Selecting a Text for your Course

If several textbooks are appropriate to your course, use the following criteria to select one:

1. **Content**: accuracy, currency, coherence, and clarity
2. **Scope and sequence of topics (organization of material)**: Scope refers to whether the material is presented in the depth and breadth you are seeking. Sequence of topics assists in logical organization.
3. **Level of difficulty and interest for students**: Material should be challenging for the level of student but not too difficult. **Tip**: Solicit opinions of students who have completed your course. Ask for comparisons among 2 or more texts. Students will be able to give a more accurate reading for this criterion than someone who is extremely familiar with the topic.
4. **Conceptual orientation and approach to the subject matter**: Consider whether this text will work with concepts for medical education or for the practice of medicine later. Consider what approaches and concepts are key.
5. **Dealing with Bias and Disabilities**: Avoid texts that have explicit or implicit bias (toward genders, race/ethnic background, age, etc.) through text, images, statistics, or through omission. **NOTE**: We are mandated to make available alternative media formats for students with reading, viewing or hearing disabilities. **Tip**: Librarians are helpful resources here.
6. **Quality of writing**: This refers to the way the authors/editors have communicated with their readers. Criteria for quality may include generation of interest, importance of ideas, logical and effective organization, appropriate voice, specific, accurate and memorable word choice, sentence fluency, and appropriate use of conventions. **Tip**: Ask, “Am I enjoying reading this? Does the writer use language well, and convey meaning clearly?” Again, students will assist with this.
7. **Pedagogical design that enhances meaning**: This refers to clear headings and subheadings, chapter previews and summaries, high quality images, diagrams, review questions, glossaries, consistent presentation among chapters, etc.
8. **Cost**: Consider paperback instead of hardback; choose a less expensive book if it is of comparable quality, especially if students are purchasing several texts. However, if students want to “build their professional bookshelf”, the option to purchase in hardcover may be important.
9. **Environmental impacts**: Consider the use of processed chlorine - free paper; publisher’s participation in green press initiatives; online text availability.
10. **Reviews by faculty who have used the textbook**: Consult published book reviews and posts on websites or listservs of professional associations. There are ratings on bookseller websites and the Faculty Center (www.facultycenter.net), which has information about textbooks. Solicit comments from colleagues and reviews by student panel.


**More detailed lists of criteria are offered by Altman, Ericksen, and Pena-Shaff (2006).**
Sources: