**How to Find Quality Primary Sources**

**(student-created directions)**

1. Start with a nice specific topic.

This isn’t always easy, most of the time in your searching the teacher is going to give you the topic. However, sometimes what the teacher wants is a little more broad than you would like to find primary sources. Please remember primary sources a lot of times are VERY SPECIFIC. At times this can be a bother but over time if you learn to not search the broad topic but search related more specific terms. For example, if I want world war 2 primary sources I don’t just search “world war 2 primary source”. While you can find things like that, it’s the same primary sources that most people can find. The better ones will come when you do specific topic searching such as “The Battle of the Bulge” or “Concentration Camps”. Finding related topics isn’t always easy but it’s nothing a good google search can’t fix. Also, remember that primary sources weren’t written yesterday. People haven’t always called these events the same thing since they happened, World War 1 was originally called The Great War until after World War 2. So if you can’t find something under one name find out if there is a different one.

1. Use Databases

While google has slowly taken over the world these databases that the school pays to use are actually intended for research. Google is a search engine not a database. Not to bash google or anything because you can find some good stuff on google but, I would limit myself to using it as a last resort. Personally, Gale and The Library of Congress are my “go-to”. They usually have every topic no matter what you would be searching for. Ms. Dyar and I have made a Diigo list (which I hope she keeps) with links to primary sources and primary source tools that should make everything a lot easier to find. When searching these databases and you can’t exactly find anything it doesn’t hurt anything to kind of search around the site. You can fall upon a good source instead of you actively searching it. Even if it is an unrelated topic I would save it just if someone needs it.

1. Be Patient

The documents you are looking for are at times 100’s of years old and a lot of them are buried deep in these databases. There will be times when you can’t find anything on a topic. When that happens you need to diversify. Search new places try different search terms. There is usually always going to be some type of source on every topic somewhere. The key is just finding that “somewhere” (which is a lot easier sounding than it is at times).

1. Be Very Picky (if possible), Find Historical Significance

At times, you will get a topic that comes up with tons of sources. But, just because the source comes up when you search a term doesn’t always mean they are closely related. If you can’t immediate link the event or term you searched for with the source that comes up DO NOT use it. If you cannot link the two things, the people learning about it most likely will not be able to find the link either. If you have sources that need to be sent to a teacher, order the sources from ones that will be most helpful (and by definition most closely related and relevant) to least helpful. A lot of times teacher don’t necessarily want 10 primary sources because it is just to much of a volume to highlight 10 primary sources in class. In my experience a teacher will use from 1-5 or 7 sources (the higher numbers are more for the history teachers). If a teacher asks for more they will usually specify that they would like more than you would think to get. Regardless of type there will be 1-3 sources that you really like. These are usually the best sources and will be the most useful for the teacher you are researching for. I would send these as the first attachments if you are emailing or put these at the top of the pile if you are printing.