Definition of primary

1: first in order of time or development: primitive • the primary stage of civilization • the primary lesion of a disease

2 a: of first rank, importance, or value: principal • the primary purpose
   b: basic, fundamental • security is a primary need
   c: of, relating to, or constituting the principal quills of a bird's wing
   d: of or relating to agriculture, forestry, and the extractive industries or their products
   e: expressive of present or future time • primary tense
   f: of, relating to, or constituting the strongest of the three or four degrees of stress recognized by most linguists • the first syllable of basketball carries primary stress

3 a: direct, firsthand • primary sources of information
   b: not derivable from other colors, odors, or tastes
   c: preparatory to something else in a continuing process • primary instruction
   d: of or relating to a primary school • primary education
   e: of or relating to a primary election • a primary candidate
   f: belonging to the first group or order in successive divisions, combinations, or ramifications • primary nerves
   g: directly derived from ores • primary metals
   h: of, relating to, or being the amino acid sequence in proteins • primary protein structure

4: resulting from the substitution of one of two or more atoms or groups in a molecule • a primary amine; especially: being or characterized by a carbon atom having a bond to only one other carbon atom

5: of, relating to, involving, or derived from primary meristem • primary tissue • primary growth
6 : of, relating to, or involved in the production of organic substances by green plants
   • primary productivity

7 : providing primary care • a primary physician

See primary defined for English-language learners
See primary defined for kids