

# Shopping for Textbooks

Here are some suggestions for making your textbook shopping trip a little easier:

- **Look on the college bookstore's web site for helpful information, and to see their options: new, used, rentals, ebooks, etc.**
- **Bring your class schedule or course syllabus with you to the bookstore to make sure you're getting books for the correct course number and section number. Courses may have similar names or multiple sections, but different instructors and books.**
- **Avoid the crowd by shopping the bookstore during its less busy hours. First thing in the morning is often a good time.**
- **Unless you're paying in cash, find out before you shop what forms of payment the store can accept and whether there are any criteria for identification, especially if you plan to charge the purchase to a parent's credit card number.**
- **It's best to buy all your books for the term within the first few weeks, even if you won't be using certain ones until later on. The bookstore must return unsold books to the suppliers about 60 days into the term. If you wait too long, the book you need may be gone.**
- **Don't hesitate to ask bookstore staff for assistance. They are there to help you find the right textbooks for your classes.**

# You Need to Return a Textbook?



If you need to return a textbook for a refund, here are some tips to ensure you don't get stuck with books you won't be using:

- **Be sure you understand the bookstore's return policy before you purchase, especially the latest date that you can get a refund.**
- **Keep your sales receipt in a safe place. You will have to show your receipt if you need to return a book.**
- **Don't highlight or write in new books or open shrinkwrapped materials until you're sure you'll use them. You can't get a full refund for a book that's marked or shows wear, or for an opened pack, even if you have dropped the class.**
- **Don't buy books for courses that you won't be taking until another term. The course may require a different book or edition by then, and it will be too late to return your purchase.**

This Special Guide is endorsed  
by College Parents of America

© 2010 National Association of College Stores  
Item #2207

# BUYING COLLEGE TEXTBOOKS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A special guide for first-year students



What to budget for textbooks  
How to ensure you get the right books  
Money and time-saving tips



# YOUR Q&A ON TEXTBOOKS



**T**extbooks and other course materials have been carefully selected by your professors to supplement your class lectures, discussions, and labs, and help you understand the course topic more thoroughly.

Your high school probably either loaned textbooks for you to use, or included the cost of books in your school fees. But in college, students shop for their own reading materials at the start of each term.

First-year college students often have a lot of questions about shopping for their textbooks. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions and answers:

## **Q: How will I know which textbooks to buy?**

**A:** To find out which textbooks to obtain, you'll need the numbers for your courses and sections.

Then check your school's course catalog or online course list for information or a web link about textbooks for your classes. As of July 2010, the Higher Education Opportunity Act requires all colleges and universities receiving federal funds to provide this information as soon as feasible.

You can also visit your campus bookstore or its web site. The store works closely with professors to get the most complete and up-to-date information on the textbooks they require or recommend for their classes. Also, you can check your professor's course syllabus, which may be posted on the course's web site or handed out the first day of class.

In addition to books, your required course materials may include coursepacks or course readers, which are compilations of articles, book excerpts, or other readings chosen by your professor. Some professors also assign electronic reading materials. You may be asked to go online to buy and download a digital copy to your computer, or to purchase a disk or PIN code that will enable you to access the materials on a password-protected web site.

## **Q: How much should I budget for buying textbooks?**

**A:** The amount to budget for textbooks will depend on the number of courses you're taking, your professors' requirements, your major, and other factors. Because students typically buy school supplies for their academic work—such as paper, notebooks, study guides, pens, dictionaries, art supplies, science supplies, and so on—at the same time they're buying textbooks, it's helpful to budget all those expenses together.

According to figures compiled by the National Association of College Stores in 2008, the average full-time college student spends approximately \$702 per school year for course materials. Your actual purchases may vary. However, your ultimate textbook costs for each term may be much lower if you choose to sell some of your books when you are finished with them.

## **Q: Why do some textbooks cost more than \$100 each?**

**A:** Textbooks are not like novels or general interest books, which can be sold to a broad consumer audience. Most textbooks are specialized for a relatively small academic audience, and require considerably more time, effort, and expense to develop. Photos, color, graphs, charts, exercises, and quizzes also add to the production cost of textbooks.

Textbooks are an investment in your education and in your lifelong personal and professional development. Your professors believe textbooks are essential to your learning and to your ability to earn good grades in your courses.

## **Q: What goes into the price of a textbook?**

**A:** On average, 75.9% of the sticker price on new textbooks sold in the college bookstore goes back to the publisher, mostly to cover development of the books, normal business expenses, and royalties to the author. The freight company that shipped the book gets 1%.

The bookstore keeps the rest, but out of that amount the store has to pay for staff wages and benefits; insurance and taxes; electricity, heat, water, and air conditioning; checkout systems; shelving; office and storage equipment; security; rent or mortgage payments; cleaning and repairs; supplies; credit

card fees; shopping bags; and other expenses. In the end, on average, just 6.3 cents (before taxes) on every dollar students pay for new textbooks represents profit to the store.

## **Q: Are there ways I can save money on my textbooks?**

**A: Yes! Here are some suggestions:**

- When available, rent or buy used textbooks from your store. However, quantities may be limited and they sell out fast, so shop the bookstore as early as possible. Used copies are not available for new editions, workbooks, or most customized items.
- Go to class or check the course syllabus to determine how the textbooks will be used. If your class has multiple books, your instructor may decide certain ones can be optional.
- Some college bookstores are able to offer electronic textbooks or rentals. Ask your store if these lower-cost options are available.
- Be cautious about buying books on the web. Some online sellers promise huge discounts that don't actually exist—be sure to compare prices for each book, and don't forget to add in shipping fees and possibly sales tax. Online sellers may not be able to ship your books for weeks, or may send the wrong edition. If you make a purchasing error, you may not be able to return the book for a refund.
- At the end of the term, you may be able to recover part of the purchase cost of your textbooks by selling those you no longer need back to the bookstore. Check with the bookstore's buyback program to see which of your books are eligible for cash.
- Keep a close eye on your textbooks. Theft of textbooks is on the rise nationwide. Thieves target books to resell. Don't leave your books unattended, even in places like the library. If your books are stolen, report the theft immediately. Mark your books in an inconspicuous place so you can identify them as yours.