This session focuses on the various sources used in historical research, and the publication cycle that generates them. We refer to these source types by ordinal numbers: primary, secondary and tertiary. At the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Identify research sources as either primary, secondary, or tertiary
- Know when to use each type of research source
- Know where to find each type of research source

This session is called 1, 2, 3, … 3, 2, 1 because it represents the sequences in the cycle of scholars’ knowledge generation and publication of research results, along with students’ steps in gaining access to that information. While ideas and evidence in history are published as primary, then secondary, then tertiary sources, students often come to understand those ideas by working backward through that same sequence, using first tertiary, then secondary, then primary sources.

**Primary sources** in history are documents that were created during the era being studied. You might consider some of these as eyewitness accounts. Some examples of primary sources are diaries, letters, official documents, oral histories, or legislation. Some primary sources are personal, while others are institutional or governmental. News reports of an event, written at the time, are also considered primary sources.

**Secondary sources** are the work of historians who use primary sources as part of their research, and create interpretations of history based upon them. A historian may write an article or book on the treatment of slaves in New Brunswick during the late 1700s. In researching this topic, he will probably study many other historian’s articles, and also documents like the *Ward Chipman Slavery Brief* (see [http://lib.unb.ca/Texts/NBHistory/chipman/index.html](http://lib.unb.ca/Texts/NBHistory/chipman/index.html)), an account of the trial in 1800 to grant freedom to a slave named Nancy. The *Ward Chipman Slavery Brief* is a primary source, a verbatim account of the trial, created at the time of the event. The historian’s article will be a secondary source, written after the time in question and pulling together various sources of information to draw conclusions about the past.

**Tertiary sources** are further syntheses of a topic, and can be found in encyclopedias, research handbooks, historical dictionaries, chronologies, and bibliographies. If you know little about a topic, tertiary sources are a good place to start. For instance, if you want to start learning about slavery and emancipation in North America, you might look at the *Encyclopedia of Emancipation and Abolition in the Transatlantic World* (HIL-REF HT985 .E53 2007), because it provides a broad overview of the progress toward emancipation, and describes key events and people. If you were reading about the *Ward Chipman Brief*, and wanted to know more about Ward Chipman, you might read the [entry about him](http://lib.unb.ca/Texts/NBHistory/chipman/index.html) in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, another tertiary source. Normally, tertiary sources are used to orient us as we approach a research area, or to clarify questions that may arise when we work with primary or secondary sources.
Finding Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources

There are several strategies to use in finding various source types. If you use the general Subject Guide for History, you will see that the tabs group materials as either Reference Sources, Books, Journal Articles or Primary Sources (fig. 1).

Reference Sources are, for the most part, tertiary. Books and articles, unless written during the time period being researched, are secondary sources. The Primary Sources tab contains a number of online collections of primary sources that are owned by the library, but these are not the only primary sources available to you.

Finding Primary Sources:

To find primary sources, several techniques are available to you. In the library catalogue, the word “sources” in the subject field is often used by cataloguers to indicate that historical material is a primary source. In UNB WorldCat, switch to the Advanced Search Screen, and try combining a ‘sources’ subject search with words to describe the topic for which you need primary sources. See Figure 2. Other subject terms you should try include diaries, personal narratives, interviews, and correspondence. Of course, the publication date of a work is another factor in deciding whether or not a work is a primary source for a particular study.
Another option for finding primary sources is to use the Subject Guide for History, which has a tab for primary sources that are available online through UNB Libraries. Figure 3 shows some of the collections of primary sources that are available through the subject guide. Some of these collections are simply the texts themselves, while others include very helpful, contextual essays to help you use the material.

A third method involves browsing through the Reference department stacks (HIL-REF), looking for books in your subject area with titles that include the words bibliography, guide, or sources. If you understand the LC classification scheme used to shelve books (see Scheme at left), your stack browsing will be more fruitful. The bibliographies and guides you find will probably not contain the sources themselves, but will list titles of archival materials that you can then track down in the Library’s collection or in an online archive. Many collections of archival material have been digitized, and even a Google search can find them. Be aware of the origin of any online archive you use; archives hosted by.edu sites tend to be more reliable. A good online repository is the Internet History Sourcebooks Project at Fordham University.
If you would like to find historical newspaper stories, advertisements or other popular accounts, the Library subscribes to several digital newspaper archives that may help you. The Journals and Newspapers tab lets you select **Newspaper Packages** (fig. 4). Some of these packages include archival material going back to the mid-1700s, including *Globe and Mail: Canada’s Heritage from 1844*, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*, and *Times Digital Archives*.

**Figure 4: Newspaper Packages**

**Finding Secondary Sources:**

We have used UNB WorldCat and Article and Research Databases to locate books and articles for a research topic. The databases listed under **Find Books** and **Find Articles** in your Subject Guide are the best starting points for finding secondary sources. The databases, *America: History and Life*, and *Historical Abstracts* are designed to serve the research needs specific to history studies, and have tools built into them that will help you to search efficiently. You used some of these tools in the Citations and Journal Articles workbook. Here are a couple more:

1. **Controlled Vocabularies:** Subject-specific databases, like *Historical Abstracts*, keep track of journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, and other publications in historical studies. Indexers read through the articles and index them, using a controlled vocabulary to
describe the contents of each publication. This controlled vocabulary is specific to the database, and understanding it can help you to find the materials you need. In the database records, the terms *subject, descriptor, or headings* refer to the words or phrases used in the controlled vocabulary to describe the contents of a publication. In *Historical Abstracts*, you can see the controlled vocabulary under the Indexes tab (fig. 5). Some databases use a *thesaurus* to organize the controlled vocabulary.

