

TYPES OF SOURCES (AND RELATED TERMS)

critical essay: an essay which performs literary criticism

literary criticism: analysis of literature

(In this course, I use “critical essay” as a catch-all term for ***journal articles*** and ***book chapters*** which analyze literature. The term can also be used for student essays about literature.)

reference work: a source of information, so called because you refer to it (consult it to learn information); does not generally make an argument for an interpretation, although it may list the arguments and interpretations which other sources have made

Examples:

Oxford English Dictionary (for information about the meanings and origins of words)

American National Biography (for information about the lives of famous Americans)

Encyclopædia Britannica (for information about a wide variety of subjects)

— ***reliable vs. unreliable*** —

reliable source: a source you can trust or rely on

Examples:

The Wall Street Journal (a major news source)

Encyclopædia Britannica (an online encyclopedia from a trusted publisher)

unreliable source: a source that you cannot be sure you can trust

Examples:

Weekly World News (a “news” source known for headlines like “Obama Appoints Martian Ambassador” and “Bat Boy Goes to War”)

Wikipedia (an online encyclopedia which anyone can edit)

— ***academic vs. popular*** —

popular source: a source created for a popular audience (that is, non-researchers)

Some types of popular sources:

news article: an article published by a news source

popular website: a website targeted to a popular audience (non-researchers)

academic source: a source created by and for researchers—typically (1) written, peer-reviewed, edited, published, and read by researchers associated with research institutions (such as universities), and (2) focusing on a particular academic discipline—such as literary criticism
peer-reviewed: reviewed (read, checked, corrected) by the author’s peers (a person’s peers are that person’s equals or companions; the peers of a researcher are other researchers working in the same academic discipline)

Some types of academic sources:

journal article: an article published in an academic journal

academic journal: a periodical publication, which (1) is edited by researchers, typically peer-reviewed by researchers, and mostly written for and read by researchers, and which (2) focuses on a particular academic discipline—such as literary criticism in general, or literary criticism of a particular set of literature, such as Victorian novels; may be printed, online, or both

Examples of journal articles:

Jones, Buford and Kent Ljungquist. “Poe, Mrs. Osgood, and ‘Annabel Lee.’” *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1983, pp. 275-280.

Morrill, David S. “‘Twilight is not good for maidens’: Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in ‘Goblin Market.’” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 28, no. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 1-16.

Examples of academic journals:

Studies in the American Renaissance

Victorian Poetry

book chapter (in an academic book): a chapter (in an academic book), which focuses on a specific part of the topic of the whole book
(In some academic books, the whole book is by one author; in others, each chapter is by a different author.)

academic book: typically written by a researcher or researchers and published by a research institution (such as a university)

Examples of book chapters in academic books by multiple authors:

Tilley, Elizabeth. “Gender and Role-Playing in *Lady Audley’s Secret*.” *Exhibited by Candlelight: Sources and Developments in the Gothic Tradition*, edited by Valeria Tinkler-Villani and Peter Davidson, with Jane Stevenson. Rodopi, 1995, pp. 197-204.

Gubar, Marah. “Peter Pan as Children’s Theatre: The Issue of Audience.” *The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Literature*, edited by Lynne Vallone and Julia Mickenberg, Oxford University Press, 2011. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. Accessed May 2014.

Examples of book chapters in academic books by single authors:

Toth, Emily. “Girls and Women.” *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. University Press of Mississippi, 1999, pp. 3-21.

Elmore, A. E. “The Heart of the Message.” *Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address: Echoes of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2014, pp. 190-218, 247-249.

online academic resource / database: online resource created or published by researchers; may contain journal articles, reference works, and/or primary sources

Examples:

William Blake Archive (mostly primary sources: Blake’s poetry, art, and letters)

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly (the articles of one academic journal online)

Oxford English Dictionary (reference work)

— *primary vs. secondary* —

primary source: “Primary sources are original sources of information that have not yet been filtered through analysis, examination or interpretation.”¹

Examples:

Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” (a literary work which secondary sources analyze to give interpretations of its meaning)
a letter written by Lord Byron to Lady Melbourne (a historical document which biographers use to piece together the events of Lord Byron’s life)

secondary source: “not an original source... has no direct physical connection to the person or event being studied”¹

Examples:

Jeremy Foote’s “Speed That Kills: The Role of Technology in Kate Chopin’s ‘The Story of An Hour’” (a critical essay which analyzes a primary source to give an interpretations of its meaning)
a biography of Lord Byron (which uses primary sources such as letters to piece together the events of Lord Byron’s life)

¹ “Primary versus Secondary Sources.” *Boston College Libraries*, 15 Dec. 2016, <http://libguides.bc.edu/englishlit/sources>. Accessed 6 Feb. 2017.