

# Frequently Asked Questions for Students



## **What is an archives?**

Archives are collections of historical records that are established to preserve the lives of individuals and organizations. Archives are comprised of primary source documents created or received by a person, family, or organization during their normal day-to-day activities. Materials found in the Staubitz Archives include interviews, photographs, recordings, copies of college publications, class scrapbooks, and materials related to student organizations and academic pursuits.

## **How is an archives different from a library?**

Because we collect one-of-a-kind materials, our rules are different than those of a library. Our collection is non-circulating; you can't just browse the shelves and check out a box. We also arrange our collection differently; we don't use Dewey or Library of Congress classification. To protect our fragile records, we ask that you don't eat, drink, or chew gum in the Reading Room. It would be a shame if you spilled your latte on an 1858 record book. We can replace the latte, but we can't replace the book.

## **What is the difference between primary and secondary sources?**

Primary sources are the raw materials of history, providing a window into the past and unfiltered access to the historical record. These original records are not necessarily paper records; primary sources can also be prints, artwork, and audio and visual recording. Primary sources can be described as sources that are closest to the origin of the information. They contain raw information and therefore must be interpreted by the student. For a more detailed explanation, check out Yale's [guide to primary sources](#).

Secondary sources are related to primary sources, but they are least one step removed from the original event or issue. These sources, such as textbooks and articles, are documents that provide background details and relate to information that originated elsewhere. You can use

secondary sources to interpret, analyze, describe, explain, or draw conclusions about the experiences detailed in primary sources.

### **I have to write a research paper using primary sources. Where do I start?**

If you've never written a research paper using primary sources, it is important to understand that the process is different from the research you do using secondary sources. Many students discover that finding and gaining access to primary source documents can be difficult. We encourage you to seek help from archivists or librarians to assist you in your research projects. Archivists and librarians will be able to help you locate primary source materials.

After locating appropriate primary sources, you will need to analyze and interpret them. This task can seem daunting, so we suggest that you consult the resources available in the library as well as making use of online tools. The National Archives website offers analysis worksheets that can help you to determine the significance of primary source documents.

### **NARA Worksheets**

[Written Document](#)

[Artifact](#)

[Cartoon](#)

[Map](#)

[Motion picture](#)

[Photograph](#)

[Poster](#)

[Sound Recording](#)

### **How do I cite primary source materials?**

Primary source citation depends on the type of primary source you are using (i.e. a law document, newspaper, etc.) and the style of citation required (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.). After you have determined these two factors, you will want to locate the citation guide in the Hedberg Library reference section. You can also access basic citation instructions at Purdue's [OWL](#) (Online Writing Lab). In addition, the National Archives website has an extensive [guide](#) to citing primary sources.

**Looking for more in-depth information on using archives? Check out this [guide](#).**