

EVALUATING COLLEGE TEXTBOOKS FOR COURSE ADOPTION
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As you know, choosing the right texts for your courses is often not as clear and straightforward as you hoped or assumed. Depending on your or your students' degree of reliance on the textbook to acquire course content, the wrong one can confound learning, eat away class time, skew information, pauperize students (or provide inadequate return on investment), and even sabotage your instructional goals. What to do, then?

Perennial discontent with commercial textbooks has led some instructors to favor primary source material instead, or customized compilations, or interactive text-web delivery of course content. The future is here in the form of modularized digitized text, learning objects, and images, delivered online. Distance learning without necessarily the distance. In some colleges across the country, institutions license textbooks that students access chapter by chapter via the intranet. It's easy to go wrong with electronically delivered content too, but for now I will talk about print textbooks, which remain the norm.

In retrospect, as a college instructor in anthropology, sociology, and world history, I often chose the wrong textbooks. For a time the introductory cultural anthropology students were forced to construct an understanding of that field entirely through ethnographies alone. The physical anthropology students had to buy a lab manual in lieu of labs. The sociology students got a text that the department head later pointed out to me was written by a well-known Marxist (I had simply liked the flowing "man-in-the-street" narrative). And the undergraduate world history students got 2,400 pages of heavily documented text in two volumes and had to buy an atlas besides. I even taught a semester or two using a text I created with what today would be regarded as illegal photocopies. (Fair use definitions for academe were more liberal in the past, mainly through ignorance of copyright law.)

My subsequent career in higher education publishing gave me another perspective on textbook selection. I became enlightened on matters high and low regarding textbook acquisition, development, marketing, and sales. Much of what I have to say here reflects my twin backgrounds as textbook adopter and textbook developer, augmented by memories of textbooks I used as a student in the now distant past. I still remember my Magruder, Dobzhansky, and Harris, for example. What ones do you remember, and what made them stick with you? I keep a shelf of what I call heirloom textbooks, once great titles long out of print. My guidelines for choosing a textbook for your course refer also to these heirlooms. I also will have something to say about when to consider not using a textbook.

Matching You to the Textbook

The first question to ask when choosing a textbook is, what are you intending to do with it? And how does it fit with the way you teach? I used to tell state college students in Introduction to World History that their 2,400-page two-volume textbook was just another perspective to compare with mine or to augment what I had to say in my lectures! Furthermore, exams would not draw directly from the text. The textbook was there primarily to keep me (and them) honest. I was appealing to their inherent need for perspective balance in any true intellectual inquiry. Hard to own such folly! But, okay, admit it--you've done this too. (And as they become more dependent on you and less inquiring, students start sharing or skipping the textbook.)

This model of instruction, by the way—"sage on the stage" lecturing to a largely passive audience—is passé with today's enlightened instructional methods, which have finally filtered down (or up?) to higher education classrooms. Nevertheless, many instructors still choose slightly divergent textbooks that will allow students to question their learning or fill in the gaps, should they be motivated (miraculously) to do so. If this really is your goal in using a textbook, you probably should not teach introductory courses, because most beginners do not yet have the requisite attitudes and skills to use a textbook in this way. If you do teach first-tier courses, reconsider your *raison d'être* for textbook selection.

An alternative to choosing a textbook as an alter ego is to choose one for no other reason than that it covers course content far more comprehensively than you can or will in your classes. This textbook has it all, so that your digressions, rants, pet topics, areas of ignorance, and other inefficiencies or lapses do not necessarily compromise educational outcomes. Plus, you can use it to generate test items. I call this "covering" (as in "covering one's ass"). Students, skipping classes, come to rely on this textbook (or its study guide) by default to acquire basic content, primarily in preparation for exams. If this is your intention, note that you cannot count on the college store to order the study guide without your say so; i.e., it would be inhumane to overlook it in the adoption process.

If you want complete control over student learning, are not concerned about "covering," and write exams only from lectures, consider using a shadow text. This is a comprehensive outline of course content—à la Cliff Notes. Through instruction, you fill in the outline yourself for student consumption, and students study from their notes, referring to the outline only for the chronology of details. Note, however, that you need highly independent learners with good attendance to do this.

