

Secondary/documentary sources: Are documents that record a variety of information. This information can range from recording parts of an individual's life (personal) to information about a specific time in society or a particular aspect in that society. Documentary sources are usually qualitative but can also be quantitative

Statistics – Quantitative	Example study	<p>General strengths – positivist Stats seen as social facts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistics can be easily generalised to a wider population. Durkheim was able to apply the findings of his study into suicide to other countries and cultures (theoretical). Detailed analysis of statistics makes it possible to make predictions of future events. Durkheim was able to make predictions that too much social control may lead to suicide (theoretical). Most official statistics are based on large data sets and therefore provide reliable information. For example education statistics are based on the exam results and attendance of millions of students over a number of years (theoretical). It is possible to use official statistics to make comparisons between variables and map out "trends of social change". For example statistics show that most crimes committed by young working class males and that crime is decreased in the last two years (theoretical). The collection of statistics is not influenced by the researcher, reducing bias. For example stats connected to gender differences in educational attainment contain little researcher bias (practical). Statistics are cheap and quick to use. Durkheim was able to access the suicide statistics of many European countries with ease and without much cost (practical). As official statistics are produced by governments they provide a credible source of information. For example census data provides reliable data on population shifts (practical) <p>A2 extra points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistics can be used to compare and contrast various social phenomena across different cultures and countries. Durkheim looked at the suicide rates of a number of countries to establish a law concerning why people committed suicide. (theoretical). 	<p>Specific weaknesses of statistics – Interpretivists Stats seen as social constructions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The weakness of most official statistics is that they are social constructions. This means that they are the product of a complex process of decision making by various people (e.g. the police, coroners, doctors, priests). For example crime and health statistics underestimate the total amount of crime and illness in society because of under reporting by the public and under recording by the police and doctors (theoretical). Statistics can easily be biased at the time they were recorded. Any predictions are based on the accuracy of the statistics and the interpretation of the results. For example education statistics fail to include students who have not been entered for exams. (theoretical). Statistics lack insight into the meaning, feelings and motivations of the people being studied. For example Durkheim's analysis of the relationship between suicide and society completely ignores any individual motivations that people may have. E.g. Escape, revenge (theoretical). It is important that the statistics being used are up to date as they can quickly go out of date. For example statistics on mortality by class are only produced every ten years (practical). Statistics are often forced to fit research topics. The information has not been gathered for the researcher and so may not include the information required. E.g. Little information exists on the relationship between crime and ethnicity. (practical) Statistics cannot be verified by the researcher and so cannot be double checked (practical). <p>A2 extra points: (A2 students use your notes on the problems/limitations of crime and suicide stats to develop arguments – especially idea that stats are social construction).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In using official statistics one must accept the way concepts are defined and measured. E.g. In some statistics social class is measured on occupational status where as in others it is based on income (theoretical).
	<p>Durkheim (1903)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmark study in sociology concerned with suicide rates. Durkheim used statistics to look at explanations other than psychological to explain suicide. Durkheim studied rates from a number of European countries. Durkheim believed that suicide was to do with the individual's relationship to society. Durkheim came up with four explanations of suicide (see crime sheets). 		
Personal documents – Qualitative	Example study	<p>Strengths – Interpretivists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One can gain massive insight into people's lives. Sometimes this is the only way to gain such insight. One can really get to understand people's feelings and the motives behind their behaviour (theoretical). One could obtain highly valid information. Presumably these documents were written at the people time with no ulterior motives, so one may get close to people's actual experiences, meanings and feelings (theoretical). Qualitative data can be examined systematically to identify patterns by using content analysis (theoretical). These documents are usually cheap and easily accessible to the researcher because no time is wasted in primary (practical). It is possible to use a wide range of personal documents from a variety of different sources making it easy to make comparisons (practical). Documentary sources often provide a useful historical dimension (practical) 	<p>Weaknesses – Positivists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One can question the authenticity and credibility of such documents. Is the document genuine? Is it complete? Does the author have sincere and honest motives? Is it valid? Is it reliable? (theoretical). Much of the findings and arguments that come from these sources depend on the interpretation skills of the researcher. There may not be similar documents available to check the reliability and representativeness of the document (theoretical). Personal documents are very subjective and so it is difficult to generalise from them (theoretical). It is very difficult to check for any bias in the documents. One can not check for inaccuracies (practical). Has consent been given if the author is still alive? Moreover if the person is deceased there is a danger of exploitation (practical). Many documentary sources are subject to bias as the content may reflect the strong opinions of the person writing the documents at a particular point in time (practical).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters E.g. Letters from a lost generation by Vera Britten concerning the trenches in the First World War. Autobiographies (life history) E.g. Long walk to freedom by Nelson Mandela concerning apartheid. Diaries E.g. The diary of Anne Frank concerning the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam. 		