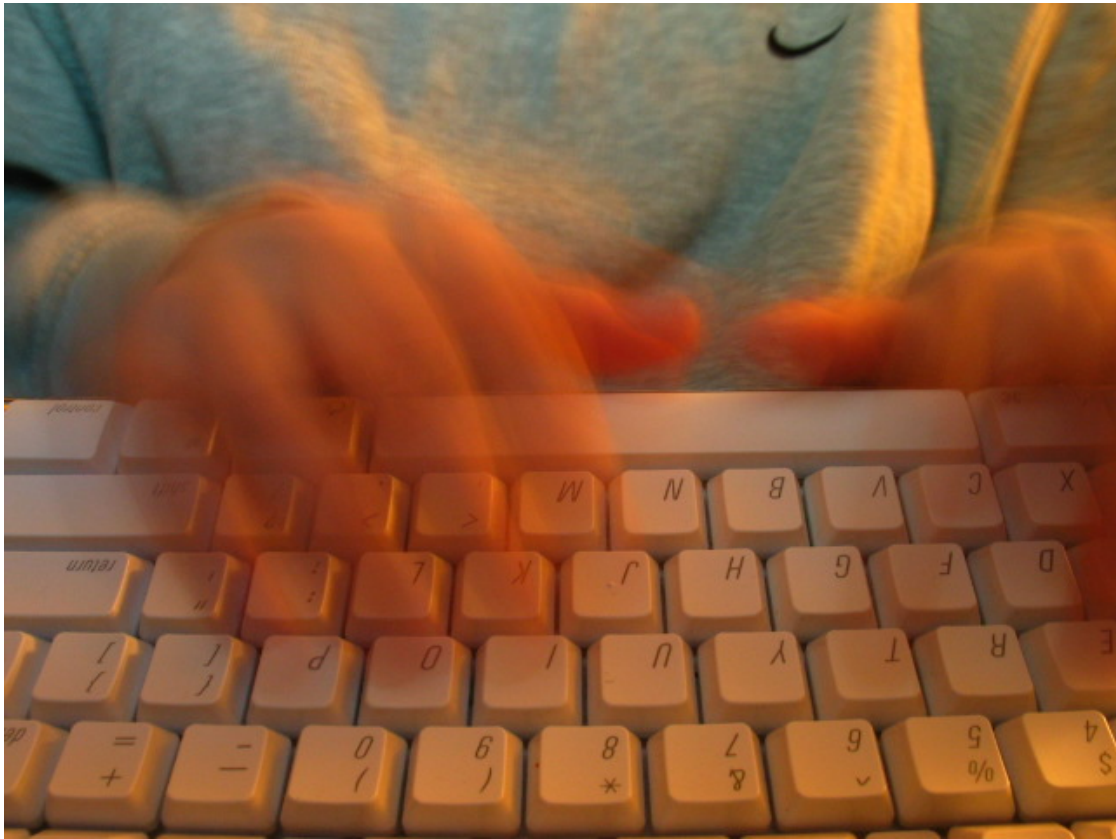


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# Writing College Textbook Supplements

**The Definitive Guide to Winning  
High-Paying Assignments  
in the College Textbook Publishing Market**

John Soares

# Writing College Textbook Supplements

## **The Definitive Guide to Winning High-Paying Assignments in the College Textbook Publishing Market**

By

**John Soares**

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# Introduction

## How I Started Writing Textbook Supplements

I received my M.A. degree in political science from the University of California at Davis in June of 1989. The following spring I taught international relations at Shasta College near Redding in northern California, and a year later I began teaching American government, international relations, and politics of developing countries courses at Butte College near Chico, California, while continuing to teach both international relations and American government at Shasta College. So I was a part-time instructor at two colleges, I was teaching a full-time course load between the two of them, yet I was making very low part-time wages.

I had always been interested in writing as a profession and had already begun a career in outdoors writing. At Butte College I met sales representatives for the major textbook publishing companies. After I expressed my desire to write for their companies, they put me in touch with editors. In the summer of 1992 I landed my first big project, a test bank for a new American government textbook published by Harper Collins. They paid \$2.50 a question for 1600 questions: I made 4000 bucks and was hooked on my new profession.

## The Progress of My Career

I took advantage of my diverse educational background (A.S. degree in engineering, B.S. degree in biochemistry, M.A. in political science, with a lot of course work in history, geography, and earth sciences) to market myself to publishers in several fields using the methods described in this book, and I continued to get work. By the summer of 1994 I'd been a part-time college instructor for four years. For the previous three years I'd been teaching essentially a full-time load of 5 classes per semester, but I was

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making only about \$15,000 from it. Even though I loved teaching and got high evaluations from both students and administrators, I decided to leave that profession and become a full-time writer. By 2001 I had reached an annual income of \$53,000, about three-and-a-half times what I made as a part-time college instructor. I achieved my highest income in 2002: \$63,066.

## **How I Wrote This Book**

Since I've worked in many different disciplines, and I've been in the field essentially full-time for over 15 years, I have created just about every type of college textbook supplement that's commonly used. In my frequent talks with editors, I always took extensive notes. I wanted to know everything I could about both my own work and college textbook publishing in general.