Using the textbook to teach is another matter. A textbook that teaches divides selected content into comparatively small and manageable chunks, has apparatus and pedagogy that guide readers through a learning process, and provides opportunities for self-assessment. This textbook is a tool for the student and is student-centered. It places their learning above both you and the subject. As the

textbook teaches, your role reverses somewhat, freeing you up to interact, elaborate, illustrate, facilitate, demonstrate, enchant—all the things that make the learning matter. This is harder, of course, so this choice is only for the good and the brave; but I believe it should be a mainstay of quality undergraduate education.

You may have other reasons for using (or not using) a textbook (even a good one) in your course. What are they?

Matching the Textbook to the Course

In the textbook adoption process you must discriminate between first- and second-tier undergraduate courses and graduate courses, and between courses conducted in lecture halls versus seminar rooms. If you teach a lecture course with many sections managed by graduate students, for example, you need as much standardization as a common textbook allows. If your course is introductory, a core textbook probably will be more useful to students than thought-provoking alternative texts. Save those for the second-tier course. In other words, your Introduction to Economics students are not ready for *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1776), beyond a quote or two, much as you would like to think you could make it accessible for them.

Commercial textbook publishers are careful to pitch textbooks to particular course levels and requirements, based on their research. These companies invest in national market research to learn how courses are taught and what is expected by way of content. The sales rep can show you an introduction to biology for non-majors in biology, for example, and another introduction to biology for biology majors. You probably can order the textbook for the majors course with or without correlations to a lab manual supplement. The same company may have other introduction to biology textbooks for AP students and community college students in terminal degree programs. They probably also have an introduction to biology with a technology focus called introduction to the life sciences. In addition, non-survey introductory biology courses may selectively focus on cellular or molecular biology, for example, or on evolutionary biology.

So, what, exactly, is the expected scope and sequence of the course you are teaching, and at what level are you teaching it?

Matching the Textbook to the Students

Another key question to ask is, why are students taking this course? The answer should help guide your textbook selection. After all, the course is for them, right? If they are taking it because of what Rate My Professor says about you, then go ahead and be quirky in your choice of textbooks. But perhaps you are unlucky enough to be teaching one of those hated required prerequisite courses in which students otherwise would not enroll. The textbook, then, should provide them

with the standard foundational information that your department deems necessary for further study of the subject.

Are they community college students seeking undergraduate degrees or transfer to four-year schools? Then the textbook should help to qualify them. Are students taking the course to prepare for practice? Then choose a textbook that focuses on theory into practice, mechanics, or application. Or is your course likely the last one they will ever take in your subject? Then, (for pity's sake), give them the gist, the bare bones, the bottom line, and go for flashes of insight. Here is the best venue, for example, for a brief or concise version of a standard textbook. Or maybe one of those new magazine-style textbooks modeled on image-based learning.

Students usually are not who we think they are or might wish them to be. A classic error of college instructors is to err on the side of either optimism or pessimism. The optimist sees eager young minds full of misinformation or ignorance, yearning for enlightenment and/or for the intellectual tools that will enable them to be happy and/or rich. This instructor is prone to choosing textbooks that expect too much of naive readers. The pessimist, on the other hand, sees skeptical young minds full of ennui. They need to be shown a thing or two, but they don't care about enlightenment, can't read or write, don't want to have to work for knowledge, and expect good grades. This instructor often favors unchallenging or boring textbooks that expect little, which actively reinforces students' natural disgust over hypocrisies, wherever found.

That said, realistic assessment of students' abilities (or zone of proximal development) is essential to proper textbook selection, bringing me to the question of "level."

Difficulty Level and Readability

Matching textbooks to students involves understanding where they are at intellectually and in terms of basic literacy skills. "Difficulty" in this context refers to degree of intellectual rigor; that is, it has to do with the complexity and coherence of thought in a narrative. A "difficult" text is one that leaves out parts of the process of thought, assuming (rightly or wrongly) that the reader can easily supply the missing parts. However, leaps of logic, inference, source citation, faith, and irony are all guaranteed to leave novices in the dust. Thus, you should not choose a textbook without first reading samples of the narrative to test for difficulty, with as much empathy for the real student reader as you can muster.

