Studying with multiple sources

Course information can be delivered through a variety of formats:

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