

## What are Primary and Secondary sources in nursing?

During your nursing career, you may be asked to use primary or secondary sources in your research. What exactly are they?

### Primary sources:

These are the first articles published formally, describing a research project or study. They are contemporary accounts of an event written by those who have experienced or witnessed an event. These include:

- Articles describing the research design and findings of original studies;
- Descriptions of new experiments;
- Patient interviews;
- Pilot studies;
- Case studies;
- Clinical trials;
- Dissertations;
- Video or audio recordings.

### Real examples:

- A nurse interviews patients about their health behaviours;
- A pharmaceutical company conducts clinical trials on a new drug;
- A hospital surveys its nursing staff.

### Secondary sources:

These interpret primary sources so are therefore removed from whatever is under review. They interpret, judge, have opinions on and draw conclusions such as:

- Meta-analysis (a method for combining data from several selected studies to develop a single conclusion that has greater statistical power);
- Scholarly book reviews;
- Textbooks;
- Systematic reviews (answers a defined research question by collecting and summarising all evidence that fits pre-specified criteria);
- Practice guidelines;
- Newsletters and professional news sources.

### Real examples:

- The Ministry of Health's plan to combat obesity in New Zealanders;
- A book on how Florence Nightingale influenced the nursing profession;
- *Mosby's guide to nursing diagnosis* (Textbook)

### Ask yourself if in doubt:

How does the author know about the details? Were they there or are they drawing conclusions from a variety of sources.

Where does the information come from? Does the information come from a variety of sources or just one?

### How to identify if a source is primary or secondary

	Primary	Secondary
<b>Title</b>	Very Specific – <i>“Diabetes symptoms and self-management behaviours in rural older adults”</i>	General - <i>“Diabetes in New Zealand”</i>
<b>Definition</b>	Type of article, which describes a project or experiment.	An article that summarises all the work from primary sources.
<b>Includes</b>	Methodology, raw data, results, tables, conclusion	May be a literature review or an evaluation of a range of evidence.
<b>Example words</b>	Clinical trial, Study, Investigation, Examination, Surveys or Experiment.	Review, Evaluation, Analysis
<b>Author</b>	Carried out work	Describes work of others
<b>Process</b>	Carried out over a length of time	Often rapid as using data of others
<b>Source of information</b>	Singular	Multiple

### For further assistance

- Ask at the Library, Christchurch, Madras St. Campus
- Live chat with a Librarian during open hours via [Asklive](#)
- Ring (03) 9408089 or 0800 24 24 76 and ask for the Library
- Email : [library@ara.ac.nz](mailto:library@ara.ac.nz)