**How to distiguish between Primary and Secondary sources of information**

Understanding the difference between **primary** and **secondary source material** is essential in research. Basically, this distinction points out the degree to which the author of the information is removed from the actual event being described, informing the reader as to whether the author is reporting impressions *first hand* (or is first to record these immediately following an event), or conveying the experiences and opinions of others—that is, *second hand*.

**2. Primary sources**

These areaccounts of an event, **written by someone who experienced or witnessed the event** in question. These **original documents** (i.e., they are not about *another* document or account) are often diaries, letters, memoirs, journals, speeches, manuscripts, and interviews. They may also include published pieces such as newspaper or magazine articles (as long as they are written soon after the fact and not as historical accounts), photographs, audio or video recordings, research reports in the natural or social sciences, or original literary or theatrical works.

**3. Secondary sources**

The function of these is to **interpret primary sources**, and so can be described as at least one step removed from the event or occurrence under review. Secondary source materials, then, interpret, assign value to, guess about, or draw conclusions about the events reported in primary sources. These are usually in the form of published works such as journal articles or books, but may include radio or television documentaries, or conference proceedings.

Adapted from "University Library." *Home*. UCSC, 2014. Web.