One very famous example of a non-credible secondary source was a paper, published in a very credible scientific journal, that linked autism to some of the ingredients in childhood vaccines. The result of this seemingly credible study was that many parents stopped vaccinating their children out of fear of autism. The result on society was an increase in childhood diseases, such as measles and whooping cough, that had almost been wiped out in the U.S. and elsewhere. Other scientists tried to replicate the results of the study, but they could not (validating results is also part of academic, especially scientific, inquiry). This failure to replicate the results called into question the validity of the original study. The original author and the journal recanted the study, so this relationship between vaccines and autism has now been debunked.

Tertiary Sources

Tertiary sources are those sources that have already been interpreted by two people. These sources are not nearly as reliable as primary and secondary sources because it is nearly impossible for a reader/listener to determine if the interpretation others have made is logical and accurate/appropriate. Common examples of tertiary sources are magazine articles in which an author uses a number of secondary sources or, lately, newspaper articles that cite other newspaper articles rather than an original source. Blogs are another common tertiary source, and they are rarely credible enough to include as a source for academic writing. (However, some academic researchers do have their own blogs, and if their work is generally considered credible, so are their blogs). Tertiary sources are like rumors – you have to take them with "a grain of salt." Many times, tertiary sources will also be filled with emotive language to get you to feel a certain way about the topic. This is a clue that your source may not be credible enough.

What Kind of Sources Should I Use?

Your topic and purpose determine whether you must use both primary and secondary sources in your paper. Ask yourself which sources are most likely to provide the information that will answer your research questions. If you are writing a research paper about reality television shows, you will need to use some reality shows as a primary source, but secondary sources, such as a reviewer's critique, are also important. If you are writing about the health effects of nicotine, you will probably want to read the published results of scientific studies, but secondary sources, such as magazine articles discussing the outcome of a recent study, may also be helpful.

Once you have thought about what kinds of sources are most likely to help you answer your research questions, you may begin your search for print and electronic resources. The challenge here is to conduct your search efficiently. Writers use strategies to help them find the sources that are most relevant and reliable while steering clear of sources that will not be useful.

Print Resources versus Electronic Resources

These days, there really isn't much difference in how you find your resources, whether they are print or electronic. Either way, you will likely search for them digitally. The only difference is whether you read the read or watch the resource online or hold it and read a print version. Keep in mind, however, that some potentially useful sources may be available only in print form. Others may be only available electronically. The following table lists different types of resources available at public, college, and university libraries.

Table 10.4.1: Library Resources

Resource Type	Description	Example(s)
Reference works	Reference works provide a summary of information about a particular topic. Almanacs, encyclopedias, atlases, medical reference books, and scientific abstracts are examples of reference works. In some cases, reference books may not be checked out of a library; rather, they must be read there. Note that reference works are many steps removed from original primary sources and are often brief, so these should be used only as a starting point when you gather information.	 The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2010 Diagnostic and Statistical Manual published by the American Psychiatric Association
Nonfiction books	Nonfiction books provide in-depth coverage of a topic. Trade books, biographies, and how-to guides are usually written for a general audience. Scholarly books and scientific studies are usually written for an audience that has specialized knowledge of a topic.	 The Low-Carb Solution: A Slimmer You in 30 Days Carbohydrates, Fats and Proteins: Exploring the Relationship Between Macronutrient Ratios and Health Outcome