

Primary Sources/Research Studies – Social Sciences

When completing research for psychology, sociology, education, and human development and family sciences classes, you will have to differentiate between primary and secondary sources.

I. Primary Sources (Research Studies)

A primary source for these disciplines differs from original documents used in historical research. Primary sources for the social sciences are any **articles or papers which describe experiments or studies conducted by researchers and are written by the researchers themselves.**

Characteristics to look for:

- The researchers explain their methods of research, as well as the results.
- Primary source articles often include the following subheadings: *methods, results, and discussion.*
- Article abstracts often indicate if the article is an actual study or merely a review.
- Words used in the article, such as “this study” or “in our study, we measured” will indicate the nature of the article.

Numerical data sets such as census figures, opinion polls, surveys or interview transcripts may also be considered primary sources.

II. Secondary Sources

A secondary source interprets or analyzes primary sources. For instance, a group of researchers might analyze or review the results from several similar studies. Sometimes these articles are identified as “literature reviews.”

III. Finding Primary Sources in the Library

Primary sources can be found in many of the library’s online databases. Although you cannot search specifically for “primary sources,” you can narrow your search to retrieve a high percentage of research studies/primary sources. See chart for specific search tips. To access the databases from the library’s home page, click on “Articles/Databases/Subjects”. Some helpful databases are listed below.

Psychology
PscyINFO

Education
ERIC
Education Research Complete

Sociology
SocINDEX with full-text
Criminal Justice Periodicals

Human Development and Family Science
Family & Society Studies Worldwide

Adapted from Library Resources and Methods of Research, Ithaca College Library
<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/course/primary.html>, and Primary Sources, Berea College Hutchinson Library
<http://www.berea.edu/hutchinslibrary/subjectguides/gstr210pri.aspx>



MURRAY LIBRARY
MESSIAH COLLEGE – BOX 3002
GRANTHAM, PA 17027
(717) 691-6006
WWW.MESSIAH.EDU/MURRAYLIBRARY

Locating Primary Sources / Research Studies in Social Sciences Databases

Database	Contents	Limit to Primary Sources/ Research Studies
Criminal Justice Periodicals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1981- • journals 	No specific limit for research studies. <u>Recommended:</u> 1. Check box to limit to “Scholarly journals, including peer-reviewed” 2. Add “this study” to your search terms*
Education Research Complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1990- • Education-related journal articles (indexes 2100; 1200 are fulltext) • Some books and conference papers 	No specific limit for research studies. <u>Recommended:</u> 1. Check box to limit to “Scholarly (Peer-reviewed) Journals” 2. Add “this study” to your search terms*
ERIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1966- • Education-related journal articles • ERIC documents (reports, curriculum, teaching guides/activities, etc.) NOTE: Full text is available for many ERIC documents	Under “Limit your results” change PUBLICATION TYPE to “Reports - Research”
Family & Society Studies Worldwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1970- 	No specific limit for research studies. <u>Recommended:</u> Add “this study” to your search terms.*
PsycINFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1887- • journal articles • technical reports • books that are parts of series • dissertations 	Under “Limit your results” change METHODOLOGY to “Empirical study” <u>CAUTION:</u> There are several other kinds of research study types in PsycINFO. To be more comprehensive, add “this study” to your search terms.*
SocINDEX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1895- • journal articles • conference papers • books 	No specific limit for research studies. <u>Recommended:</u> 1. Check box to limit to “Scholarly (Peer-reviewed) Journals” 2. Add “this study” to your search terms.*

* For a more precise search, change one of the pull-down menus to Abstract and key in “this study.” Key other search terms into a different search box.