Note, however, that a difficult text may be eminently readable, as difficulty and readability are not the same. Readability is a measure simply of word order, word length, sentence length, sentence complexity, and similar features of paragraphs. Some of the most difficult texts on record are deceptively easy reads. Several formulae of varying usefulness exist for testing readability. I like the modified Fry for postsecondary instructional materials, but I always confirm my assessment

using two or three methods. A keyword search on “readability” will lead you to several appropriate methods for analyzing readability.

The point of making sure that students can both read and comprehend your chosen textbook is simply to avoid impeding their acquisition of course content unnecessarily. I don’t agree with the tough love types who feel that students should have to struggle for meaning. There is more than enough struggle to go around as it is. Facilitating their reading for rapid comprehension while also stretching their flexibility and range of thought seems the best mix for a textbook. Find the students where they are.

Commercial textbook publishers subject manuscripts to readability analyses, which sometimes serve as the point of purchase. As a rule of thumb, for undergraduate textbooks they aim for grade 12, on the unassailable logic that the college undergraduate is a high school graduate. Being labeled in the trade as “too high level” or “too low level” can be the kiss of death for a textbook. “Too high level” translates as “for majors only” or “for graduate students,” which publishers may see as too small as markets to invest in. Educational publishers, like trade book and mass market publishers, need blockbusters—the highest possible volume of sales to the broadest possible market segment. At the same time, “too low level” often translates as “dumbed down”—pretty risky nowadays in the politics of textbook publishing, despite the unquestionable success of Wiley’s “For Dummies” model.

Certain characteristics give away high-level and low-level texts, and your choice of a textbook for your course may properly lie somewhere between them. The hallmarks of high-level texts include sophisticated designs with double- or triple-columned text; footnotes or chapter endnotes; extensive parenthetical source citations; a bibliography in addition to a reference section in the book end matter; and long separate author and subject indexes. Sometimes the only chapter-closing pedagogy is a selected or annotated bibliography. Narrative text may be comparatively uninterrupted by headings or may have 4 or 5 levels of heading, or may have double-numbered paragraphs. Boxes tend to be few, unillustrated, long, and thinly linked to the narrative. Photos are fewer in number and printed smaller. Higher-level texts tend to have non-pedagogical (purely descriptive) captions, if any, and to ask fewer questions of readers generally. Figures and tables may even appear without titles. Material is presented authoritatively with little effort to interact with learners, and there may be no student supplements other than a lab manual.

Low-level texts, in contrast, are distinguished by fewer references applied more broadly, such that parenthetical source citations may not even appear within the body of the narrative. In terms of design, lower-level texts typically have one column of text with comparatively wide margins, often containing extensive pedagogical marginalia, including definitions of key terms and tie-ins with print and electronic student supplements. The text may be broken up fairly frequently with dramatic-looking nested headings, but usually only two or three levels of

headings are used. Interim reviews may follow each section of text, and extensive review and application sections may appear after each chapter or part. More pages may contain more images, art, boxes, and white space than text or applications, and photos may be printed large and carry pedagogical captions. Boxes typically are more integrated within narrative context. The book end matter may have a Glossary, and the author and subject indexes usually are combined.

Adaptations of textbooks, such as shortened versions, usually are published as new editions rather than as revisions. A common misconception is that brief or concise editions are dumbed down versions of the parent text. Usually this is not the case, however. Anyone who has written an abstract knows that the abstract is not an inferior version of the article or research it describes. A brief edition is supposed to work the same way. Like an abstract, it omits only whatever details, examples, illustrations, or data are not needed for basic comprehension. Like an abstract, it focuses on premises or theoretical stances, key questions or hypotheses, basic methods, and important findings or conclusions. Thus, concise editions can be as high-level or as low-level as their parent texts without inconsistency and without dumbing down.

Intentionally dumbed-down texts do exist, however. The following features in combination give them away: low-level language; lack of appropriate technical vocabulary, overexplanation; overuse of personal/down-home anecdotes or homilies; oversimplified or hypothetical examples; use of repetitions and refrains as in storytelling; use of statements that go without saying; analogies relating to the reader's childhood or adolescent experience; use of images and applications in place of narrative text; and overdesign. Authors are as much to blame for dumbing down as editors or publishers. Ultimately, the true source of dumbing down is the customers—the instructors who complain about the inadequacies of their students, the students who complain about the inaccessibility of their textbooks.