If you were looking for information on ‘cattle,’ a browse through the Headings index for that term would show alternate terms, along with a count of how many articles have been indexed using that term (fig. 6). If ever you are having trouble finding search terms, take a look at the controlled vocabulary.
2. **Field-specific Searching**: Sometimes, you have a good idea of what you want to find when you begin searching in a database. Perhaps you know the author’s name, or the title of the journal in which a particular article appears. You may only be interested in finding something written about a particular geographical area. All of these can be located using field-specific searching. In *Historical Abstracts*, you are provided with a pull-down menu of options for this. Figure 7 shows a search for articles on *agriculture* by someone named *Martinez-Alier*.

![Figure 7: Field-specific searching, topic and author](image)

3. **Linking Search Terms with AND, OR**: In its simplest form, database searching is like drawing up a grocery list: “I need apples AND cheese AND (cake OR cookies).” You will get apples and cheese and then choose either cake or cookies, whichever looks yummier. The words AND and OR are very powerful in database searching, as they let you combine elements in your searching. Remember that OR is used to broaden your search, by finding related or synonymous terms, while AND is used to narrow your search, by bringing in additional criteria. Most online databases offer options for linking search terms (fig. 8), but you can always simply type in one search string (fig. 9). Use parentheses to combine OR terms.

![Figure 8](image)
Finding Tertiary Sources:
Reference, or tertiary sources include encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks of research, almanacs, chronologies, and other publications. They may be in print or online format. This section will help you to find both.

The Subject Guides for History list the most useful reference sources for you to use, but these are only a portion of the tertiary sources that are available to you. (fig. 10).

You have the option of searching these individually, or you can go into specific subject guides and search using a Reference Universe widget (fig. 11), which will look for your search terms in the indices of hundreds of print and online reference works that UNB Libraries own. Reference Universe is very handy for identifying the most useful reference works for your topic.
When researching a new topic it is often necessary to get an overview, explanations of unfamiliar terms, or brief factual information. The print and electronic resources listed below include selected reference materials (dictionaries, encyclopaedias, handbooks, guides, and standards) for the field of History. To find additional reference materials, check Quest (the library catalogue) or our Reference Materials database. For a quick search on your topic, use the Reference Universe search box, here:

![Search for Reference Materials](image)

**Key Resources**

**Online (21)**
- Virtual Reference Library (1)
- Blackwell Reference Online (18)
- ABC-CLIO Ebooks (1)
- Oxford Digital Reference Shelf (1)

**Print (214)**

**Limit by Subject Heading**

**Figure 11: Using the Reference Universe widget to find entries on slavery**

**Figure 12: Reference Universe results**
The Historians’ Publication Cycle

Publication Cycle
- Library catalogues, Quest, UNB WorldCat, Blackwell Reference Online, Cambridge Reference Online, HIL-REF, Reference Universe
- Encyclopedias, textbooks
- Exclusively popular
  - Media outlets, Academic Search Premier, CBCA Complete
    - Popular magazines, newspapers, web
- Scholarly journal articles
  - Article and research databases (e.g. Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life, JSTOR, Periodical Archives Online, ITER, etc.)

Knowledge Cycle
- Generalize & formalize
- Develop & discuss idea, use of primary evidence
- Present preliminary research
- Conference papers, proceedings
- Technical reports, dissertations, theses, research reports
- Dissertations and Theses, EThOS, Association web sites

Access Cycle
- Research diaries, emails, grant proposals
- Limited public access (grey literature), CIAO, online archives

Adapted from: http://www.library.washington.edu/subject/environment/im220/pubcycle.jpg
**Tasks (Due Dec. 1st)**

**Task #1**
Identify the following as either primary, secondary or tertiary sources for research on slavery in Canadian history:


- Report of Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Colony of Sierra Leone, 7 May 1827. Box 13, Item 5.3. Wilberforce House Museum, Hull, U.K.


**Task #2**
Use UNB WorldCat to find a primary source on the fur trade in North America. What is the title of one of the books you find?

______________________________________________________________

What is its location and call number?________________________________________________________

**Task #3**
Use the Reference Universe widget on a History subject guide to find an encyclopedia entry that mentions the use of camels for travel.

What encyclopedia do you find one in?

__________________________________________________________

Which volume and page number is the entry found on? ________________________________

What is its location and call number? ______________________________________________________

Who wrote the entry? _________________________________________________________________

**Task #4**
If I search through the controlled vocabulary of headings in Historical Abstracts, I am only able to find one article with the heading “pickpockets”. I am interested in finding articles about that topic. What other, *allowable* subject headings could I use? Name three headings, and tell me how many articles I might find with each one.
Task #5
Which one of the following searches is likely to find me material on how witches were judged or punished?
Circle the correct search.
Searching: Historical Abstracts | Choose Databases

- witches or witch hunting or witchcraft in SU Subject Terms
- OR trials or courts or persecution in SU Subject Terms
- AND in Select a Field (optional) Add Row

Basic Search | Advanced Search | Visual Search | Search History