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From Inspiration to Publication: Research Resources

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"Simply put, historians gather clues and evidence from the past in order to understand and reconstruct an image of a particular person, place, event, or time period… History is not merely a collection of facts and dates but, rather, the unfolding and telling of a story from the past, which always involves a degree of judgment and interpretation."

– Jenny L. Presnell, *The Information-Literate Historian* (p.4)

Categories of historical research resources:

<u>Tertiary</u> – Sources that compile, summarize, or repackage other resources, such as dictionaries, general or subject encyclopedias, bibliographies, guidebooks, textbooks, and manuals. Great sources to consult if you're new to researching a historical period.

<u>Secondary</u> – Sources that examine, interpret, and describe primary sources, such as historical biographies, narrative histories, or articles from history journals.

<u>Primary</u> – Sources that were written at the time under study, ones that record events as they happened, including letters, diaries, memoirs, maps, newspaper articles, news broadcasts, census records, personal narratives, interviews, and other archival material.

Searching for primary sources:

In Google and library databases, use the following keywords to search for primary sources:

correspondence	memoirs
diaries	personal narratives
documents	primary sources
interviews	sources
letters	speeches
maps	

Search tips:

- Keep your keywords *simple* and *focused* for the best results
- For library databases, get to know the *subject headings* for your topic/era
- Put phrases in quotes to keep words adjacent to one another in your search results (this works for many resources, including Google). Example: "civil war" "primary sources"
- Think of synonyms for your keywords to expand your search.
- When searching for primary sources on the web or in online archives, think about what words for your topic would be in use *at the time*, in addition to those used today.

Specific library databases:

Ancestry.com - also offers individual subscriptions
America: History and Life (US & Canada) and Historical Abstracts (rest of world)
Early English Books Online

Historical newspaper databases: *NYT*, Times (London), *Chicago Tribune*, etc…

JSTOR (stands for Journal STORage) – an online journal archive, available via many university libraries and some public and state libraries. Also offers individual access for up to 100 free articles/month with registration, during covid. See: https://support.jstor.org/hc/en-us/articles/115004760028-How-to-register-get-free-access-to-content

Newspapers.com – offers individual subscriptions to historical newspaper archives.

Oxford English Dictionary, to see which words were in use when.

Library catalogs:

WorldCat – www.worldcat.org. "Find items in libraries near you," over 2 billion items in all. It also lists prices from Amazon and out-of-print booksellers if you want to buy them.

National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, aka NUCMC - https://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/ . See which libraries or archives in the US have manuscript collections on certain topics.

Websites, Digital Libraries, Digital Archives:

Chronicling America - https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/. Historical American newspapers.

Digital Library Directory - http://www.digitallibrarydirectory.com/   A guide to digital archives, searchable by topic.

Internet History Sourcebooks Project – https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ "A collection of public domain and copy-permitted historical texts presented cleanly for educational use."

Many resources included in these sites are part of the "deep web" (accessible via internal databases) and not directly searchable via Google, so it pays to check out these sites separately and look for search engines.

Research sources you may not have thought of:

Google Books, at books.google.com. Can limit by century and see word use/frequency back then.

Individuals (academics or other subject experts) who may be able to provide research leads

Literature written at the time you're writing about, to get a sense for the syntax, vocabulary, social attitudes and concerns, and so forth.

YouTube and British Pathe https://www.britishpathe.com/ – for historical films and clips

Check out *The Information-Literate Historian: A Guide to Research for History Students*, by Jenny L. Presnell (Oxford Univ Press, 2018).

And don't forget…

Speak to a local librarian if you're stuck – we're trained researchers and can help point you in the right direction. Also, reach out to your fellow authors and readers on the HNS Facebook group, in specialized discussions, and at this conference.