

Northeast Lakeview College LRC

Resource Guide – Primary Sources

What are Primary Sources?

Primary sources are firsthand, original accounts, created at or around the time an event actually occurred. Examples include autobiographies, original research, letters, memoirs, diaries, poems, novels, etc.

What are Secondary Sources?

Secondary sources offer interpretation, analysis, and/or commentary after an event occurred. The information is usually compiled from or based on primary sources or other secondary sources. Examples include literary criticism, biographies, reviews, analyses, etc.

How do I find Primary Sources?

Primary sources can be found in many different places and formats, so searching for them is not always straightforward. They may or may not be actually labeled as primary sources. Primary sources can be found in all of the following places:

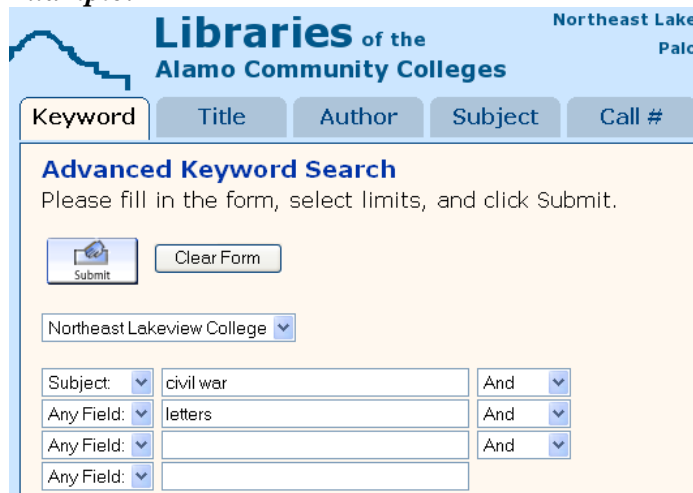
- [ACCD Online Catalog](#)
- [Electronic Books](#)
- [Electronic Databases](#)
- Websites

How do I find Primary Sources in the ACCD Online Catalog?

Visit the ACCD Online Catalog at: <http://library.accd.edu/search/X>

Option 1: Search for the keywords of your topic plus words like memoir, diary, autobiography, etc. You may have to look at the actual item to verify that it does contain primary source material.

Example:



The screenshot shows the search interface for the Libraries of the Alamo Community Colleges. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs for "Keyword", "Title", "Author", "Subject", and "Call #". Below this is the "Advanced Keyword Search" section, which includes a "Submit" button and a "Clear Form" button. A dropdown menu is set to "Northeast Lakeview College". The search criteria are entered as follows: "Subject" is "civil war", "Any Field" is "letters", and two other "Any Field" boxes are empty. Each search criterion is followed by an "And" dropdown menu.

Alternate format available upon request. Please inquire at the Reference Desk.

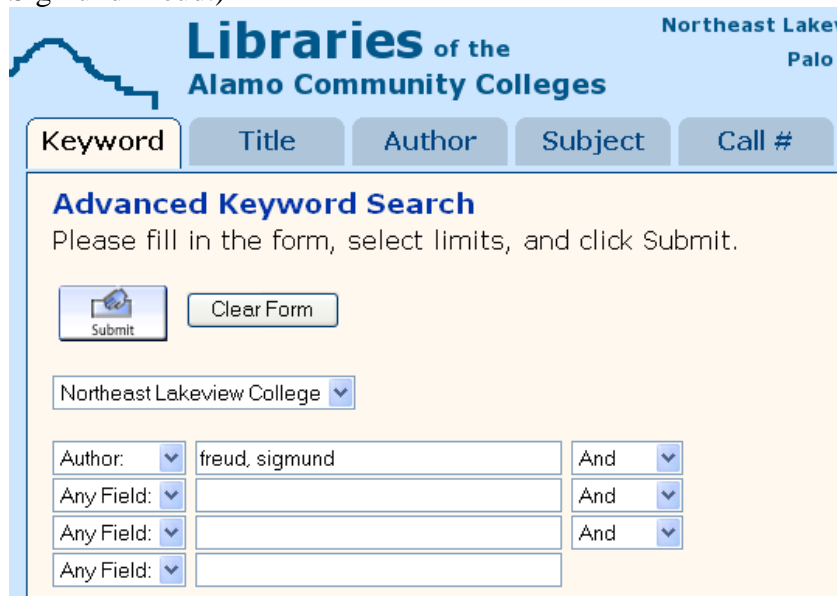
You can also try including the term “sources” in the Subject field, for example, search Subject: civil war sources. Again, examine the actual item to determine whether it actually includes primary source material or is simply about a primary source.

Option 2: Search with the keywords of your topic only, then examine the actual item itself to see if it contains any primary source material. Sometimes the catalog record might not mention anything about primary source material, however, if you look at the actual resource, you might find appropriate content, such as an excerpt from a speech or diary.

Government documents can sometimes be good sources of primary material. A variety of online government documents are available via the ACCD Online Catalog. To locate them, just limit your search to **San Antonio College** and search with the keywords of your topic. Look for results with a Location of **SAC Documents Internet**; many of these will be government documents. Click on the title of the document, then click on the link under “Available online:” to open the document. Again, be sure to carefully examine the actual resource to determine if it contains primary source material.

Option 3: Search for an item which shows original research by someone in that particular profession or discipline. A book written by a particular person is often considered a primary source for that person, if he/she actually came up with the ideas or discovered the findings.

Example: (In this example, the two results found contain the original writings of Sigmund Freud.)