I first had the idea for this book in the late 1990s, and I've been collecting information from editors, books, supplements, and the Internet ever since. During the writing process I checked with editorial contacts for clarification on many areas, and I've had the manuscript thoroughly reviewed.

## **How This Book Will Help You Make Money**

I show you everything you need to know to find editors at college textbook publishing companies and convince them to pay you good money to create textbook supplements. I also detail how to do a great job on your projects and maintain solid relationships with editors so they come back to you time and again with more high-paying projects.

## **The Motto**

This is my motto for creating textbook supplements:

**Help Instructors Teach Better; Help Students Learn Better**

This guides me and keeps me focused on producing only the highest-quality work. Of course, by doing this I also help myself to earn better.

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## Chapter 1

# The Benefits of Writing Textbook Supplements

There are two main areas in which writing textbook supplements will benefit you: helping your career and putting money in your bank account.

### **Help Your Career**

Having one or more textbook supplements on your résumé or c.v. will boost your chances of career advancement, especially if you are in the teaching profession.

### **Increase Chances of Getting a Better Job**

Many supplement writers are part-time faculty at a community college or a university. I was a part-time instructor at the community college level for several years, so I know what it's like, and I know that most part-time instructors would love to be full-time instructors. Hiring committees, whether for community colleges, teaching-focused four-year colleges, or research-focused universities, are impressed that you have written textbook supplements. It shows you are active in education beyond just teaching, it shows you have initiative, and it shows you can tackle and complete large projects.

### **Increase Chances of Getting Tenure or Promotion**

Of course, if you already have a full-time teaching gig, you want tenure, and beyond that, you want promotions. Textbook supplements are impressive to promotion committees for all the reasons discussed above.

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## Other Writing Possibilities

You likely have other writing interests besides doing work in educational publishing. Having textbook supplements on your writing résumé will make it easier to convince publishers—be they newspaper, magazine, Internet, or book publishers—that you can do quality work and follow a project through to completion.

## Get a Job with a Textbook Publisher

Writing supplements is a good way to get to know people in the textbook publishing industry. You may decide you'd like to work for one of the publishers in editorial, marketing, or sales. It really helps when your publishing credits show you have experience in the field, and you'll also know editors that can recommend you for jobs.

## What Affects How Much You Make

There are several factors, all discussed in detail in subsequent chapters (especially Chapter 4, Negotiating Payment), that determine how much money you will personally make:

- Most importantly, your desire to succeed in this field
- How well you market yourself to textbook publishing companies
- How well you write
- How well you communicate with editors
- Your areas of academic expertise and the demand for supplements in those areas
- Your overall skill level with software programs such as Microsoft Word™
- Your ability to understand and use the Internet
- How well you understand the textbook publishing business
- How well you negotiate with editors
- Your flexibility with publishing cycles and publishing schedules
- Your willingness to work hard when necessary to meet deadlines

## Make Good Money

### Sample Rates of Pay

Pay rates range from sub-minimum wage to over \$100 per hour. However, most of the

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work I have been offered paid in the \$35-60 per hour range. I have had some projects where I made \$100-\$150 per hour, and I've had a few where I only made \$20 per hour. Keep in mind that I have experience in the field, type quickly, and am a full-time writer. However, you could be, or with more experience could be, better and faster than me.

If you have good qualifications, if you market yourself well, and if you negotiate well with editors, you should be able to make \$25-\$75 per hour, depending upon the project and company.

### **The Most I Made in One Year**

My top year in this business was 2002: I earned \$63,066 working on textbook supplements. I was fairly busy in 2002; however, I probably averaged about 25 hours per week over the whole year. There were periods when I worked long days for weeks on end, and then there were periods where I had little or no work, periods in which I pursued other business and personal interests or took time off to travel and visit with family and friends.

### **Be Aware of Publishing Cycles**

Most college textbooks are on either a two-year or a three-year publishing cycle. This means that a new edition of a given textbook is released with updates to the field that have occurred since the last edition was finalized. In addition, the authors and publisher may decide to add more breadth to the book or perhaps some new pedagogical features.

Publishers time the release of new editions so they are available either at the beginning of the fall semester (mid-August) or at the beginning of winter quarter (early January). The bulk of textbook supplement preparation occurs in the two to four months prior to publication of the book. This happens because supplement authors need to work from either the page proofs (PDF files of the book that are very close to the final product) or from the manuscript of the new edition, and these are typically not ready until this time.

This means that work is very concentrated in certain months and can be lean in other months. You need to be prepared to work hard and make your good money while you can, and then make good use of the slow times doing other pursuits that either make you money or bring you joy.

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### **When to Transition to Full-Time**

Yes, you can make good money in this field. However, it takes time to reach the point where you command high levels of pay and get offered projects on a steady basis. Therefore, you must look at writing textbook supplements as a way to augment your current income, not replace it. This is especially the case if you work in only one academic discipline. If you work in more than one, you of course have more opportunities to get projects.

Many of you only want to write textbook supplements in order to supplement your income. However, if you do want to earn your living doing this, be sure you are getting more than enough work to pay the bills. You must have three or more months of savings as a cushion for potential gaps in the publishing cycle when there is little or no work available, and six months' savings is optimal.

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