Myths and Urban Legends about Textbooks

Contrary to popular misconception, textbooks are not all clones, although by necessity they must be similar to reflect course syllabi. Publishers go to great lengths and expense to ensure that their products are unique while remaining mainstream and competitive. “Mainstream” means following the conventional scope and sequence of the course as it is typically taught on the nation's campuses, based on market research. “Competitive” means that it has all the bells and whistles that make other companies' textbooks successful (i.e., profitable). And “unique” means that it has its own value-added twist or enough novel material to pique customer interest and capture market share. Editors fill whole binders with comparison grids to chart how their book is mainstream, competitive, and unique in relation to other books for the same course from other publishers in their league.

The downside of this is that major publishers do not take risks of any magnitude with textbook content and organization. If you have a radically different approach to your subject or want to teach it in a new way that is not currently accepted practice, you likely will not find a textbook that suits your needs. In fact this is a prime reason for not using a textbook (or for writing your own). Assuming that your institution, department, and students explicitly know about and want what you are offering, you will need to find or develop your own course materials or persuade a publisher to consider your own proposal for a new textbook. To do this you would need to present some proof that there really is a new or emerging market or clear demand for this kind of textbook. I have seen this done successfully—for example, with the world's first introductory textbooks in the field of applied anthropology. However, I have also seen such efforts fail—for example, when the world simply is not ready for your take on the “emerging critical consensus” or “new synthesis” that you have in mind.

Another urban legend is that revisions are merely cosmetic. Actually, the investment needed to bring out a revision is only slightly less than for a first edition, which can be as much as a quarter of a million dollars for an introductory textbook in a core subject. Much more is involved, therefore, than slapping on new covers. The authors' contracts must be renegotiated, new authors may be brought into the team and others retired, editors apply new market research and competition analyses to develop a revision plan, and usually the book is at least partly redesigned. The degree of similarity in appearance between a revision and its previous edition depends almost exclusively on market considerations. Do people love this book and remain loyal to it? Then make it look much the same. Are people dissatisfied with it or iffy? Or is there simultaneously a major new challenge from a competitor? Then make it look different.

Industry standards dictate that a revised edition of a textbook should be approximately one-third changed from the previous edition or substantively different in some other way. This extends to replacing a third or more of the photos and figures. The real reasons for revising are to correct, update, improve, or adapt a work to keep it competitive in the marketplace. At one point, psychology textbooks that did not discuss DSM-IV were judged obsolete, for example, and had to be revised. Teacher education texts had to be revised after enactment of the NCLB. Most publishers made rapid and costly revisions in selected titles after 9/11. I have worked on textbooks that were revised within two years because customers objected to certain content or certain content was found to be outdated or wrong, but also because the authors were suing each other over royalty splits. While some of these changes did not add up to a third of the book, they necessitated a revision.

While it is easy to think (and not unheard of) that publishers put out new editions as often as they can get away with in order to reap more profits, this usually is not the case. For one thing, textbooks, especially first editions, normally need at least two years of sales just to pay for themselves, much less pay the authors their royalties and the publisher its margin. For another, the market readily punishes

publishers (justly or not) who put an older edition out of print by bringing out a new higher-priced edition after only a year. While this may look like corporate greed, however, it may be just a desperate effort to save a book with insufficient sales that otherwise would be taken off the market entirely. Such a book may even be revised heavily enough (half changed) to be brought out as a new first edition. Older textbooks often are recycled in this way, through mix and match cannibalizations. I call them “frankensteins,” and like the original, they’re not inherently bad, (though I have seen some that are badly done).

Unless it is in a series designed as annual editions, therefore, a book that is revised after one year is in trouble. Maybe it had something in it (or not in it) that was killing sales. Maybe it was late coming out and missed its sales for the first semester of its copyright year (in which case a revision can justify permitting it to continue to exist at all). In any event, the publisher is risking double shortfalls by bringing out a revision before the previous edition has paid for the cost of publishing it. In light of these facts we may wish to reexamine our prejudices and assumptions regarding textbook revisions.

