



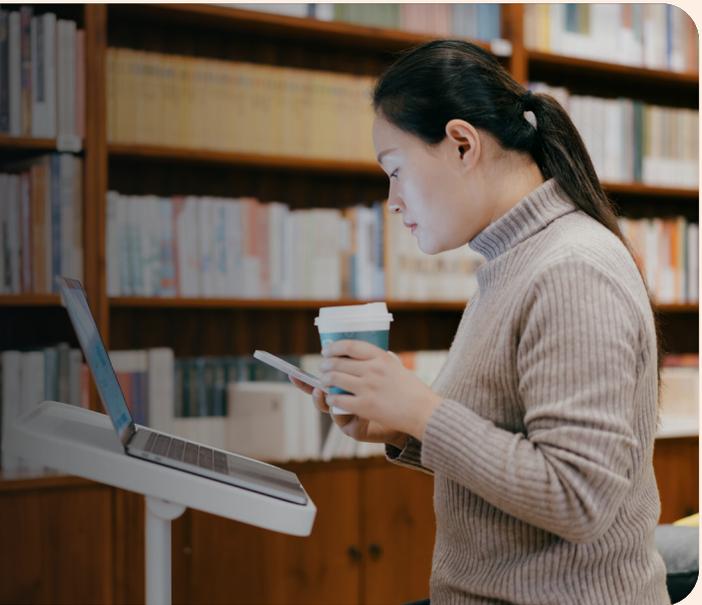
Beyond knowledge:

The crucial role of books in
higher education excellence
and employability



ELSEVIER

A global perspective of students, academics, researchers and librarians

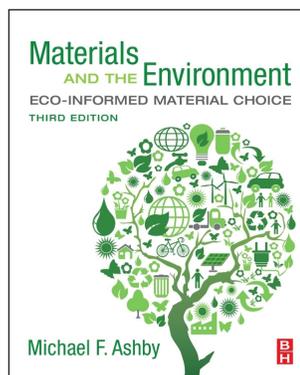
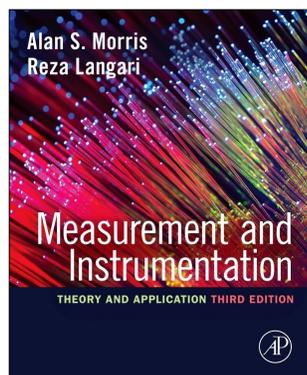
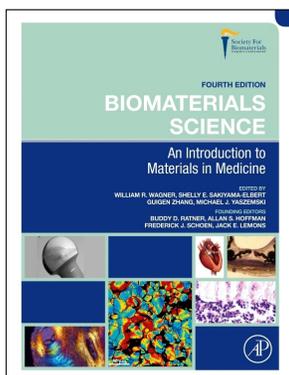


Introduction

According to a recent report, *View from the top: Academic leaders' and funders' insights on the challenges ahead* (Elsevier/Ipsos, 2024), 82% of global [academic] leaders consider educational excellence a high priority, yet only 64% feel their institution is well prepared to tackle the challenge¹. Additionally, 93% of them put a high priority on ensuring research excellence, but only 56% feel well prepared to meet this challenge².

For academic librarians, student success remains a key priority³. But pressures on institutions in many parts of the world to produce “employable” graduates, whether in academia or industry, are mounting.

In this overview, students, teaching faculty, researchers and librarians weigh in on how they approach student and researcher preparation and on the role that books specifically play in developing the skills needed for academic and career success.



A selection of popular textbooks for academic courses from Elsevier

- 1 View from the top, p.47, 2024 (accessed June 5, 2024)
- 2 ibid
- 3 Ithaka S+R US Library Survey 2022 (co-sponsored by Elsevier and JSTOR)

Teaching the basics

Helping students develop proficiency in information literacy, critical analysis and research are among the most important skills to ensure educational excellence⁴. And using high quality, peer-reviewed literature is one of the most impactful ways to teach these skills.

In an Elsevier survey conducted by TechValidate, 90% of students and researchers state that they benefit from using books and journals together in the same search⁵.

“Being able to find all relevant information for my research has been amazing; finding [a] journal or book on [a] topic and finding others at ease is brilliant.”⁶

– Graduate student, Life Sciences (location not given)

Additionally, students and teaching faculty are more frequently having to explore new areas because many of today’s complex questions are coming at the intersection of disciplines. To get themselves up to speed, they need a fundamental base of knowledge and practice available in books, including textbooks, introductory monographs and major reference works, as well as book-based tools available in full-text databases that enable unfamiliar subject- and topic-level exploration.

