

Historical Primary Sources Description Table

Type of primary source	Format example	Information source might provide	Topic considerations	Where it might be found
Personal narratives	Memoirs, autobiographies, captivity narratives, travel narratives	Way of living, costumes, behaviors, cultural understanding, feelings, perspectives	Literacy for time period, positionality in society, hindsight, self-edited, intended audience	UC Library Search, digital collections online, subject databases by topic/theme/time period
Personal correspondence	Letters	Way of living, costumes, behaviors, cultural understanding, feelings, perspectives	Literacy for time period, intention of letter, who is the sender/receiver, positionality in society	May be in original handwritten format, or published as printed sources. UC Library Search, digital collections online, subject databases by topic/theme/time period
Official correspondence	Government missives, business letters or memos, proclamations, memo	Current state of operations, directions, operational changes	Sender and receiver of correspondence, roles within the government or business, power dynamics	May exist as standalone sources, described in UC Library Search or online digital collections. May also be presented as collections of sources created and disseminated by a particular leader/ruler/office
Private documents	Diaries, ledgers	Way of living, costumes, behaviors, cultural understanding, feelings, perspectives	Literacy for time period, positionality in society	May be in original handwritten format, or published as printed sources. UC Library

				Search, digital collections online, subject databases by topic/theme/time period
Creative works	Poems, plays, illustrations, engravings, paintings, photography	Dress, societal behavior and customs, cultural understanding, feelings,	Time of creation, the perspective of the artist, intention of portrayal (accurate, stylized, satirical)	UC Library Search, digital collections online, subject databases by topic/theme/time period
News	Newspapers, newspaper clippings, news magazines, almanacs, newsletters, broadsides, gazettes	Societal behavior and customs, cultural understanding, ways of living, societal issues/news, politics, economics, stand out events, spending habits	Literacy for time period, intended audience, intended purpose, biases, positions of authority/power as publisher	UC Library Search, digital collections online, subject databases by topic/theme/time period
Ephemera	Pamphlets, broadsides, Posters, advertisements, postcards, theater programs, recipe books	Societal customs and dress, leisure activities, spending habits, ways of living, perspectives, cultural understanding	Intended audience, literacy for time period, biases, intended purpose intended audience	UC Library Search, digital collections online, subject databases by topic/theme/time period
Official Documents	Certificates of birth/death, treaties, press releases, court hearings, contracts, wills, deeds	Recorded decisions, evidence of birth/death/ownership	Content of the "official record", authority of officiant or office, does the document assign value	May find digital collections online, subject databases by topic/theme/time period
Recorded Data	Manifests, ledgers, census records, meteorological data	Statistics like population, amount/cost of goods, weather/climate	Who/what is counted, who/what is left out, why these records were necessary, who recorded, authority of	May be included as tables or appendices within texts of published books from the time period, some types of data

			record	may also exist as standalone sources, or may have been gathered into some published or online digitized projects
Maps	<p>Drawn or printed on paper, cloth, wood, metal, animal hide</p> <p>Maps may exist as standalone items, may be folded into printed books to help illustrate narrative text, or may exist in atlases bringing together multiple maps</p>	<p>Understanding of geographical boundaries, geological features (land, water), importance of area</p>	<p>Intended purpose, official vs. unofficial, who was the user, who had access; how knowledgeable was the creators (did info come from first hand observations, from reprinted information by others, from oral accounts)</p>	<p>UC Library Search, Digital library collections (and aggregators), specialized digital collections of maps like the David Rumsey collection</p>