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LIFESTYLE



July 10 — Why queue up for hours at a college bookstore and then lug home heavy course books when cyber shops will ship the door-stoppers directly to your dorm? Buying course books online surely saves time and energy. But does it save money? Even when discounted, new course books are still costly. For the best deals, savvy shoppers now turn to the used book cyber market. They also take advantage of buy-back programs where e-shops let them sell back unwanted texts.

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Check the course book list against the edition you plan to buy before you head to the checkout.

SUPER SAVVY SHOPPERS may even make a few bucks in the process. The trick, as always, is to buy low and sell high.

To illustrate the concept, let's shop the different vendors for an introductory physics textbook, "Physics" by David Halliday, Kenneth S. Krane and Robert Resnick. I choose this text not only because I remember it fondly — and it's still in print — but also because it's required for many science and engineering majors. Therefore, the used market should be brisk.

"Physics" comes in two volumes. Let's tackle volume one, whose International Standard Book Number (ISBN) number is 0471320579. The 10-digit number, which uniquely identifies the book, is usually the easiest way to find a book using cyber search engines.

#### Back-to-school shopping

##### By Teri Goldberg

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The text, published by Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated, retails for \$95.99. Online, it sells new for as low as \$75.91 at Fairfield, N.J.-based [albooks.com](#) to as high as \$95.99 at Washington-based [varsitybooks.com](#).

But the best selection and prices can be found at [half.com](#), a cyber exchange that offers mass-marketed products at fixed prices. Sixteen recent editions of the text and seven "vintage" copies were available the Monday after the July 4th weekend. Newer editions of the hardcover text were priced from \$30 for a "very good" copy — the seller says he got a 95 in the class — to \$67.47 for a "good" copy from another commercial used textbook vendor. Brand new copies sold for \$42.99 to \$46.64. "Vintage" or collectors copies, dating back to 1978, were priced as low as \$4.09. Shipping costs \$3.25 per book by media mail or book rate, the cheapest and slowest way to mail a book.

**A word about textbook editions:** Certain professors require that students get the same edition of a text, since material can be added or deleted for different editions. So check the course book list against the edition you plan to buy before you head to the checkout.

Since it's early in the season, the selection of used books is good. Later in the summer, popular textbooks may not be so easily available. Two cyber shops to consider then are [textbookx.com](http://textbookx.com), formerly [textbooksatcost.com](http://textbooksatcost.com), and one-stop superstore [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com).

"New or like new" copies were available for \$59.45 at [textbookx.com](http://textbookx.com) and for \$61.34 — or \$67.31 with shipping — at [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com). Book rate at [textbookx.com](http://textbookx.com) costs \$2.59 per order plus 99 cents per book.

## Selling high

When it's time to sell, savvy shoppers should aim for the highest price. In this category, [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com) offered to pay the most, \$27, for the used text. And the buy-back process is relatively simple. Just type in the textbook's title or ISBN number and if the company is buying that particular book, it will reply immediately with a price quote. Book sellers have to send the used text within seven days to [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com).

Also, make sure you use the pre-paid shipping label available at the checkout counter. If the book meets the company's standards, a check will arrive by snail mail. Books must be in good condition, says a company representative, which means no torn or missing pages.

Books that don't meet the company's standards will not be returned. Instead, sellers will receive a \$3 credit per book at [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com).

[Ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com) also posts a few special offers online. Right now, [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com) customers receive a free [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com) T-shirt when they place an order of \$99 or more. Just enter "TSHIRT99" at the checkout. Consumers who spend \$200 or more will receive \$10 off the total, if they type in "FREE200" at the checkout.

[Barnesandnoble.com](http://Barnesandnoble.com) also has a course book buy-back program, which operates much like the one at [ecampus.com](http://ecampus.com). The superstore, which also provides a free-shipping label, buys back only those books in "good condition" and pays cash for each title accepted. Books cannot have "mildew stains, missing pages, or lots of underlined text," according to the company's Web site. Books that don't meet these conditions will not be returned. Currently the resale value for "Physics" is \$24.95.

## Register to sell

[Textbookx.com](http://Textbookx.com) also buys back used course books.

But the Ithaca, N.Y.-based company uses a different model. Consumers have to register to sell used books. When the book is sold, the company sends the seller a check minus a 15 percent commission. The payment can be sent directly to a credit card or checking account. Consumers can also opt for store credit and receive an additional five percent.

One word about reselling old books. The above guidelines only apply to mass-marketed popular textbooks. If you have a “rare” copy of any of the Harry Potter books, I’d hang tight. Right now at [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com), a galley or pre-production proof of “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban” is selling for \$1,250,175. A set of the first four books is also available for a mere \$50,000. The first editions are signed by the author and housed in silk-bound slipcases. Abebooks.com also has a lot of used paperback Potter books for \$1 and \$5, says a company representative. And believe me, each is worth the read.

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*If you know of a great deal, e-mail us at [bargains@msnbc.com](mailto:bargains@msnbc.com) with a detailed description including URL, time period and a contact person’s e-mail. Deadline for consideration is seven days before the Monday of the week the sale starts. To write to Teri Goldberg about other shopping issues, e-mail [personalshopper@msnbc.com](mailto:personalshopper@msnbc.com)*

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