Before You Start Searching for Primary Sources

Video Transcript

In this video, I want to look at some things to consider before you start searching for primary sources.

So, think about how much information is being created every single day – the news, television, radio, blogs, Twitter. People are constantly creating new information and all of it is considered primary source material.

There is a lot of information out there and if you try to search too broadly for primary sources you’ll likely feel overwhelmed. So what can you do to prevent information overload?

Well, after you’ve picked a topic, first gather up some basic factual information about your topic such as:

- Specific dates
- Places
- Key events or
- Names of specific documents, organizations, or people involved

Having a list of things like this before you start will help you to do a comprehensive search.

After you’ve brainstormed these ideas, you can then choose some keywords. Primary sources in particular have keywords specific to them.

Examples of Keywords for Primary Sources

Some examples of keywords for primary sources include:

- **Sources** or **documents** - for general primary sources (examples: medieval sources, civil war documents, papal sources)
- **Personal narratives, autobiography** or **memoir** (examples: Pearl Harbor personal narratives, battle of the bulge memoir, autobiography world war II)
- **Correspondence** or **letters** (examples: Civil War correspondence, French revolution letters)
- **Diary** (examples: Civil War diary, woman diary early modern France)
- **Interview, oral history** or **speeches** (examples: Cold War interview, Japanese internment oral history, Malcolm X speeches)
- **Pamphlet** (examples: pamphlet chastity, women rights pamphlet)
- **Pictorial works** – another word for photographs or artwork (examples: Chicago pictorial works, World’s Fair pictorial works)

Say for example my topic is looking at the written accounts of soldiers who fought in World War II. In the upcoming screenshots, I’m going to use the keywords **Diary** and **World War II** to demonstrate how to search the library’s book collection and on Google for primary sources.
- Old News by Jason de Villa - https://flic.kr/p/98jLH CC BY-NC
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