

Studying with multiple sources

Course information can be delivered through a variety of formats:

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| Lectures by teacher or guests | Textbooks | Fictional story/novels |
| Interviews and biographies eyewitness accounts or commentaries | Duplicates/hand-outs of (text) chapters, magazine articles | Original source material as diaries, government documents, proceedings, minutes |
| Electronic media such as videos, radio programs | Internet web site pages, discussion groups | |

Stahl, et al (1998) found that using multiple-text sources can only be effective if we are taught to use them properly. As beginners, we tend to be more consistent in what information we select from short, well-constructed texts. Longer, less structured documents tend to be more confusing.

Text books

- provide a foundation of facts and viewpoints to provide an overview
- sequence information and facts to understand issues
- create a context for comparing and understanding other sources
- are written in a neutral, objective tone

Problems with a single text

for a subject or course include:

- information is often "academic" lacking the drama of real life experience, adventure, and experimentation
- bias is hidden or concealed ignoring competing facts, priorities, minority viewpoints
- a single interpretation limits how reported facts are prioritized/sequenced restricting viewpoint (Euro/Caucasian) or subject testing (white male)
- original/eyewitness sources of information are secondary to interpretative accounts

Additional readings and alternative sources

of information can assist you to

- **create a richer understanding** with additional information and perspective
- **interact or engage with facts, actors, circumstances** of the material

- **practice and familiarize**
yourself with new subject vocabulary and concepts
- **process opposing, even conflicting,**
points of view in order to assess, evaluate, defend

Conflicting information however can impede your learning,
unless you can

- **analyze it** for commonalties
- **reorganize or synthesize**
your model for understanding it
- **consider the impact of, and evaluate, conflicts**
- **filter it with a context presented in the basic text**

Some Recommendations:

- **Read your text**
to provide the factual framework from which to begin
(see also [Taking notes from a text book](#))
- **Proceed to shorter, more focused sources**
of information especially if you are inexperienced in the subject
- **Practice with multiple texts** to improve your evaluative skills:
 - compare and contrast your sources
 - analyze them for bias or viewpoint
 - note when and where they were written, and how that affects the viewpoint
- **Understand the connections**
between events, actors, and circumstances rather than learn a series of "facts" which can be easily be forgotten
- **Use in-class or on-line discussion time**
to test your understanding and ask questions!