

Once you do sheepishly produce your ratty, dog-eared copy of Jane Austen on the first day of classes, your instructor might hint that it would be nice if everyone had the same copy. However, while it's always nice to be on the same page as your teacher figuratively speaking, there's no real reason why you have to have a text with the exact same pagination, especially when it comes to literary studies. Worst-case scenario: when your instructor refers to a particular passage in the text, you won't be able to flip to it just as quickly as everyone else. But since your instructor will probably just read the passage out loud anyway, who cares if you can't find it yourself?

#### **Lesson IV: You don't need all the bells & whistles**

In many cases, especially with first-year texts, publishers are finding ways to bundle and package more and more peripheral paraphernalia into what would have been a plain old textbook. Study guides, CDs, and other such supplemental material, often of minimal educational value (study guides, for example, are often written by a different person or group than the person who wrote the text), can greatly boost the price of the final product. When these doo-dads are sold separately, be very wary: talk to your prof, talk to other students who've taken the class, and try to determine their value before ponying up that extra \$20 or \$30.

Another item you may find on your "required textbooks" list is a course pack; these are compiled and arranged by your instructor him or herself. These usually consist of supplementary reading material and resources, and are ostensibly intended to spare you from buying entire texts containing these various and often hard-to-find items—a benevolent gesture that saves students untold hundreds of dollars. However, you can often save yourself even more cash by trying to seek out these articles and clippings yourself, whether via the library or online databases. Talk to your prof: unless these pieces are incredibly obscure, they can probably point you in the right photocopying direction.

#### **Lesson V: You don't have to spend any money!**

You can always rely on the good old library to get you through (*fig. 1.1*). At least in the case of Humanities courses, the library will be stocked with multiple copies of the text you're looking for. There may not be one for everyone in your class, but not everyone in your class is going to go to the library for their books, now, are they? So if you really want to be subversive (or if you're just plain cheap) then head on down one of the many libraries on campus or throughout town (*fig. 1.2*).

#### **Lesson IV: caveat vendor (seller beware)**

If, on the other hand, you find yourself on the other side of the textbook equation and are looking to get rid of some of those dusty tomes, then you have several options. The most popular—though probably not the most cost-effective—would be the book buyback, which occurs at the end of term.

An ideal book-buyback transaction typically sees the seller receiving 30–50 per cent of the book's original cover price, assuming it's in saleable condition—a reasonable proposition, all things considered. The picture isn't always this rosy, however: oftentimes, whether there's a new edition out or it's not being taught in any class that term, your text will not currently be on the buyback market. Instead, the bookstore may offer you a "wholesale price"—one that often isn't worth the paper your book is printed on.

While the complex economics of the publishing industry may well dictate such a buyback price, do not accept such a lowball offer. Sticking with the economic perspective, it's like owning stock that's dive-bombed on you: even though its resale value has plummeted, it just doesn't make sense for you to abandon ship at this point, not when you've paid so much more for it. Instead of selling it for next to nothing, you might as well hold on to it for nothing in hopes that its value might one day go up. If not, at least you'll still be getting some value—that is, the textbook itself—out of your original investment. After all, it's not a share, it's a tangible, useable commodity.

If the cutthroat world of the book market puts you off, then cut out the middleman and sell directly to your peers. Who knows, maybe you'll even meet the man or woman of your dreams—especially if this dream includes your partner having a passion for used Chemical Engineering textbooks.

The most exhaustive and sophisticated method of book-swapping is the online trading site [xbook.ca](http://xbook.ca), a service provided via bearscat and open to all U of A students. Xbook is essentially an online bulletin board that allows buyers and sellers to advertise, shop and communicate. Sellers list the texts they have, report on their condition and set their own prices. Buyers contact the seller directly, and can browse the site's inventory based on the aforementioned categories.

Can't be bothered to list all your books online? Not technologically savvy? Looking for some exercise? You can always sell your books the old-fashioned way by running around and putting up posters on bulletin boards. There are several drawbacks to this, however: for one thing, potential buyers aren't guaranteed to see your advertisements; printing numerous signs can get expensive; running around campus can get tiring; and some buildings require you to track down the bulletin board authorities before allowing you to pin anything up. If you do decide to employ this manual method, you can save yourself a lot of effort by finding out what class your books will be used in, looking up where those classes are being taught, and placing your advertisements near that classroom (most have an unregulated bulletin board located right outside the door).

#### **Final Lesson**

If there's nothing else you take away from this how-to guide, let it be this: for the love of god, don't use a highlighter! It's so first-year, and you'll regret it in the future if you do decide to keep your books. There's nothing more annoying when reading an otherwise well-kept used copy of a textbook than finding that the previous owner went on a neon-yellow rampage for the first and last two weeks of class (though the middle portion is often suspiciously devoid of any indications of even half-hearted perusal). If you simply cannot suppress your urge to employ mnemonic devices of questionable effectiveness, then use a pencil! Or sticky notes. Or just make a note somewhere else. Either way, spare yourself (and future readers, if you do decide to sell) the pain. Like your grandma always warned, stroking your highlighter too much will make you go blind.



**Figure 1.2** While Canadian copyright law dictates that only 10% of a textbook should be photocopied, you can always—if you're into breaking the law—take that library book to ten different photocopy joints (or do it yourself at the library, you sneaky bastard) and voila, you've a complete copy of that \$150 stats text for about \$15.