

Witness

A witness is an existing instance of a [text](#) (see also [copy](#)). The witnesses form the evidence for the [textual tradition](#) of a given text, and are the basis from which [stemmata](#) are constructed. Witnesses may be carried in any physical [medium](#); normally these will be [manuscripts](#) or printed books, but can also include oral recordings and the like in the case of folk tales and other oral traditions. A single manuscript is often witness to multiple texts, as manuscripts generally carry more than one text.

A distinction is normally drawn between a 'direct witness', which is an instance of the text observed directly in a [document](#), and an '[indirect witness](#)', which may be a paraphrase, a translation, or even merely a reference to the text. Witnesses may be complete or incomplete, i.e. [fragmentary](#) or [lacunary](#). Some scholars may also speak of a 'conjectural witness', which is not an extant textual witness but rather a [postulated lost intermediary](#) in a stemma.

In other languages

DE: Zeuge
FR: témoin
IT: testimone

[TA](#)