

Holy *Bleep*! Why Are Your Courses So Darn Cheap?

by Kate Johnson



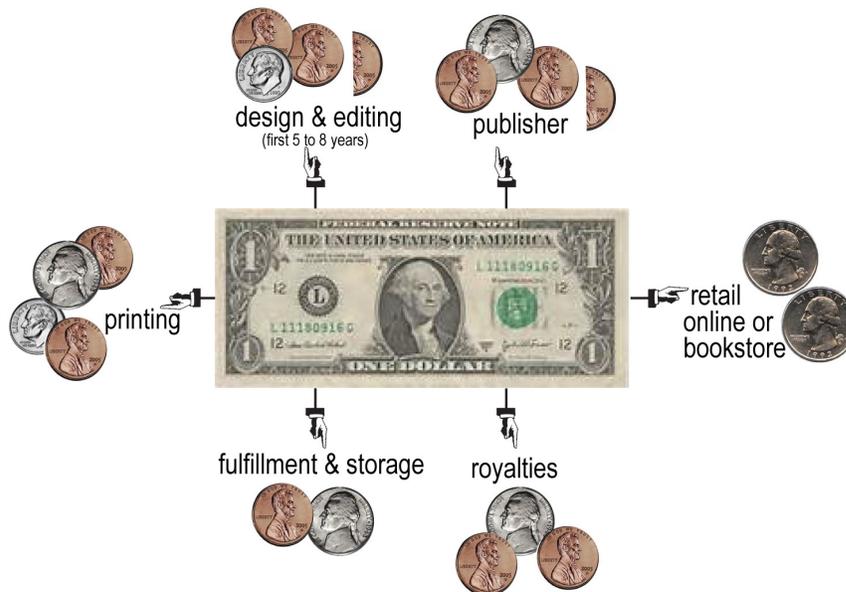
Said no one—ever. But that’s okay; there will be no apologies here, just a little explaining . . .

I realize that compared to what people are used to paying for books (like, 99¢ kindle books on Amazon, or \$1.99 trade paperbacks at Barnes and Noble) our courses seem expensive. But I ask that you take a minute and hear this publisher (standing on her warn out soapbox) out. I promise you won’t bat an eye at the price of a textbook or eBook course again; or at the very least, stop that swearing, okay?

The problem (and by “problem” I mean your dismay, not our prices) is complicated and has more layers than Kate Middleton’s wedding cake. As consumers we have been conditioned to think that books ought to be cheap, cheaper than just about anything else we buy for our children, including clothing, food, video games, toys, and cell phone service. The reasons for this devaluing of books range from the long history of the publishing industry choosing quantity over quality, to the public’s warped sense of priority. But the fact of the matter is this: it almost certainly costs more to take your daughter out to dinner and a movie, or fill a gas tank, or buy a pair of designer jeans, or a dozen other ephemeral endeavors than to buy one course that will give her an education to last a lifetime.

But you’re still perturbed, aren’t you? I feel your trepidations and I’ve read your emails: How do other publishers sell books cheaply? Don’t you understand that many homeschooling families are on a tight budget? How do you justify charging what you do for a PDF file? Did you write this article from the yacht you purchased with your profits?

Some of those questions (hopefully that nasty last one) are answered by a cool graphic demonstration, or as I like to call it: SHOW ‘EM THE MONEY! Below is a general breakdown of the title-specific distribution of each dollar you spend on one of our textbooks.

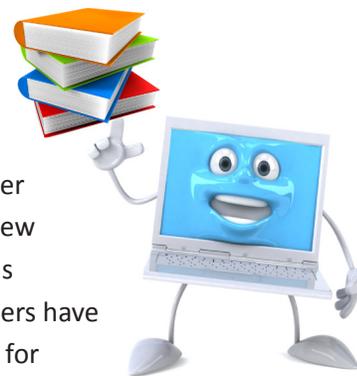


So for each dollar you spend on a textbook, Pandia Press makes about 7½¢ if purchased from a retailer. Then much of that 7½¢ is used to pay general, non title-specific costs such as website, staffing, and advertising. Now where did I park that yacht?

But why do books at the bookstore cost comparatively less? The reason academic publishers have to charge more for their textbooks than trade publishers is a simple case of sale volume. For reasons anyone who took high school economics will understand, **higher sales equals lower price**. Curricula publishers (specifically homeschool publishers) have a much narrower market, and therefore far less sales, than trade. Fewer sales equals shorter print runs, which equals higher cost per book.

Which brings up another soapbox opportunity for me: **used curricula sales** and **illegal file sharing**. NOTHING adversely affects the price and availability of curricula more than these. Illegal eBook sharing and copying/distribution of books is. . . well, illegal, and I know I don't need to explain why that is not okay. But let's talk about used curricula sales: It is not illegal to purchase an original print copy of a course and later resale it used (at a profit even), the "doctrine of first sale" ensures this right. So what's the problem? Clearly eBay and the dozens and dozens of homeschool-specific used curriculum websites and conferences see no problem. They even advocate they are "helping" by providing a much needed money-saving service. Education publishers lose approximately 30% of sales to used book sellers.* When you choose to purchase a course used rather than new, neither publisher nor author makes one red cent. Don't think this affects you? Think again. The loss from used curricula can put homeschool publishers out of business. For those of us that manage to stay around, it means the buyers of new curricula have to pay more to offset the loss, and it greatly jeopardizes a publisher's ability to produce new courses. If people stopped selling our courses used and sales increased by 30%, our books would cost less, a lot less. . . probably 30% less. And we could publish new courses a lot faster.

That brings us to eBooks. Yes, our profit margins are significantly higher with eBooks than print. As you might have already figured out, **eBook sales are why we are still here**. You could say that eBooks carry print. The extra money made on eBook sales allows us to continue offering print courses, as well as pay start-up expenses for publishing new curricula. That is the key purpose eBooks are priced as they are, but there are two other important reasons: First, if eBook sales were made too low, it would make print obsolete. Few would purchase the much pricier print editions, printing costs would increase, print editions would become even more expensive, and they would have to be discontinued. Our customers have shown us time and time again that they want print editions, and eBooks are difficult to use for certain titles such as RSO Biology 2. Finally, there is a strong desire by this publisher to adequately compensate the fabulous authors who write our courses. Authors receive a percentage of the sale of a course. eBooks are priced so that the author receives a fair compensation for the time and effort she gave creating the course.



So I hope now you understand the reasons behind our price structure. You know the quality of the courses we offer. And just like anything else, you do get what you pay for. The quality of education that Pandia Press offers makes it more than worth the cost. I know that many homeschooling families and small schools have to scrimp and save to buy curricula and school supplies, but I hope that you will consider cutting costs elsewhere. Buy your children new, quality curricula and show them just where your priorities lie.

* According to the New York Times. www.nytimes.com/2005/09/29/books/29book.html?_r=0