

When a Textbook Is Online, Not on Paper



Electronic books have changed the way many people read for pleasure. Now online textbooks are changing the way some students learn and some teachers teach.

More than one hundred seventy-five thousand students attend the public schools in Fairfax County, Virginia, outside Washington. Last year, the school system used digital books in fifteen schools. This school year, middle schools and high schools changed from printed to electronic textbooks in their social studies classes.

Luke Rosa is a history teacher at Falls Church High School. His students work on school laptop computers. He explains the idea to them this way.

"I mean, it's just like a regular textbook, except it's got it all online."

Peter Noonan, an assistant superintendent of schools, says with electronic textbooks, publishers can quickly update the content with the latest information.

"The world's changing consistently. And the online textbooks can change right along with the events that are happening."

Digital books also cost less than printed textbooks, he says.

"Usually it's in the neighborhood of between fifty and seventy dollars to buy a textbook for each student, which adds up to roughly eight million dollars for all of our students in Fairfax County. We actually have purchased all of the online textbooks for our students for just under six million dollars."

So what do students think?

"I don't have to carry a textbook around, so that's nice."

"I don't like it because the Internet sometimes, it's like, doesn't work."

"You can highlight your work. You can leave notes on your work and it'll all be saved onto your account. It's a lot better than a regular textbook."



Social studies teacher Michael Bambara says the e-book he uses in his government class is better than a printed textbook. He likes the way it has materials for students with different levels of reading skills.

"Particularly this book, that I use in government has differentiated reading levels. So a person can individualize their learning and I can individualize their instruction."

But the students also need access to the Internet when they are not at school. About ten percent of students in Fairfax County do not have a computer

or online access at home. Stephen Castillo is one of them.

"Pretty much I go to, like, the library, I guess, or go to a friend's house."

Public libraries in the county have free Internet. There are also after-school computer labs as well as computer clubhouses supported by the county. Middle school student Slieman Hakim is happy about that. He says his family has to share a single computer at home.

"All of my family works on a computer, my sister and me both do our homework on it. So I come here to do my homework. It's good."

Other school systems in the area are also considering online textbooks. In Prince George's County, Maryland, a survey showed that sixty percent of students have computer access at home.

Curriculum Director Gladys Whitehead says an e-book test project is being planned.

"Next year we'll just have a pilot with probably one classroom and one subject area, so that we can see, you know, what issues will come up with complete online access."

Welcome to Voice of America's Special English Article Activity

This worksheet is designed to be used with: *When a Textbook Is Online, Not on Paper.*

Level: beginner - intermediate

Time: 20 minutes

This worksheet will help you learn new vocabulary about digital textbooks. You will answer questions about the advantages and disadvantages of digital textbooks, and write a short paragraph about your opinion.

1. What is a *digital book*?

a book with paper pages you can turn

a book you can read on a computer

2. What is this article about?

textbooks that students read on line

textbooks that students read in print

3. Complete the following sentence with the name of a school subject.

This school year, middle schools and high schools changed from printed to electronic textbooks in their _____ classes.

4. What advantages does Peter Noonan say there are to using digital books?

5. Does Melanie Reuter like digital textbooks? Why?

6. Does Maria Stephany like digital textbooks? Why?

7. Who likes digital textbooks because you can highlight your work?

Melanie Reuter

Maria Stephany

Brian Tran

Michael Bambara

8. Who likes e-books because there is material for students at different reading levels?

Melanie Reuter

Maria Stephany

Brian Tran

Michael Bambara

ANSWER KEY

1. a book you can read on a computer
2. textbooks that students read on line
3. social studies
4. publishers can quickly update the content with the latest information, and digital books also cost less than printed textbooks
5. Yes; she doesn't have to carry a textbook around
6. No; she doesn't because she doesn't always work
7. Brian Tran
8. Michael Bambara
9. He doesn't have internet access at home
10. because there is free internet access