

BOOK-LEARNIN' 101:

How to buy your books without breaking the bank

Contrary to popular postsecondary mythology, you don't have to wait until the first day of classes before buying your books; you don't have to wait for your syllabus to be handed out, and you don't need to hear it first-hand from your prof either. However, if you still feel that this is necessary, then follow these simple guidelines in order to skip the real lines at the Bookstore.



Figure 1.1 Library books. Shelve your plans for buying new.

Lesson I: How and where to buy your books

During the busy book-buying season, one obvious way of beating the rush is to go during off-peak hours: either first thing in the morning or, even better, later in the evening. You can also employ the buddy-system of “queueing,” as the British apparently call it, whereby you and, well, a buddy take turns standing in line or shopping for your texts.

That said, the Bookstore actually does a pretty good job of pumping through the maximal amount of customers during peak periods, thanks mainly to the swelling of their cashier ranks. So even if it looks like a Tokyo subway station down there as you peer through the windows in SUB, the reality is you likely won't have to wait in line for more than 15 minutes at any time.

However, if you prefer to think for those 15 minutes that you're not being herded through university like cattle, you can always use a combination of old-fashioned foresight and newfangled technology to acquire your books before the first-week rush. To find out beforehand what books you'll need to buy, simply check out your suggested textbooks online.

To do this, you have two options: either through the Bookstore's own website (<http://www.bookstore.ualberta.ca>) using your student ID number, or via Bear Scat (<https://bearscat.su.ualberta.ca>)—for this you'll need a Campus Computing ID. The latter site will tell you not only what books you need, but also how much they will cost at the University Bookstore—as well as Amazon, Chapters and SUBtitles. It also gives you the projected used price for that book, meaning that's what a used copy *would* cost if there were any for sale (though this is not guaranteed).

Once you've done the research, go ahead and purchase them *before* your classes even start—it's okay, we won't tell anyone. Since the “suggested” textbooks are posted on official sites such as those mentioned above (as well as on instructors' own class websites, if you can find them), and since these rarely get changed, there's really nothing to worry about. Besides, even if they do get changed last minute, whether due to lack of availability or a particularly fussy prof, you can almost always return unused books hassle-free (course packs being one exception—but more on that later).

The Bookstore is open all through the summer, and most texts bought online at major dealers such as Amazon and Chapters will arrive at your door within a week. Of course, you can also just walk into a Chapters or Indigo store yourself, as these locations typically carry most of the mainstream literary titles—though you'll probably be out of luck for specialized textbooks and manuals. You can also support the local, non-censoring bookstore economy by taking your business to independents like Greenwood's Bookshoppe (7925 104 Street) or Audrey's Books (10702 Jasper Avenue). Or, if you want to avoid the teeming masses altogether, just do it the old-fashioned way, buying and trading among your peers (see Selling, Lesson IV).

Lesson II: You don't have to buy everything new

There are a lot of reasons why you might have to buy a textbook brand-new: it might well be a brand-new book; it might be a hard-to-find reprint or special order; it may be an obscure or highly specialized text; or you may specifically need to have the latest edition (see Lesson III). However, if you can buy a decent, gently used copy, then what's stopping you?

The bookstore itself will sell used copies—if it has any. This of course depends on what they've managed to procure in the buyback process (see Lesson IV). In general, the more popular a book is, the more likely it will be used again by others, whereas the more obscure and advanced material almost never resurfaces. In other words, you'll likely find plenty of used PSYC 104 textbooks, but good luck fulfilling any of your 300- or 400-level needs.

There's also SUBtitles, the used-book store run by the Students' Union, which sells your books on consignment. This means you leave your books on their shelves until they sell. Once your dusty old texts do wind up in new hands, SUBtitles simply takes a small piece of the pie for services rendered. The selection here is usually reasonable, though inventory levels tend to be a bit sparse. Chances are you won't find all the books you're looking for here, but it's definitely worth taking a look.

If you strike out at these University-sanctioned stores, then it's time to hit the gritty streets of Old Strathcona. The bulk of the city's used-book stores reside here, stretching from 109 Books (on—you guessed it—109 Street) all the way to Wee Book Inn (10310 Whyte Avenue) and beyond. There are several others in this general vicinity (not including antiquarian dealers), but for my money the best place to find used literary gems is Old Strathcona Books at 8104 Gateway Boulevard. Used books can also be had downtown and elsewhere, but these locales are few and far between.

Lesson III: You don't (always) need the same edition

It's often imperative to you have the latest edition of a text, especially in the ever-changing scientific disciplines. However, when it comes to ancient historical documents or 19th-century philosophic treatises, it's a pretty safe bet that not a lot has changed. Sure, there's a new introduction or afterword written by a new expert, and maybe there's even a fancy new illustration on the front cover, but the fact remains that pretty much any copy of *Pride and Prejudice* that you get your hands on for first-year English is going to suffice.