

A New Edition of Your Text

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It's bound to happen almost every three years – the text that you worked so hard to select and then worked even harder to incorporate into your course comes out in a new edition. For many faculty, this can be a vexing addition to an already heavy workload. They may feel like the course is finally “working” and now they have to revise and start again. Other faculty staunchly refuse to alter their course in the face of changing editions, assuming the substantive change is less than minimal and motivated solely by the publisher's desire to “beat” the used book market. While shrieking in frustration may have some therapeutic value, there are ways to make the new edition work to your advantage: All it takes is a little advance planning.

Why Do They Do This to Us (Create New Editions)?

New editions are often unwelcome to faculty, and viewed as offering no real benefit except profit for the publishers. While publishers are certainly interested in profits, that is not the only reason to revise a text. New editions often incorporate changes suggested by students and faculty using the text, and colleagues of the authors, and they nearly always include new information. These changes often result in some degree of re-organization, or perhaps a different slant, to make the material more accessible.

New Editions Create Opportunities

From a faculty member's viewpoint, there are still good reasons to take advantage of the opportunities new editions provide. When a new edition comes out, faculty have the chance to:

Re-vamp course content. Many of us teach the same course year after year, and the content can become stale. New editions offer the impetus for a careful evaluation of what we teach in a course and how the current text complements our goals and presents course content. Changes in text content can serve as motivation to think about the course we are teaching, what changes we might make in it, and whether we might be better off with a completely different text.

Re-assess students' needs. If you read the course goals listed in your syllabus, and the introduction to the text you use, you will have a good sense of what you are trying to accomplish with your students. But to decide how the new edition fits your course structure and goals you need to think about your students. What do students need to learn? What do students want to learn? What would be most useful for your students given their typical background? Where does the course fit in the curriculum?

Bypass professional ennui. Doing the above need not be terribly time consuming. In essence it is a mini course portfolio, where you use the publication of a new text edition to think about what you want students to learn, what they need to learn, the pacing of the course, and so forth. Engaging in this process can help you minimize how stale you become, especially if this is a course you teach regularly.

Catch up on new research and theories. Most faculty teach, in part, because of the intellectual nature of the undertaking. A new text edition allows teachers to keep current on new research and theory, and at

times to discard dearly held but outdated ideas. But there can be excitement in seeing an area of psychology evolve.

Latest Edition or Different Text?

Once you have decided how you want the course to progress, and what student and department needs must be met, you can better assess if the new edition can do the job for you, or if you need to switch books altogether. You need not do this work by yourself; colleagues and students can be quite helpful. Understanding the types of changes new editions usually entail – style, order of presentation, and content – can help with this decision.

Style changes. Authorship changes can create style changes in the text. These changes often occur because the publisher received feedback from people who have used the text and improvements were needed. Although some professors may feel it is important to read the entire text when this type of change occurs, we submit that reading one to two chapters (in very different content areas) will give you a sense of any style changes. At that point, you can decide if you still like the text enough to continue with the new edition. If it seems like something you cannot live with, then it is time to start shopping for a new text altogether.

The order of presentation. Order of presentation changes are fairly easily identified by turning to the table of contents, and do not necessarily require a great deal of alteration in lecture. If you have worked hard to develop a “flow” of connections between topics that you want to retain in the classroom and if the order change is minimal, assigning chapters out of order is probably the best solution. Most textbook chapters are self-contained, and assigning them in non-sequential order will not cause difficulties for the student.

A change in content. The most time-consuming aspect of dealing with a new text edition occurs when the content is altered. The publisher’s transition guide (see below) is an important and efficient way to identify content changes. If the text has changed too much for your liking, it is time to consider a different text.

Talk with your colleagues, and students. Your colleagues may be using the text you use, or different ones, for reasons you have never considered. They may help you define your text selection criteria by clarifying your own reasons for using certain texts. It is also good practice to talk with students about why you have asked them to purchase the text you did. If done early in the semester, this invites them into the course and the learning process. And their feedback can be invaluable as you evaluate a new edition’s offerings.

Look at the new edition yourself. This will take a bit of time. Read the preface and introduction to see what the author(s) says about the new edition. As noted, if there are new co-authors see if the writing quality and style is similar to the present text. The most efficient way to determine what has changed from the old to the new edition is to get your hands on the transition guide provided by the publisher. Most publishers are happy to provide them because they make good business sense – they increase the chances that you will not seek a different book because they have made it easy for you to identify new or improved areas in the new edition, and the text authors get a chance to show you that they continue to update their text. The transition guide is exactly what you need to determine quickly and accurately what has changed, and therefore what changes may be required in your course. Most publishers have these

guides available on their Web sites.

Look at the ancillary materials. The quality of the ancillary package can have a big impact on how much time the instructor spends generating in-class or on-line activities, PowerPoint slides and images for lecture materials, review guides, and grading exams. If the publisher is adding a lot of ancillary support to the text, it tells you something about the publisher's investment. Students can help you with part of this evaluation process. If the publisher is spending a lot on resources to help students learn more autonomously, and the students perceive the resources as valuable, then you can have some assurance that staying with the new edition and its ancillaries will be worthwhile.

Have your students help. Many of our colleagues have enlisted the assistance of their students in the text selection process with great success. If you are waffling on whether to stay with the new edition of your old text or go to a new one, student input can help you decide. For example, consider creating an extra credit assignment for students in a course in which you anticipate a new edition. Students could read and compare chapters across two different texts and provide the instructor with a written, critical review. Students feel empowered when asked to participate in this part of the education process and typically take the assignment seriously. Their feedback can help you determine whether it is time to switch to a new text altogether, or to transition to the new edition of the present text.

Be careful and specific in what you want to know. For example, students may like a new edition because it has more displays (pictures and one page topics), more headings, more summaries, and the like. In brief, there is less text for students to read. These may not be your criteria, however.

Making Compromises

Sometimes there are good reasons to stick with a new edition, even if you think a change to another text is justifiable. You may be teaching a distance education course and have agreed with the publisher to allow images and exercises to be used over the television or Internet. Changing to a new text creates the need for a completely new set of agreements, as well as the need to change the images and exercises you use. These types of changes can be hugely time consuming, and instructors need to evaluate if changing to a new, "better" text is worth this time investment, especially if the new edition is adequate.

The timing of the change to a new text, in general, is also worth considering. If you are considering changing from the new edition to another text altogether, it is worth looking at it when your text goes into new edition. Edition changes are always going to happen. Using these tips, hopefully the transition to a new edition will actually benefit you, your students and your course without great time expenditure.

Recommended Reading

Davis, B. G. (1993). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dewey, R. A. (1999). Finding the right Introductory Psychology textbook. In B. Perlman, L. I. McCann, & S. H. McFadden (Eds.), *Lessons learned: Practical advice for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 25-28). Washington, DC: American Psychological Society.

Hutchings, P. (Ed). (1998). *The course portfolio: How faculty can examine their teaching to advance practice and improve student learning*. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

McKeachie, W. J. (1999). *Teaching tips* (10th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.