There no doubt are other myths and urban legends about textbook publishing. Now, however, we come to the arcane matters of how a textbook is built and how its scope and sequence are realized and how these factors might affect your decision making process for textbook adoption.

The Index and Outline Tests

As a college instructor I often chose textbooks indignantly and by default after subjecting them to the “index test.” This is where you quickly check the index for a half dozen theorists and researchers or terms and concepts that are dear to your heart. If those particular names, words, or phrases are not there, then the textbook is unacceptably flawed. Off with its head! This is quick, but hardly scientific. For one thing, indexes are notoriously flawed. Publishers or their packagers (i.e., production houses) outsource indexing to lowest bidders, who may not have professional experience with college-level textbooks in your field. From the other side of the desk, I have often fumed over the inadequate indexes appended to textbooks I helped to develop. Whatever you are looking for, in other words, very likely is in the book even if not in the index. If this is really an overriding concern for you, request access to an electronic version of the textbook from the publisher and conduct “Find” searches for the terms you require your textbook to contain.

Tables of contents (TOCs) also may mislead, though they certainly sketch the parameters. The main reason is that it is standard practice to include in a TOC only the A- and B-heads (that is, the first and second levels of heading), omitting the details given in C- and D-heads. (The purpose is to contain the length of the front matter.) Depending on the construction of text headings, therefore, a lot of information may be missing from the TOC. Nevertheless, publishers go to great

lengths to craft the TOC, because it is the most visible and most common basis for decisions to adopt.

Chapter sequence also probably should not matter much. I once rejected a textbook because the sequence of chapters did not match the way I taught the course. Most of us know by now, however, that assigning chapters out of sequence usually is not a problem. In fact, the trend toward delivering textbooks electronically has led to ever-greater modularization. The exception to the “ease of resequencing” principle is a textbook with functionally interrelated chapters—a rare find that may even be reason enough for changing the way you teach the course. Some of the best upper-level or second-tier textbooks begin as functionally integrated narratives that an editor then chops up with headings to give them a textbook, rather than a trade book, format.

The Citations and Currency Tests

My second test for textbooks has always been the references. After ascertaining that most everyone is cited who should be, I conduct what I call my “currency test.” This consists of running my finger down the dates of publication in the References section to count informally the numbers of works cited for the current and preceding years. I used to reject any textbook that did not have two or three current cites per chapter. For example, in 2006, a textbook with no citations after 2004 was hopelessly outdated, or so I thought. Now I know that by the time students buy them in the college store, textbooks necessarily are about two years out of date, although with electronic publishing this gap is narrowing.

How can this be? Well, textbooks are 1 to 3 years in development, when the manuscript is drafted, reviewed, and revised (and rerevised); 6 to 9 months in production (down from a year), when the manuscript is copyedited and indexed and the book is designed and laid out; and another 3 to 6 months in manufacturing and fulfillment, when the book is printed, bound, warehoused, and shipped. Then, the textbooks must be available for you and other prospective adopters to sample early enough so you can order them for your future course (usually a full semester before your course is scheduled to begin), and early enough for your bookstore to obtain and shelve the books for your students to buy before your course starts.

You can imagine, then, how textbooks appear out of date. A text with a 2008 copyright date that you sample and order in 2007 may have only a scattering of 2006 cites as its most current references. As a developmental editor, knowing how important currency is to instructors, I got a lot of pleasure out of infusing it into a book during the production phase. (For this, one needs to cultivate the friendship of production editors, because content is not supposed to be changed during production.) If I could swing it, my updates included one ultra-current source citation per chapter and a few “ripped from the headlines” examples or cases, nimbly substituted into captions, chapter opening vignettes, or chapter

closers (with the author's knowledge, of course). I was exceptional in this, however, so as a rule don't let your currency test be the deciding factor.

An exception is grandfathered references, which can weigh heavy cumulatively. I reject textbooks in any subject with a preponderance of references that are more than ten years out of date. Even in fields that rely on archaic texts, historic documents, or foundational research, current interpretations and critical studies of those materials must be current and cutting edge or otherwise reflect contemporary syntheses. No subject is safe from the need to be current in this sense.

