

- 1.) In literature or philosophy, your main primary source is usually the text you are analyzing, and your data are the words on the page.
- 2.) Secondary sources are books, articles, or reports that are based on primary sources and are intended for scholarly or professional audiences. The body of secondary sources in a field is sometimes called that field's "literature". The best secondary sources are books from reputable university presses and articles or reports that have been "peer reviewed", meaning that they were vetted by experts in the field before they were published.
- 3.) In the early stages of research, you can use tertiary sources to get a feel for a topic. but if you are making a scholarly argument, you should rely on secondary sources, because these make up the "conversation" in which you are seeking to participate. If you cite tertiary source is in a scholarly argument, you will mark yourself as either a novice or an outsider, and many readers won't take you-or your argument-seriously.
- 4.) Because so much information is now at our fingertips, libraries are more essential than ever when conducting research. Libraries not only let us access information but also ensure that our sources are reliable.
- 5.) A single source can lead to others and return you two catalogs and databases you have already visited, only this time with new search terms. Novice researchers often rely too heavy on only a few terms or on terms that proved to be too broad-or narrow-to call up relevant sources.
- 6.) The problem with any online search is that it may produce an overwhelming number of titles. The University of Chicago library has more than 300 books on Napoleon and thousands with the word *environment* in their titles. If your search turns up too many choices, narrow it down.
- 7.) When you find a book that seems useful skim its bibliography or works cited. Its index will list the authors cited most often (generally, the more citations, the more important an author is).
- 8.) Your practical experience with such everyday research might lead you to regard the Internet as comprehensive and reliable. (You use it to price a smartphone or pair of jeans, so why not for your academic or professional research?) But that would be a mistake.
- 9.) When you work beyond the standard *kinds* of references relevant to the question, you enrich not only your analysis but your range of intellectual reference and your ability to synthesize diverse kinds of data, a crucial competence of an inquiring mind.

10.) You can also benefit from talking directly with experts on your topic. Ask them about the important open question in the field. Ask them what they think of your project or provisional thesis. Ask them to suggest secondary sources for you to read. This kind of professional guidance can be invaluable to a novice researcher, and many experts will be happy to talk with you (or at least engage in a little e-mail correspondence).