PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

Primary Source?

A primary source is an original source that documents an event in time, a person or an idea.

Some examples of primary sources are:

- Raw data
- Original research (journal articles, books)
- Diary entries, letters and other correspondence
- Photographs, artifacts
- audio or video broadcasts (that catch events as they unfold) e.g. **Real-estate film shot at Hatley Park c.1938** from DSpace@RRU
- Eyewitness accounts or interviews
- Legal documents, government documents, public records (e.g. birth certificates)
- Records or other documents created by organizations

Secondary source?

Secondary sources build upon primary resources by analyzing, interpreting, synthesizing or discussing them.

Examples would be:

- Books
- Journal articles (that do not provide original research)

A good way to determine whether or not a source you are evaluating is primary or secondary in nature is to ask yourself:

"Is this 'first-hand' information or 'second-hand' information?"

If you said 'first-hand' then it is likely a primary source. If you said 'second-hand', then it's likely a secondary source.

However, there is not always such a clear delineation. A secondary source may also be a primary source, depending on the context it's used in.

Examples:

Primary Source	Secondary Source
Newspaper Interview of Gilles Duceppe	Newpaper article written post-interview, evaluating Duceppe's comments
Census data collected by Statistics Canada	An article using Census data to discuss population trends
Diaries or letters from soldiers during World War II	A book about the effects of WWII on soldiers

Primary data

An advantage of using primary data is that researchers are collecting information for the specific purposes of their study. In essence, the questions the researchers ask are tailored to elicit the data that will help them with their study. Researchers collect the data themselves, using surveys, interviews and direct observations.

In the field of workplace health research, for example, direct observations may involve a researcher watching people at work. The researcher could count and code the number of times she sees practices or behaviours relevant to her interest; e.g. instances of improper lifting posture or the number of hostile or disrespectful interactions workers engage in with clients and customers over a period of time.

To take another example, let's say a research team wants to find out about workers' experiences in return to work after a work-related injury. Part of the research may involve interviewing workers by telephone about how long they were off work and about their experiences with the return-to-work process. The workers' answers– considered primary data–will provide the researchers with specific information about the return-to-work process; e.g. they may learn about the frequency of work accommodation offers, and the reasons some workers refused such offers.

Secondary data

There are several types of secondary data. They can include information from the national population census and other government information collected by Statistics Canada. One type of secondary data that's used increasingly is administrative data. This term refers to data that is collected routinely as part of the day-to-day operations of an organization, institution or agency. There are any number of examples: motor vehicle registrations, hospital intake and discharge records, workers' compensation claims records, and more.

Compared to primary data, secondary data tends to be readily available and inexpensive to obtain. In addition, administrative data tends to have large samples, because the data collection is comprehensive and routine. What's more, administrative

data (and many types of secondary data) are collected over a long period. That allows researchers to detect change over time.

Going back to the return-to-work study mentioned above, the researchers could also examine secondary data in addition to the information provided by their primary data (i.e. survey results). They could look at workers' compensation lost-time claims data to determine the amount of time workers were receiving wage replacement benefits. With a combination of these two data sources, the researchers may be able to determine which factors predict a shorter work absence among injured workers. This information could then help improve return to work for other injured workers.

The type of data researchers choose can depend on many things including the research question, their budget, their skills and available resources. Based on these and other factors, they may choose to use primary data, secondary data–or both.

Methods of Primary Data Collection:

1. Personal investigation: The surveyor collects the data himself/herself. The data so collected is reliable but is suited for small projects.

2. Collection via Investigators: Trained investigators are employed to contact the respondents to collect data.

3. Questionnaires: Questionnaires may be used to ask specific questions that suit the study and get responses from the respondents. These questionnaires may be mailed as well.

4. Telephonic Investigation: The collection of data is done through asking questions over the telephone.to give quick and accurate information.

Secondary data:

Secondary data are opposite to primary data. They are collected and published already (by some <u>organization</u>, for instance). They can be used as a source of data and used by surveyors to collect data from and conduct the analysis. Secondary data are impure in the sense that they have undergone statistical treatment at least once.

Methods of secondary data collection:

1. Official publications such as the Ministry of Finance, Statistical Departments of the <u>government</u>, Federal Bureaus, Agricultural Statistical boards, etc. Semi-official sources include <u>State Bank</u>, Boards of Economic Enquiry, etc.

2. Data published by Chambers of Commerce and trade associations and boards.

3. Articles in the newspaper, from journals and technical publications.

Difference between Primary and Secondary data

Primary data refers to first-hand information which is directly collected from the units being surveyed. It is pure in the sense that it has not undergone any statistical treatment yet. It is particularly collected for some purpose. Secondary data, on the other hand, is second-hand data. It is collected from some source that had originally primarily collected it. It has therefore undergone statistical treatment and is classified as impure or not original. Thus, the main difference between primary and secondary data lies in the exchange of hands.