

Using Archives & Primary Sources

Finding Primary Sources Online & in Print

Think about the different disciplines represented by your research question and look for material in discipline-specific sources. Be creative!

Research is iterative: when you find a new search term or piece of information, go back to your sources and re-search using the new term(s) to find even more.

[Library catalog](#) & [WorldCat](#)

Take advantage of subject keywords such as:

- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Interviews
- Speeches
- Personal narratives
- Autobiography

WorldCat lets you limit to Archival Materials if you want to consult original sources (unpublished material). When you find a collection or archive of interest, search online for its finding aid (the description of the collection's contents).

Specialized bibliographies and research handbooks can be helpful also.

For published material, [WorldCat.org](#) or [Google Books](#) will locate the nearest library that holds the item you want

Use [Google Books](#) and [Internet Archive](#) for text mining, identifying obscure references

Consult our [Primary Sources](#), [News](#), and [Data/Statistics](#) Research Guides for selected sources

Use the [Subject Specialists](#) page to make an appointment for more specific consultation

Government Documents & Data

Many government documents are considered primary sources; e.g. court opinions, laws and hearings, presidential materials, census/agency survey data, and government agency reports.

Some can be found through Google or other search engines, but some are in digitized collections that search engines don't index.

Wellesley College is a depository library for federal government documents. Many documents (both print and electronic) can be found by using the Wellesley library catalog

Government information is freely available to the public; however, Wellesley has specialized databases (Lexis/Nexis Academic, Lexis/Nexis Statistical Insight, Westlaw Campus) that allow for more complex searching techniques.

Data is a primary source and can take the form of raw data sets to be used with codebooks and statistical software packages, or summary statistics already compiled in table form. Use the following sources to get started:

- <http://www.wellesley.edu/Library/Research/GovDocs/digcollns.html>
- <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>
- <http://www.wellesley.edu/Library/Research/data.html>
- <http://catalog.gpo.gov/F?RN=387640060> – catalog of govdocs from GPO, 1976+

Archives

Funding:

Need money to travel to do your research or to acquire a specific research tool? Ask your advisor about the availability of department funding and make sure you look at the fellowships listed on the Dean of the College's [Student Travel & Research Opportunities](#) webpage.

Planning your visit to an archive, repository, or special collection:

Archival materials are generally one-of-a-kind, must be viewed at the library/repository, and cannot be checked out.

Search online catalogs or finding aids if they are available so you have a sense of what you want to look at, what is available, and how much of it there is (i.e. 4 folders, 40 boxes, etc.).

Verify that what you need is actually held at that location. Some libraries and archives store portions of their collections in off-site storage facilities that have to be retrieved before your visit.

Familiarize yourself with the library or repository's policies page. You will find information there regarding patron registration and whether or not booking a research appointment is necessary. You can also find out whether they allow the use of laptops or digital cameras in the reading room, and the availability and cost of scanning or photocopying services, etc.

Things to remember:

The papers of an individual or organization are not always housed in the same library or repository. Ask the library/repository staff if they know whether any related papers are held elsewhere.

You could be given microfilm, a photocopy, or a scan of the original document if that original is too fragile to be handled.

Library staff will instruct you on the best way to handle the materials. You could be asked to wear white cotton gloves while examining photographs or shown how to support the binding of a book using a book cradle.

Want to include reproductions of images or documents in your thesis or other published research? Make sure to ask the library staff about copyright permission and rights for the material you wish to use before including it.