

# The best ways to save on college textbooks

By **Brenda Richardson**

The following article is part of *The Modern Education*, a [Chase](#) series to help people navigate the costs of college and beyond.

Shortly before heading off to college, Fabiola Castillo learned a valuable lesson from her older brother: Surf the web for good deals on textbooks. "I look up book titles online and try to find the cheapest ones," says Castillo, a freshman at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, Illinois. "I've bought two books for humanities on eBay. Some biology books are about \$100 each. Science books are way expensive, but on eBay you can buy them for about half the cost."



The average college student spends about \$600 a year on books and other course materials, according to the National Association of College Stores. To avoid a shock to your wallet – and help rein in costs – follow these six steps:

## 1. Use a price-comparison tool

Online textbook marketplaces such as Amazon.com, Textbook.com, and CampusBooks.com make finding savings a breeze by feeding into other textbook sellers' sites for a wider selection. Desmond Henry, a Certified Financial Planner in Topeka, Kansas and graduate student at Kansas State University, is partial to CampusBooks, which he calls "the golden ticket for textbooks online." The website combs through hundreds of listings and filters them into categories such as new, used, ebooks, rentals and international. It also searches local library inventories for free textbooks.

When the price-comparison results pop up, click on the "Buy or Rent" link under the book cover's image. It can project whether you will get more value out of buying or renting textbooks, including the estimated buyback price.

## 2. Take advantage of smartphone apps

Sometimes, the time delay between the end of your first class and your book search online could mean the difference between a great deal and a full-price textbook. To slash the time gap, install a free mobile textbook app to find cheap prices on the go. For instance, BookBandit compares prices of online merchants to present the lowest prices available, and allows you to search by title, author or ISBN.

Some campus stores, such as those operated by Barnes & Noble College, offer price matching on textbooks advertised or offered from a local brick-and-mortar bookstore or online retailer (i.e. Amazon or bn.com), but excludes third party resellers. These programs ensure you get the best price for your textbooks without having to shop off-campus.

To get the best return on your resale investment, pay attention to extras like notes and study guides. The app also acts as a go-between for students at the same college to buy and sell textbooks. Barnes & Noble College and CampusBooks also have apps that can track down textbook bargains.

## 3. Look for coupons and promotional codes online

Major aggregators such as RetailMeNot and Coupons.com are handy for textbook coupons and free shipping codes. Some sellers offer free ebook access while you're waiting for the print textbook to ship.

## 4. Beware of older and alternative editions

Sometimes it makes sense to buy an older book edition if it's similar to the newer edition you've been signed. However, beware of cheaper alternative editions, such as international books, which might vary greatly from the American version.

"An international book might have different questions," Henry says. "It's one thing to try to save a few bucks, but you may end up having to turn around and buy the American version if you get the wrong book."

## 5. Check access codes

Many schools use digital access codes, which allow you to access online course materials. They can be used only once, and their price can add up. Check to see whether your online seller or campus store sells used books with access codes that have not been activated.

Also, find out if your instructor will allow you to opt out of material that can only be obtained through an access code. Keep in mind that for used or rented textbooks, merchants typically do not guarantee supplemental material like access codes or lab manuals.

## 6. Share and share alike

Consider sharing a book with your roommate or another classmate and splitting the cost. "Some of my friends are taking the same classes, so we share books," Castillo says.