

Primary and Secondary Sources of Research

Research publications are divided into primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources report the results of original studies and represent the latest information on a topic. Secondary sources are reviews of several primary sources in a particular research area and are not meant to provide the reader with the same detail as in primary sources. Secondary sources also contain information that is dated by at least 1 year, due to publication lags.

A study examining children's sibling relationship in families where one child is seriously ill would be an example of a primary source of information. An article reviewing the past 15 years of sibling research, with critiques of previous studies and suggestions for future direction, would be an example of a secondary source of information.

Primary Sources:

Journal Articles

Journal articles contain both primary and secondary sources of information; however, the majority of articles are primary sources that describe a particular study. A typical journal article states the problem under investigation, briefly reviews past research on the topic, presents the hypotheses, describes the methods used to test the hypotheses, reviews the statistical results, and discusses the findings.

Dissertations

Dissertations are reports of research studies conducted by advanced-level graduate students to fulfill the requirements for a Ph.D. Dissertations are available in their original form at the university where the graduate student attended.

Secondary Sources:

Review Articles

Review articles in journals summarize, integrate, and critique several studies related to a particular area. These articles are a good starting point for someone who is just beginning to learn about a topic. Often, the word "review" is in the title which makes it easier to find these articles through online searches. Some journals are completely devoted to review articles, including *Psychology Review*

Bradley, M.E. (2006). Cyberlab for Psychological Research.
<http://faculty.frostburg.edu/mbradley/cyberlab.html>

and *Psychological Bulletin*.

Chapters in Books & Books

Many chapters and entire books review research studies. These types of research literature provide the broadest exploration of a particular subject without the limitations of space found in journal articles (even review articles).

Handbooks & Annual Reviews

Other publications available for reviews of the literature are from handbooks and annual reviews. Handbooks are volumes of books about general areas within psychology. For example, child psychology publishes a handbook titled *Handbook of Child Psychology*. Annual Reviews in Psychology also extensively review research, for the past year only. Both sources provide comprehensive information on a variety of topics.