesses." (Rampolla, 2012).

Examples include:

- books (nonfiction & fiction)
- magazine and journal articles
- advertisements
- photographs and images
- speeches - letters - diaries
- memoirs and autobiographies
- government documents -maps
- census data - court decisions
- films and audiorecordings
- materials generated by companies & organizations
- objects and ephemera (e.g., postcards)

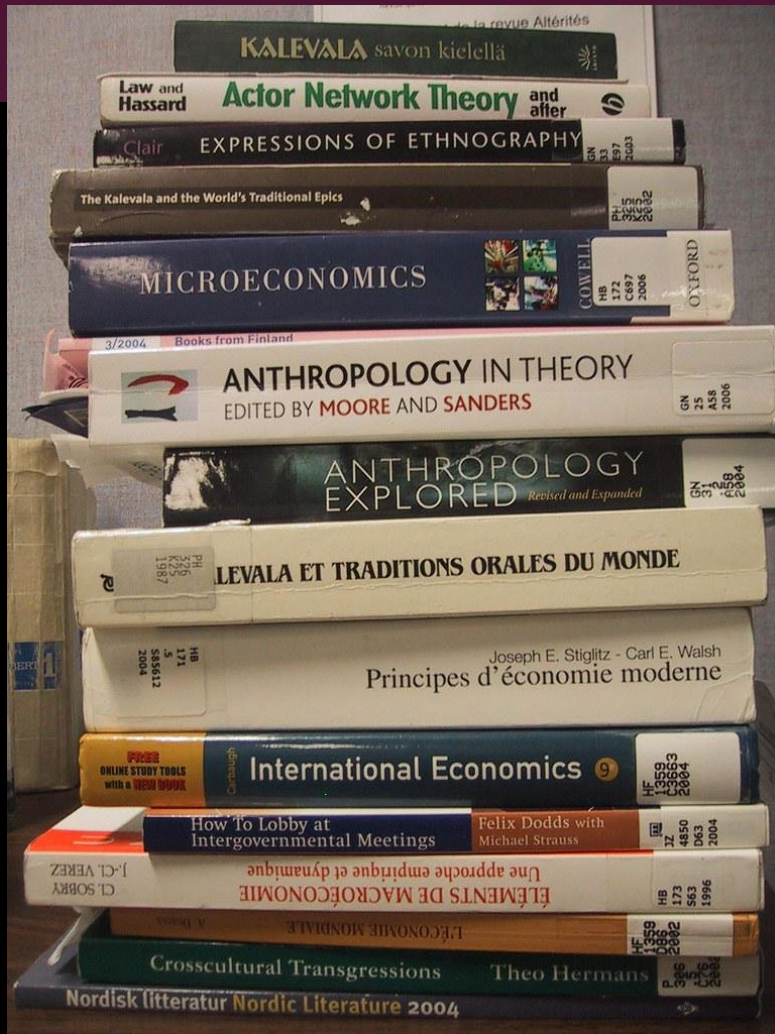
## SECONDARY SOURCES

"Texts - such as books, articles, or documentary films - that are written or created by people who were not eyewitnesses to the events or period in question; instead, the authors of secondary sources synthesize, analyze, and interpret primary sources..." (Rampolla, 2012).

Examples include:

- scholarly books, book chapters, and dissertations
- peer-reviewed articles
- political commentary
- biographies
- art criticism

Note: the line between primary and secondary sources varies based on the context of their use!





LIST THE TYPES OF PRIMARY SOURCES COMMON TO YOUR AREA  
OF RESEARCH (DISCIPLINE)

