GEOGRAPHY 503: Fundamentals of Geoenvironmental Research
Source documents for literature review

Types of sources to consider

- Refereed articles – papers published in research journals that have been through a peer-review process.
- Scholarly books – both monographs and edited volumes
- Government documents – reports by federal, state, and other government agencies, published government statistics, maps, imagery, and other data
- Conference proceedings – abstracts, papers, and/or discussion documents
- Theses and dissertations – previous student research
- Archival records – e.g. meeting minutes or notes from an organization or institution
- Textbooks or other reference sources – should be kept to a minimum.
- Internet sources – use extreme caution and scrutinize the source.
- Popular media – magazines, newspapers, etc.
- Personal data or observations – your own fieldwork, experimentation, etc.

Classification of Sources

Primary sources are original materials which have not been filtered through interpretation, condensation, or, often, even evaluation by a second party; for example journal articles, monographs, reports, patents, theses, diaries, letters, photographs, poems.

Others would define primary sources as original records, such as field measurements, conference proceedings, census statistics, lab experimental results, works of art, etc. Under this definition, published works such as journal articles and books would be considered “secondary.”

Secondary sources modify, select, or rearrange primary information for a specific purpose or audience. Examples include biographies, histories, review articles, textbooks, and any bibliography used to locate primary sources.

Tertiary sources distill and collect primary and secondary sources. Twice removed from the original, they include encyclopedias, textbooks, fact books and almanacs, guides and handbooks.