Studying with multiple sources

Course information can be delivered through a variety of formats:

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