The Thumb Test

Marketing managers in higher education publishing often refer to the "thumb test," a textbook selection technique even more quick and dirty than the "index text" and the "currency test." In a thumb test you hold the book's spine in your left hand and ruffle the pages from the front to the back of the book between thumb and forefinger of your right hand, as if flipping the cels in a homemade animation. Your eye catches the design and format, including fonts, number of columns of text, color palette, design motifs, part or chapter openers, photos and art, tables, captions, type and frequency of headings, and boxes. Out of this visual blur your mind builds an impression: This is (or is not) the textbook for you!

I've often been astonished to read professors' prejudices regarding book design and format, as if they knew anything about book building or were expert in programs such as PageMaker, InDesign, or QuarkXPress, and as if they even understood how font sets work or the role of PMS colors in a book's palette. I don't think much of those who choose textbooks on the basis of appearance alone; e.g., you don't like pink, or you don't like orange, or you don't like boxes, or the margins are too crowded, or the pictures are too large (or too small).

That goes for judging a book by its cover too. Publishers expend great sums on cover designs, having learned that professors, not just the masses, will adopt or not adopt on that basis alone. That Introduction to Criminal Justice textbook, for example. Should the cover be art or photos? One photo or a montage? Should the American flag appear somewhere on the cover? Or the American colors? If there are police officers, should they be literal or abstract or iconic? Should care be taken to include female and minority officers? Should they appear armed? What about the border patrol and tribal police? If police officers are shown, will it appear to skew the survey course in favor of law enforcement over the courts and corrections? Or should the cover show a courthouse (all those nice pillars) or a prison (all those nice bars) instead? Or all three? Or maybe just a symbol of justice—the statue of the lady with her blindfold and scales? Is there one where her breasts are not too revealed or suggestive? Or is the statue idea too trite or too focused on law per se. Would a statue look too high-level? Is there something we could have on the cover instead that would suggest terrorism or Homeland Security? And so on ad nauseam. Book designers and all those who work with

them strive for beautiful books, and often succeed, but we nevertheless must refrain, I think, from selecting textbooks solely on that basis.

Format is an exception--for example, the delivery of content as a book or an e-book and, if a book, the type of binding and trim size. Your course may beg for a hardcover textbook with a sewn binding, a perfect-bound paperback, or a spiral-bound lay-flat flipbook. The 7 X 10, 8 X 10, and 8.5 X 11 trim sizes are fairly standard for undergraduate textbooks. The larger the trim size the lower the level, as a rule, although there are exceptions. Smaller trim sizes, especially the 6 X 9, are more typical of trade book-type texts such as may be assigned in higher-level courses.

Length and Price Issues

The number of pages in a textbook is a consideration in textbook adoption if you expect students to finish reading it by the end of the course. Most undergraduate introductory textbooks are developed to be doable in 14 weeks, leaving 2 weeks for testing and other things in a standard semester. You'll notice that these textbooks usually have 14 to 16 chapters. In this model, students master content at a rate of a chapter a week. Textbooks designed for shorter terms—8-week and 12-week courses—typically have fewer chapters. High-level textbooks and those in the sciences tend to have more chapters but often of shorter length. The industry standard for maximum chapter length is 40 book pages inclusive.

The number of pages in a book and the number of colors affect pricing. Most introductory undergraduate nonscience textbooks are under 640 pages in length (20 signatures) and are printed in 4 colors. Page counts of 576 or 608 are more common (Introductory science textbooks tend to be overlong, in contrast, because of the habit of exhaustive inclusivity so central to scientific thinking.) Again, the lower the page count, the lower the level generally, although concise editions and science textbooks at all levels may prove exceptional. Second-tier textbooks for courses with comparatively high enrollments often are two-color, and high-level and bargain editions typically are one color (black on white) and are largely unillustrated.

The big 4-color textbooks are expensive, and the media are full of running complaints about financial (as well as physical) burdens on students with the high-priced tomes they are forced to buy. Since 2004, Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) and congressional and court actions have forced publishers to debundle textbooks from supplements and to provide alternate formats for textbooks to which students can have access. Most publishers now offer e-text or web versions, for example, and shrinkwrapped three-hole punched chapters for coverless delivery. As mentioned earlier, institutions also license textbooks to deliver to students electronically at lower cost via Blackboard or school intranets.