The screenshot shows the search interface for the Libraries of the Alamo Community Colleges. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the text "Libraries of the Alamo Community Colleges" and "Northeast Lakeview Palo". Below this is a search bar with tabs for "Keyword", "Title", "Author", "Subject", and "Call #". The "Keyword" tab is selected. Below the search bar is a section titled "Advanced Keyword Search" with the instruction "Please fill in the form, select limits, and click Submit." There are two buttons: "Submit" and "Clear Form". Below these buttons is a dropdown menu for "Northeast Lakeview College". Below the dropdown menu are four search criteria rows. The first row has "Author:" selected, a text input field containing "freud, sigmund", and an "And" dropdown menu. The second, third, and fourth rows have "Any Field:" selected, empty text input fields, and "And" dropdown menus.

How do I find Primary Sources in Electronic Books?

E-books are included in the ACCD Online Catalog, so if you’ve already searched the catalog as mentioned above, you’ve already searched the Electronic Books content as well! However, if you’re having trouble locating materials, you can try searching the entire **full-text** of the E-book content by clicking on the [Electronic Books](#) link from the library home page.

Alternate format available upon request. Please inquire at the Reference Desk.

Advanced Search

Search Terms

Subject And

Full-Text And

Keyword And

Publisher

English

Try searching for the keywords of your topic (as Keyword or Subject) plus words like diary, speech, excerpt, etc. Not all excerpts will be from primary sources; examine the actual e-book content closely to determine this.

How do I find Primary Sources in Electronic Databases?

Visit the NLC Library Electronic Databases page at:

http://www.accd.edu/nlc/library/t_Electronic%20Databases.htm

In some databases, you can limit your search to a particular document or publication type, such as interview, letter, speech, or even “primary source document”. Remember that **original research** is usually considered to be a primary source as well, and is common in the scientific disciplines. Databases with primary sources include [Academic Search Complete](#), [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#), [eLibrary Curriculum](#), [History Resource Center](#), and others.

Example #1: Academic Search Complete

On the Advanced Search screen (default), this database provides a limiter for **Publication Type** = Primary Source Document, as well as **Document Type** = Interview, Letter, or Speech. Enter your search term(s) at the top and select these limiters as appropriate. Note: Academic Search Complete contains the full-text of *Vital Speeches of the Day* from 1934 – present.

Keyword | Publications | Subject Terms | Cited References | More Sign In to

Searching: **Academic Search Complete** | [Choose Databases >](#)

"gun control" in

and in

and in [Add Row](#)

[Advanced Search](#) | [Visual Search](#) | [Search History/Alerts](#) | [Preferences >](#)

Publication Type

- Book
- Primary Source Document**
- Educational Report
- Health Report

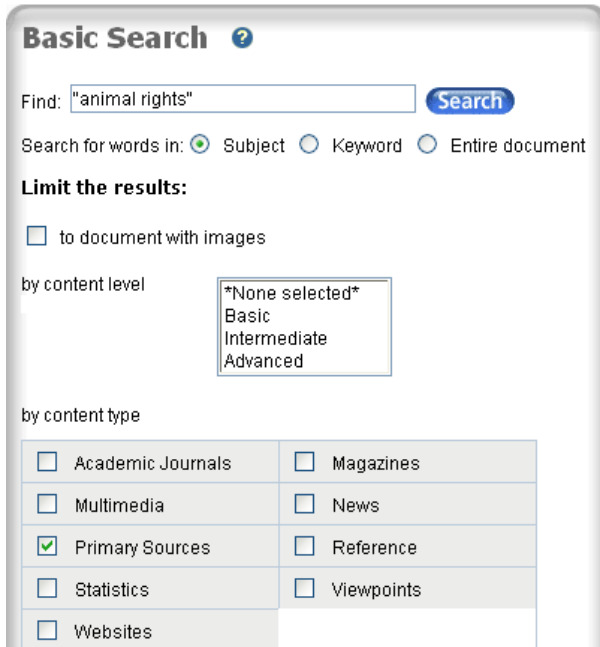
Document Type

- Erratum
- Letter**
- Interview
- Literary Criticism

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Example #2: [Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center](#)

In this database, both the Basic and Advanced Search screens provide the option to limit your search by **content type** = Primary Sources. Examples of primary sources in Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center include government reports, excerpts from official documents, and court testimonies.



The screenshot shows the 'Basic Search' interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text '"animal rights"' and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar, there are radio buttons for 'Subject' (selected), 'Keyword', and 'Entire document'. Under the heading 'Limit the results:', there is a checkbox for 'to document with images'. Below that, there is a section 'by content level' with a dropdown menu showing '*None selected*', 'Basic', 'Intermediate', and 'Advanced'. Finally, there is a section 'by content type' with a grid of checkboxes for various content types: Academic Journals, Magazines, Multimedia, News, Primary Sources (checked), Reference, Statistics, Viewpoints, and Websites.

What websites can I use to find Primary Sources?

Many primary sources are available online, but be sure to evaluate the quality of any online source before using it. Websites which indicate they contain “**digital library collections**” often include primary sources. Government websites, such as GPO Access (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>) and other sites ending in **.gov** can also be good sources for primary documents.

Other helpful websites include:

- American Rhetoric - <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/>
- Library of Congress American Memory - <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>
- RUSA – Using Primary Sources on the Web - <http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/RUSA/>
- Berkeley’s Primary Sources on the Web - <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/primarysourcesontheweb.html>
- The National Archives Educators & Students Primary Documents - <http://www.archives.gov/education/>
- Library of American Civilization Titles Online - <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1849.xml>

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