

What kind of sources do you need for your own project?

You will need different types of sources depending on the topic you have chosen.

Let's say you are doing a project about your local environment, including its forests, rivers and rocks. You need to get your hands on a good mix of primary and secondary sources.

Remember: primary sources are original items. Secondary sources explain original items. So a piece of local rock is a primary source, but a book or website about rocks is a secondary source.

You can learn a lot from touching and looking at the rock, but it is only by reading the book and its illustrations that you will be able to work out what kind of rock it is. You may well need to look up a few different books and websites.

The same goes for a leaf from a local tree, for example. The leaf is a primary source, but a book about trees is a secondary source. The shape, colour, texture and smell of the leaf tell you a lot. But if you make notes of this information and then compare it with leaves described in a book or a website about trees, then you should be able to work out what kind of tree the leaf belongs to.

Creatures are primary sources, too. So a squirrel running up the tree near your school is a primary source, but a video documentary about squirrels is a secondary source.

Watching the squirrel running about gives you lots of information to write down and illustrate, but watching the video will give you more information and greater understanding. What other kinds of secondary sources might tell you more about squirrels?

The same goes for creatures in the local river. A frog is a primary source, but a talk about frogs and other river creatures from a local wildlife ranger is a secondary source. Where else might you learn more information about frogs? Is it a primary or a secondary source?

Of course, your project could be about something completely different. You still need to think about different types of sources that will help you.

Electricity is a topic that would make a great project. Sources are just as important here.

For example, when you touch a metal door frame or pull off a jumper too quickly you might get a slight electric shock. This shock is a primary source. You can describe what happens by writing it down and making an illustration. This would make a great experiment.

But why do you get an electric shock? Guess what type of source you will need to look at for an explanation? ... that's right: a secondary source, like a book or a website.

What other kinds of electricity are there? Where does electricity come from? How do we generate electricity and make it useful? How does electricity get to your home and school? What machines and services depend on electricity?

These are just some of the questions you could ask, and the answers will be found in primary and secondary sources.