Yes, textbooks are too expensive. But it is a mistake to place the blame exclusively on the corporate greed of evil demon publishers. For example, as pointed out

earlier, frequent revisions are not necessarily “fraudulent.” Revising a textbook an average of every 3.5 years (as statistics show is the case) is responsible in light of the rate of change in knowledge and scholarship in today’s world. It is not a ploy to suck more profit out of the kids. Besides, it is you the instructor who demands currency in your textbooks. It is you who adopts a more current textbook over one that came out a year or two earlier. What publisher will come to you and say, give us your business! Our book is out of date but it’s cheaper. Would you really adopt that book?

Why is each new edition usually more expensive than the last? Because of the same kinds of market forces that cause you to pay a higher price for a pound of meat this month or a tank of gas than you did last month. Because the price of a stamp went up. Because the cost of a barrel of oil went up, and the cost of a kilowatt hour. Because professional textbook development easily costs 12 to 15k. Because a single photo can cost \$500 to use and a copyeditor can command \$4 per manuscript page. Because the health insurance for warehouse workers went up. Because the college bookstore adds a higher markup. Because booksellers return unsold books at the publisher’s expense. Because publishers cannot legally write off unsold inventory. Because in publishing profit margins rarely rise above 10 percent regardless. Because people buy and sell pirated and foreign copies. And because you and your students keep selling your textbooks back to the used book merchants, reducing the revenues not only from the publishers but also from the authors who wrote them, who lose their royalties. Try adding up the cost of all the used textbooks for your course that are available online, and you’ll see what I mean.

No, of course publishers are not innocent victims. But they are businesses, and there are many hidden costs beyond their control, and the problem is more complex with more widely shared accountability than we have thus far admitted. Fortunately, CD-ROMs, DVDs, the Internet, and iPod technologies are enabling publishers to lower prices without necessarily becoming unprofitable. To students and professors who claim that everyone should have free access to textbooks and the knowledge they contain, I say, explain to us, then, how the people who research, write, edit, produce, design, illustrate, manufacture, market, sell, store, and deliver those textbooks are supposed to earn their living, raise their children, buy their groceries, and pay their rent.

As my daughter would say, it is what is it. If price is a high-priority factor in your textbook adoptions, please just check all the delivery options a publisher offers before axing an otherwise suitable candidate.

Supplement Packages

Ancillary material also can be a good reason to adopt. I have sometimes been swayed by outstanding or especially useful supplements, including, for example, course-related anthologies, web sites, subscriptions, videos, and software. A web site with rotating 3-D diagnostic fossils and animations on comparative anatomy,

primate evolution, and human haplotypes and migrations sold me on a biological anthropology textbook that was otherwise a bit difficult for the students. I also once chose a sociology textbook because it came with an excellent reader on expressions and consequences of globalization. Today, because of debundling, I might be able to subscribe to the web site and order the reader without having to order the companion textbook.

Publisher research shows that textbook adopters most covet acetate and electronic transparencies (despite all the Tufte-esque criticism of PowerPoints) and free videos. Many instructors also want a comprehensive Test Bank, perhaps even one that has been validated scientifically and comes with a testing service. Which supplements are most important to you when considering a text for course adoption?

Pedagogy and Apparatus

Something that many instructors do not know is that good textbooks are constructed to match what is known about the way people learn. In choosing a textbook, you probably will have the best luck with one that has been consciously endowed with pedagogy and apparatus. “Pedagogy” refers to instructional methods and teaching devices. “Apparatus” refers to the organization and sequence of elements within a chapter, unit of study, or book. For example, textbook apparatus minimally includes an opening section, the body, and a closing section for every chapter. The opening section may include, for example, the chapter outline, a chapter-opening photo, a list of focus questions for the chapter, and an introduction or chapter-opening vignette. The closing section may include a summary, a list of key terms, a set of problems or application questions, and a “For Further Reading” list. Chapter pedagogy, on the other hand, may include learning objectives, questions, captions, margin glosses, recaps, features set off from text through design, and the like. Textbook pedagogy is supposed to be guided by scientific (more or less) models of teaching and learning.

