

OER PUBLIC DOMAIN TEXTBOOK SOURCES*

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Abstract

Overview of alternatives to textbooks.

1 OER Sources of Public Domain Textbooks

1.1 Lesson Components

- Fast Fact
- Skills/Objectives
- Success Indicators
- Introduction
- Activity
- Review questions
- Resources

1.2 Fast Fact

1.3 Project Gutenberg has 20,000 free books in its Online Book Catalog and is the oldest producer of free ebooks on the Internet.

1.4 Skills/Objectives

Learners will be able to:

- Locate sources of public domain textbooks.
- Establish criteria for selection of public domain textbooks.

1.5 Success Indicators

- Lesson plan developed that incorporates use of a public domain textbook.

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2 Introduction

Faculty often find the task of selecting reading materials or textbooks for a course daunting. Instructors can ease the selection process by establishing and following criteria such as quantity, quality, accuracy, currency, reading level, relevance, and reliability. Whether due to passion for the course topic or simply hasty decision-making, some instructors make the mistake of selecting and assigning an overwhelming amount of reading for their students. Try estimating how many minutes students will need to complete each reading assignment and adjust your selection of learning materials accordingly. Another concern is that information provided to students, especially in printed textbooks, can quickly become outdated.

Criteria/Guidelines for Selection of Materials

- Quality of content, literary merit and format
- Timeliness
- Favorable reviews
- Permanence/lasting value
- Authority: author
- Scope
- Physical quality
- Format: print, CD-ROM, online, etc.
- reading level

Two major efforts to promote the development and sharing of public domain textbooks are Connexions¹ and Wikibooks². Free Textbook Search³ allows users to search for free textbooks in 113 sites in English, German, French, Dutch or Swedish.

Connexions⁴ is a project at Rice University supported by the Hewlett Foundation to promote collaborative development, free sharing, and rapid publishing of scholarly content on the Web. Content is organized in small modules that are easily connected into larger courses. All content is free to use and reuse under the Creative Commons "attribution" license.

Wikibooks⁵ is a Wikimedia project started in 2003 with the mission to create a free collection of open-content textbooks that anyone can edit.

Collections of books that are freely available include Project Gutenberg⁶, Read Print⁷, Bartleby⁸, Online Books⁹, Electronic Text Service¹⁰, and the Open Book Project¹¹.

Project Gutenberg has 20,000 free books in its Online Book Catalog and is the oldest producer of free eBooks on the Internet. The mission of Project Gutenberg¹² is to encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks. In an effort to promote intercultural understanding, the World Digital Library¹³ plans to make available significant primary materials from cultures around the world, including manuscripts, maps, rare books, musical scores, recordings, films, prints, photographs, architectural drawings, and other significant cultural materials.

¹<http://cnx.org/>

²http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page

³<http://www.freetextbooks.eu/>

⁴<http://cnx.org/>

⁵http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page

⁶<http://www.gutenberg.org/>

⁷<http://www.readprint.com/>

⁸<http://www.bartleby.com/>

⁹<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/>

¹⁰<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ebooks/>

¹¹<http://www.ibiblio.org/obp/>

¹²<http://www.gutenberg.org/>

¹³<http://www.worlddigitallibrary.org/project/english/index.html>

The Assayer¹⁴ displays a list of textbooks that are freely available in many disciplines. For an example, see these introductory physics textbooks¹⁵ and Liberte¹⁶, a first-year collegel French textbook. The Internet Public Library¹⁷ provides a comprehensive list of books that are available on the internet. A video tour¹⁸ of the site is available. Examples of free available eBooks from Bartleby¹⁹:

- The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction²⁰
- The Oxford Shakespeare²¹
- Anatomy of the Human Body²²
- The World Factbook, 2003²³
- Online Sapiens²⁴

Two sources of audio books in the public domain are LibriVox²⁵ and Loudlit²⁶. LibriVox²⁷ provides free audiobooks from the public domain with several options for listening. Loudlit²⁸ provides a text of great literary masterpieces as well as high quality audio to help readers improve their spelling, punctuation and paragraph structure. Loudlit literature includes children's stories, poetry, short stories, and novels.

Other sources of textbook learning materials are digital collections of institutional repositories²⁹ at universities and self-archiving³⁰ by authors on the internet. Some of these include:

- Scholarship of the California Digital Library³¹
- MIT textbooks³²
- Hofstra University Hofprints-Hofstra University E-Print Archive³³
- Cornell Race, Ethnicity, and Religion Project³⁴

3 Activity

Experience

1. Identify some learning materials at Project Gutenberg³⁵.
2. Go to Wikibooks³⁶ to identify textbooks in your teaching discipline.
3. Consider using Wikibooks for a class project³⁷; read the guidelines.
4. Take a tour³⁸ of Connexions to find out if it has resources of use to you in your teaching.

¹⁴<http://www.theassayer.org/>

¹⁵<http://www.lightandmatter.com/area1.html>

¹⁶<http://www.lightandmatter.com/french/>

¹⁷<http://www.ipl.org/>

¹⁸<http://www.ipl.org/div/about/tours/IPLTourIntroVideo.mov>

¹⁹<http://www.bartleby.com/>

²⁰<http://www.bartleby.com/ebook/>

²¹<http://www.bartleby.com/70/>

²²<http://www.bartleby.com/107/>

²³<http://www.bartleby.com/151/>

²⁴<http://onlinesapiens.com/books.html>

²⁵<http://librivox.org/>

²⁶<http://www.loudlit.org>

²⁷<http://librivox.org/>

²⁸<http://www.loudlit.org>

²⁹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutional_repository

³⁰<http://www.eprints.org/openaccess/self-faq/>

³¹<http://repositories.cdlib.org/escholarship/>

³²<http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/resources/index.htm>

³³<http://hofprints.hofstra.edu/>

³⁴<http://racereligion.library.cornell.edu/race/ebooks.php>

³⁵<http://www.gutenberg.org/>

³⁶http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page

³⁷http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wikibooks:Guidelines_for_class_projects

³⁸<http://cnx.org/about-us/tour/1.html>

Reflect

1. Create an account³⁹ at Project Gutenberg then post your own review of a textbook.

Apply

1. Distributed Proofreaders⁴⁰ . Help create an eBook.
2. Contribute⁴¹ to Wikibooks by editing pages, creating new pages, publicizing Wikibooks, and many other ways, such as donating.

3.1 Review Questions

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages to using public domain textbooks for teaching?
2. What are the most useful sources of public domain textbooks in your discipline and why?

3.2 Resources

- Project Gutenberg⁴²
- The 7 Things You Should Know About E-Books⁴³

³⁹<http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Special:Userlogin>

⁴⁰<http://www.pgdp.net/c/>

⁴¹http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wikibooks:Contributing_FAQ

⁴²http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page

⁴³http://www.educause.edu/content.asp?page_id=666&ID=ELI7020&bhcp=1