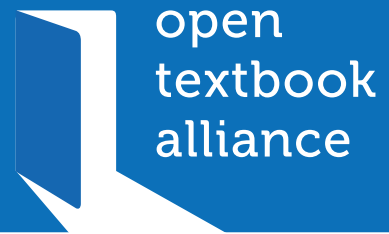# The case for open textbooks

open textbook alliance

Textbook prices are out of control.

- Individual textbooks now **often cost over $200**, and sometimes cost as much as $400.

- Over the past decade, textbook **prices increased 88%**— that's three times the rate of inflation.

- **65% of students** report that they skipped buying or renting an assigned textbook because of cost.

- Without access to books, many students struggle to succeed in their classes. **Nearly half** of all students say that the **cost of course materials** impacts which classes and how many classes they are able to take.

Why are textbook prices so high?

The broken textbook market allows publishers to keep driving up prices without consequences.

Prices are usually kept in check by two things:	The buying power of customers who **shop around** for the best deal.	**Competition** between companies.
But in the textbook market, those checks don't apply.	The customers – the students – don't choose their textbooks, so **they can't shop around**. Instead, books are assigned by faculty members, who don't buy the books themselves.	Just **five publishers control 80%** of the textbook market, so they rarely compete directly on price.

Meanwhile, publishers keep **inventing creative new ways to increase profits**, like high-priced, single-use access codes or other products that eliminate used alternatives, prevent sharing, and limit consumer choice.

Open textbooks provide a solution.

Open textbooks provide an exciting alternative to traditional books that can save students money and improve the educational experience.

- Open textbooks are just like traditional textbooks except that the authors have decided to publish them under an **open copyright license**.

- Open textbooks are available **free online and for very low cost in print**.

- Recent research has shown that open textbooks are **as effective, if not more effective**, than traditionally-published course materials.

- Individual faculty members can customize open textbooks to make them **better fit their classes**.

- Open textbooks are just one example of Open Educational Resources (OER). In addition to books, OER includes open versions of study guides, practice tests, problem sets, exams, videos, and other classroom tools.

Open textbooks can save millions for students.

▶ Open textbooks have the potential to save students nationwide **up to a billion dollars** per year.

▶ In subjects where traditional textbooks cost $100-$300, switching a single classroom of 100 students to an open textbook can save students up to $30,000.

▶ At the University of Massachusetts, a small pilot program to help classes switch to open textbooks saved UMass students more than **$1 million in just four years**.

▶ At Kansas State University, an open textbooks program run by the library, Provost's office, and the Center for Advancement of Teaching and Learning has **saved students over $1.1 million**.

▶ Tidewater Community College has developed a business administration degree program that relies exclusively on open course materials. Eliminating expensive textbooks has **reduced the cost of attendance for participating students by 25%**.

How Open Textbooks Compare

	Traditional Textbooks	Open Textbooks
Written by expert authors	✔	✔
Peer reviewed	✔	✔
High educational quality	✔	✔
Can include problem sets, sample exercises, etc.	✔	✔
Can be sold in campus bookstores	✔	✔
Cost up to $400	✔	✘
Publish unnecessary new editions	✔	✘
Bundle books with expensive add-ons	✔	✘
Available free and unrestricted online	✘	✔
Available in print for $20-$40	✘	✔
Electronic versions never expire	✘	✔
Can be customized by faculty	✘	✔

Open Textbooks FAQs

Q: Aren't there easier ways to save students money on textbooks?

A: Used books, book rentals, and other programs can help, but open textbooks are by far the most effective way to save money for your students.

Q: How can I be sure an open textbook is high quality?

A: Ultimately, each professor is the best judge of whether or not a particular book is right for their class. Many high-quality open textbooks are available right now – written by leaders in their fields, peer-reviewed, and professionally designed. In addition, a number of studies have found that OER are as or more effective than traditional books.

Q: Can I get the book I'm currently using as an open textbook?

A: If the book you are currently using is published by a major publisher, then the answer is probably no. Traditional publishers rely on their ability to sell their books for a healthy profit.

Q: How can I find an open textbook for my class?

A: There are websites that aggregate faculty reviews of open textbooks and can help professors find books for their subjects.

Q: Who writes open textbooks? How do they get paid?

A: There are several open textbook companies that follow the typical process of authoring, editing, and publishing books. In other cases, authors or teams of authors are funded by grants from foundations, universities, or the government.

Q: Are open textbooks the same as e-books?

A: No. Both are digital and can be used on laptops, tablets, and smartphones. However, typical e-books are still quite expensive and have many drawbacks, like access that expires and limits on printing. By contrast, open textbooks are free online, never expire, and have no restrictions on printing.

Q: Is it legal to share and adapt open textbooks?

A: Most open licenses allow instructors to legally adapt or edit a book's text, though authors have the option to reserve certain other rights for themselves. In any case, the original author should at least be attributed for the work.

Q: Can I write my own open textbook if I want?

A: Yes! There are many foundations, states, companies, and institutions that will pay professors to write open textbooks. Professors can even self-publish an open textbook by releasing it under an open license.

OpenTextbookAlliance.org

The Open Textbook Alliance is a nationwide coalition of student government leaders who are working to bring open textbooks to college campuses.

Open textbooks can lead to higher student performance.

- Open licenses, such as the popular Creative Commons license, allow professors to **adapt and customize** a book's content. That means professors can edit an open textbook to fit their class — adding or removing chapters, changing problem sets, and more.

- Data from Tidewater Community College's textbook-free degree program shows notable increases in student completion and performance when faculty members become more engaged with the classroom materials.

- A journal-published analysis of over 16,000 students at public institutions showed that **students using open materials perform as well**, if not better, than their peers using traditional course materials.

- A 2012 survey of students found that 95% rated open educational resources (OER) as "easy to use" and 78% responded that OER "provided **access to more up-to-date material** than is available in my print textbooks."

Educators: Help bring open textbooks to your campus.

- Visit our website to join the effort to bring more open textbooks to your campus.

- **Consider using open textbooks** in your classes. Look online at these sites to see if open textbooks exist for your subject areas: Open Textbook Library: **open.umn.edu**; OpenStax: **openstax.org**; and OER Commons: **oercommons.org**.

- **Tell your colleagues** about open textbooks and encourage them to investigate these sites for themselves.

- Meet with your **campus librarians** or academic technology officers to explore ways to promote open textbooks.

- Speak at or host an event with your student government to **educate the campus** about open textbooks.

- **Download the Campus Program Guide** from our website and give it to your administration to show them how to enact an open textbooks pilot program.