There are many models of what happens cognitively when learning takes place, but the process of direct instruction generally follows these steps: establish objectives, expectations, and relevance, or otherwise engage and motivate; activate prior knowledge, or review any prerequisite knowledge and skills; present new information, engaging students’ selective attention to acquire and remember the information; use questioning to check for comprehension; give opportunities for independent practice; assess performance and provide feedback; give opportunities to apply learning outcomes. Good textbooks do the same things. In nondirect instruction, in contrast, students acquire content on their own through active learning and interaction with others. They learn through observation, inquiry, discussion, modeling, progressive skill approximation, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, and hands-on experience. This is good too, but rarer. Textbooks exist that favor one model of instruction

over the other, and textbooks exist that attempt to combine the best of both worlds.

Does a textbook you're considering have brief readings in each chapter? If those readings are identified as belonging to specific narrative contexts, then they are meaningful for chapter learning and therefore are examples of pedagogy, the more so if they include an explanatory introduction, annotation, or question. If the readings are followed by questions that test students' comprehension of the readings, this is an example of the direct instruction model. Students are supposed to master the readings the same as they do the text. There will be questions about the readings on the test. If, however, the readings are followed by questions that ask students how the readings relate to chapter content or to life, then this is nondirect instruction. The students must discover a connection for themselves, and the textbook trusts that they can do so. Classroom discussion can confirm it. Which model better expresses your approach to teaching your course?

Generally, the more apparatus and pedagogy, the lower the level. However, beware the empty anti-pedagogy that bloats introductory textbooks! The gimmicky, obviously outsourced boxes without context, relevance, interest, sense, or engagement with the reader. But please also avoid the prejudice that boxes are bad. Done right, boxes are paragons of good teaching, facilitating students' rapid long-term acquisition of chapter content. Rather than interrupting and distracting from text, they are deeply embedded in narrative context and bring textual processing to a higher cognitive level. You can apply the same test as well to all the other forms that apparatus and pedagogy take.

When to Consider Not Using a Textbook

Courses without textbooks are a mixed bag. For example, courses bent on indoctrination tend to rely on doctrinal literature rather than a textbook, and instructors bent on epistemological control may seek to serve as the sole provider of course content. Knowledge is power, and all that. On the other hand, courses intended to stimulate critical thinking, creative problem solving, and intellectual resynthesis may well rely on primary sources and critical material rather than standard textbook fare. Many upper-tier and graduate courses are prime candidates for not using a textbook, especially with motivated, independent learners with good attendance, and especially in interactive seminar courses with small enrollments that rely heavily on discussion.

Some instructors go for definitive works by "dead great white men," controversial popularizations by celebrities, or works of notoriously original thinkers. Imagine, teaching sociology with Georg Simmel or C. Wright Mills, for example, or anthropology with Claude Levy-Strauss or Richard Dawkins, or history with Jared Diamond or Howard Zinn. If your purpose is to inculcate, to shake up student mindset, or to promote critical thinking, and if your class relies on free discussion or structured discourse, then you probably should use original texts rather than a textbook. Just include more women and minorities in your

selections (if you know what's good for you), and make sure your students understand why a given contributor is regarded as "great," controversial," "original," or "notorious."

But know your limits. I once tried to teach world history through primary source excerpts alone. By the 14th century, just when things were really getting interesting, I could no longer afford photocopies, and the students were becoming mentally exhausted from my "thing of shreds and patches." My experiment ended with the bewildering (even to me) and hardly representative combination of Al-Bakri's observations of Ghana, Pope Urban's call to arms for the First Crusade, Marco Polo's description of the Mongol invasion of Japan, a translation of the "Song of Quetzalcoatl," Boccaccio's description of the plague, and a slaver's ship manifest. Did I order a textbook for the second semester? You bet.

Mary Ellen Lepionka is the author of *Writing and Developing Your College Textbook, 2nd Edition* (Atlantic Path Publishing, 2008) and *Writing and Developing College Textbook Supplements* (Atlantic Path Publishing, 2005). She also conducts workshops on academic authoring, textbook development, and higher education publishing. Contact Mary Ellen at me.lepionka@verizon.net. For more information see www.atlanticpathpublishing.com.