

Studying with multiple sources

Course information can be delivered through a variety of formats:

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!