Primary Sources

What is a primary source?
A primary source provides direct or first-hand evidence.

Why are primary sources important?
Secondary sources often reflect someone’s interpretation of the facts—instead of the actual facts. This is a huge reason why it’s so crucial to access the primary source.

How can you use primary sources in your research?
1. Learn to identify what is a primary source and what is not. Common primary sources are government reports, datasets, papers in academic journals, uncut videos, and complete transcripts.

2. Be ready to dig. The internet has made primary sources far more available than any time in human history, but finding them sometimes requires digging back from one source, to another, to another.

3. Don’t give up. Internet searches often yield a lot of shoddy content. Don’t stop at the first ten results.

4. Get the whole story. Once you find the primary source, examine it critically and consider its caveats and limitations.

REMEMBER: If a source relies on another source or does not provide documented evidence, it is not the primary source for that information.