Kathryne TafollaYoung, WR 121, Sec. 04

**When looking at primary and secondary sources, remember that one is not necessarily “better” than the other. It’s important to understand the differences between them so that you can assess the reliability of each type.**

**SECONDARY SOURCES**

*(textbooks, magazine articles, etc., where the author of the source did not personally witness the event(s) he or she is writing about)*

Is the author an expert in the field?

-----Written other publications?

-----Educational background?

What biases might the author hold?

-----Organizations he/she belongs to?

-----Other editorials or biased writings? (This doesn’t exclude an author, but it’s something important to be aware of)

Who is the author’s intended audience?

-----Personal experience?

How much editing has it gone through?

Any outside forces/pressures which could have affected the source?

Was the source produced for scholarly or for commercial publication?

Is the content consistent with other known facts?

Does the author utilize quality sources?

-----primary vs. secondary sources

-----a wide range of sources from different perspectives

Do the generalizations drawn seem logical?

-----Is there corroborating evidence offered for generalizations?

When was the source published?

Special Questions for Magazines and Journals

-----Who subscribes?

-----How frequently does it come out?

-----How widely is it circulated?

-----What is the source’s reputation in the academic community?

-----Who funds the journal or magazine?

Special Questions for Websites

-----What was the initial source for the information in question?

-----How frequently is the site updated?

-----By whom is the site funded?

-----Are mechanics and conventions of grammar and usage largely correct?

-----Are citations done, and done properly?

-----Is it possible to verify the author of the specific information on the page and his/her credentials?

**PRIMARY SOURCES**

*(sources such as diary entries, research logs, eyewitness reports, interviews etc., where the author personally witnessed or participated in the event(s) he or she is writing about)*

Is the source intended to be public or private?

Under what circumstances did the document come into existence?

-----Free will vs. duress

-----Genuine expression vs. deceit

-----Unwitting vs. intentional

Is the author an eyewitness to the event/s?

-----Is the author well situated to witness the event/s?

-----Is the content consistent with other known facts?

When , how, and to whom was the report made?

Who created the source and what role did s/he play?

-----Important vs. Obscure

-----Could the author benefit by altering the content of the source?

For what audience is the source intended?

How much editing has this information gone through?

Does the report seem probable to the dictates of common sense?

Is additional information needed to interpret the source?