# CONTAINERS

Database

Journals

Primary Source  
Collections

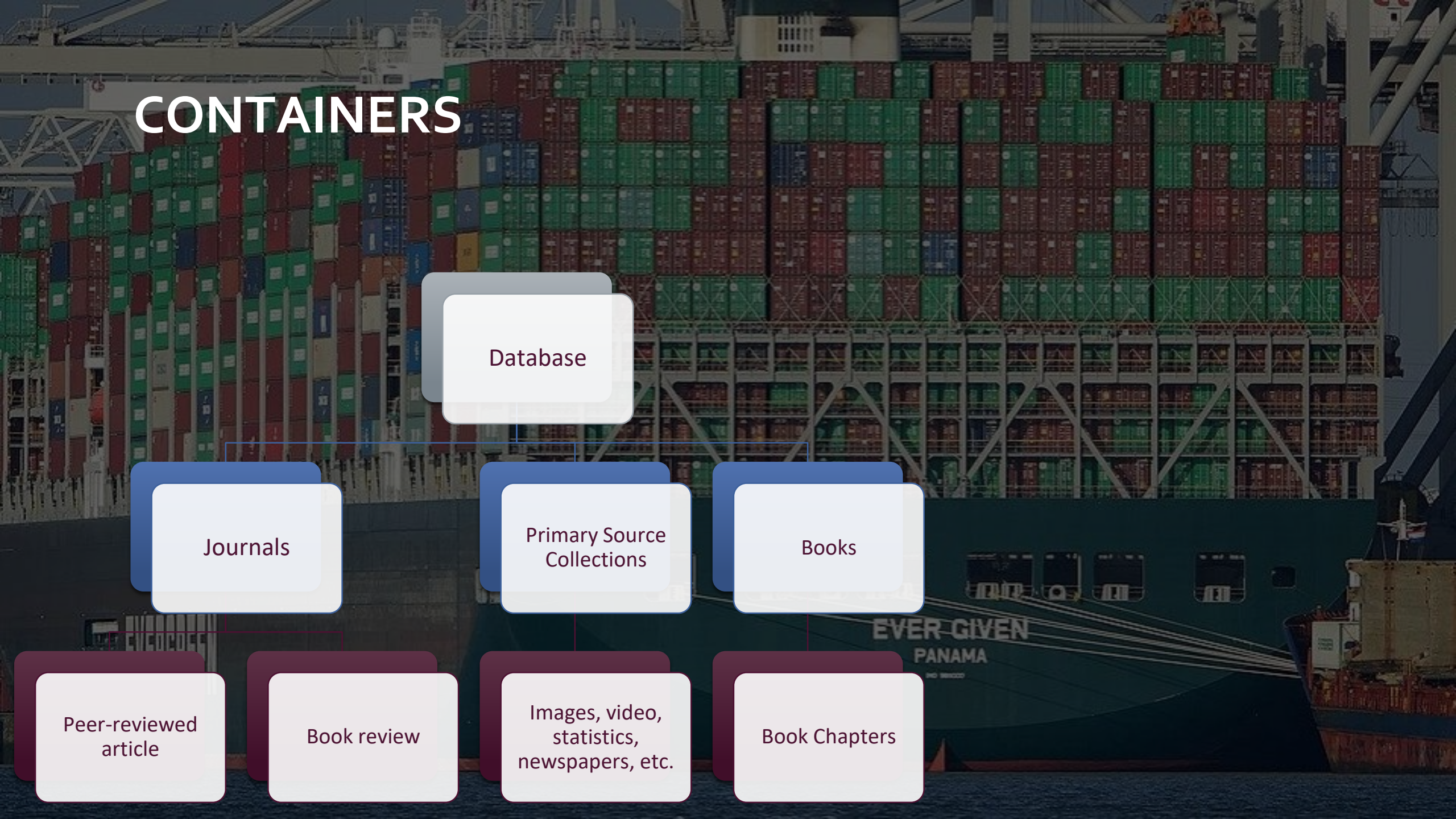
Books

Peer-reviewed  
article

Book review

Images, video,  
statistics,  
newspapers, etc.

Book Chapters



# IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL SOURCES

First, ask yourself what kind of information you'll need to answer your research question. Newspaper articles? Video footage? Statistics? Peer-reviewed studies?

Next, identify databases or websites that have that type of information. If you get stumped, ask! The databases page is organized by subject, but you can also search by keyword (e.g. "newspaper," "census," etc., although that will only be a rough search).

Tip: if you have no idea where to start, try Googling "[topic] primary sources libguide" (note: you may not be able to access all resources on other institutions' libguides)



# Searching for primary sources

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Newspapers: <https://databases.lib.wvu.edu/search?query=newspaper>

Government information: <https://libguides.wvu.edu/govdocs>

Video footage: <http://www.aparchive.com/>

For more info on primary sources and how to evaluate/analyze them, check out Dr. Miriam Cady's Introduction to Primary Sources

LibGuide: <https://libguides.wvu.edu/c.php?g=1100143&p=8688335>



## Don't forget – not everything is digitized!

The Library of Congress receives some 22,000 items each working day and adds approximately 10,000 items to its collections daily. No wonder it's the largest library in the world, with nearly 128 million items on approximately 530 miles of bookshelves! The collections include more than 29 million books and other printed materials, 2.7 million recordings, 12 million photographs, 4.8 million maps and 57 million manuscripts.

<https://www.loc.gov/wiseguide/dec02/aisles.html>

# What primary sources might help answer these questions?

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- How have the demographics of higher education in the U.S. changed since what is now Harvard University was founded in 1636?
- What are the origins of the use of plants as interior design elements?
- Your research subject (born in the 1910s) proudly proclaimed to be a descendent of Daniel Boone. How can you confirm (or dispute) their claim?
- Your research subject taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Scotts Run (West Virginia). How can you find the demographics of the area at that time?
- Your research subject traveled from Philadelphia to Appalachia in the late 18th century. She is known to have kept a journal, but none exist from the journey. Where can you find examples of women's journals from this period?



# You go on the hunt:

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1. Choose a type of primary source common to your discipline.
2. Explore two or three possible "containers" where you might find these sources.

# Questions?

