

# Primary or secondary research



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Should I use Primary or Secondary Research in my Dissertation?

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So, you are starting to think about your dissertation, and you’ve grasped the basics including the difference between primary and secondary research.

However, understanding what the differences are won’t necessarily help you to decide whether you should go for a secondary-data based, literature-review style dissertation, or get to grips with primary research. This guide is designed to help you decide what’s best for you.

## **Overview of the Differences**

Just to remind you, there are clear differences between primary and secondary research. Primary research means research which is carried out for the purposes of your study. Secondary research is information that already exists. Many people chose to do an extended literature review, and this is the main type of secondary study. Secondary data can include journal articles, textbooks, online sources, company and industry data and other types of information. However, you might also decide to carry out new analysis on existing data, for example SPSS analysis on a large dataset collected by other researchers. This is another form of secondary research.

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## **Primary or Secondary Research: How to Decide**

Your tutor, professors or department might have a preference for the type of dissertation you do. In some subjects you might be strongly advised to do a primary study; in others it might not be practical (English language or Philosophy, for example).

To some extent, whether you chose primary or secondary research will also depend on your research question. If the area is under-investigated, adding to the body of existing information by a small-scale study might make sense.

Also listen to what your tutor suggests. He or she might feel that a primary study would be worthwhile.

You might feel negatively about primary research, imagining that it will involve more work, or be more difficult, but you can access a great deal of help along the way, either from your tutor or online, and the experience will be valuable for you in your future career.

If you are particularly interested in exploring theory you might want to consider secondary research. You might feel strongly that one or other model is better than another, feel that a new model needs to be developed, or want to review a large amount of existing research in the field. You might want to look at the usefulness of existing theories for understanding particular circumstances or behaviour patterns, for instance, or review the existing studies in a particular field.

It is easy to assume that secondary research studies are easier, but this is not the case. You will need to evaluate the importance of the material you look at, compare and contrast the theories put forward, arrange the material in a logical way, and critique and analyse it in much more detail.

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If you decide to do a primary research study, you will also need to decide whether to collect qualitative or quantitative data. You might also decide to use a mixture of both types of data. Qualitative studies are useful for finding out why people behave as they do, what they think about issues, and how they feel in depth and emotionally. Quantitative studies are appropriate to questions of number, amount, and for dealing with measurable phenomena.

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