“Prior to teaching [my] students, I need to create ... a holistic understanding of the topic I am teaching, and textbooks are the fastest path to that kind of understanding.”⁷

– Teaching Faculty, Social Sciences, Australia



“Unlike journal articles, books serve as a source of more comprehensive scientific knowledge. ... I purposefully look for books to prepare new courses of disciplines or to update outdated educational materials.”⁸

– Alina Petrushka, Scientific Library, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine

“When my research is related to other disciplines outside my expertise, I will get an insight from books ...”⁹

– Researcher, Physical Sciences (location not given)

4 ibid

5 Survey of Books on ScienceDirect users, conducted for Elsevier by TechValidate, 2020

6 ScienceDirect user survey, Elsevier, 2023

7 Elsevier survey, conducted by DeltaThink, 2022

8 International survey of Books on ScienceDirect, Elsevier, 2023

9 Elsevier survey of book authors, 2022

One example of a book-based tool is the Topics feature within Elsevier's full-text platform, ScienceDirect. Using machine learning to extract contextual information from the huge range of books across ScienceDirect, Topics help students and researchers quickly find and assess background information in new areas. Students, teachers and researchers have easy access to this free database, discoverable through a library's federated search and by open search engines, and can make it a seamless part of their workflow.

"... ScienceDirect Topic pages ... helps me save my time researching any information as it really exposes various connections across one topic and others."¹⁰

– Student (location not given)

Without access to a range of basic and authoritative information from books, students in particular struggle to successfully build the necessary knowledge that would lead to producing impactful work. Books provide a sweep of knowledge and help synthesize information that can otherwise be fragmented in other sources.

"A lot of sources can provide very fragmented knowledge ... the book is just a really good way to provide the scaffolding and the structure that students need ... to be able to put it together."¹¹

– Associate Professor, Health Services Psychology, USA

"When I work with students, I always recommend certain books to use, as well as journals. But I prefer books, especially when tackling something new."¹²

– Academic librarian, Croatia



"Books [provide] the theoretical frameworks of the academic works of my students, be they undergraduate or postgraduate."¹³

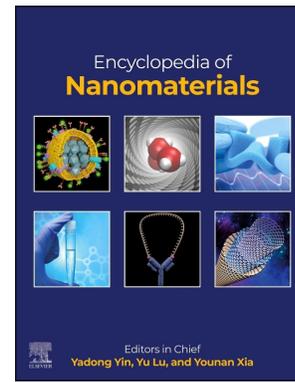
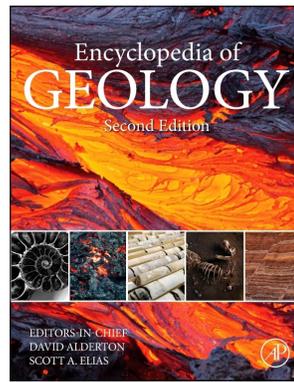
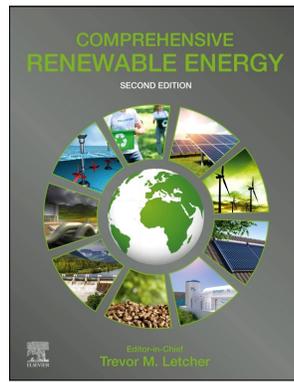
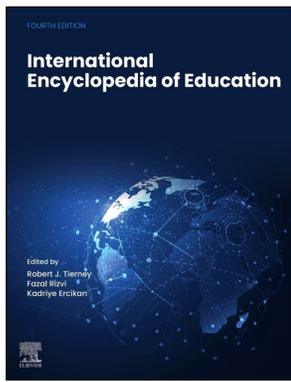
– Achly Denisse Barraza Saez, Librarian and Information Literacy Tutor, University of Playa Ancha, Chile

¹⁰ ScienceDirect user survey, Elsevier, 2023

¹¹ Elsevier survey, conducted by DeltaThink, 2022

¹² International survey of Books on ScienceDirect, Elsevier, 2023

¹³ ibid



A sample of major reference works from Elsevier preferred by institutional customers

Building a solid foundation

Once the basic skills of knowledge discovery have been mastered, the next logical step in academic progression is to apply that knowledge to finding answers or solutions. Here, too, books are a powerful resource. Use of topic-specific monographs and major reference works, book series and serials, and handbooks all are crucial to advancing from knowledge to application.

“... reference content helps me to supplement my learning ... and provides me with the tools I need to complete assignments.”¹⁴

– **Postdoctoral researcher, Health Sciences (location not given)**

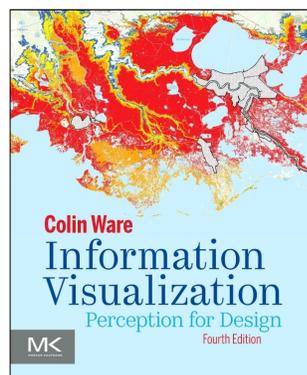
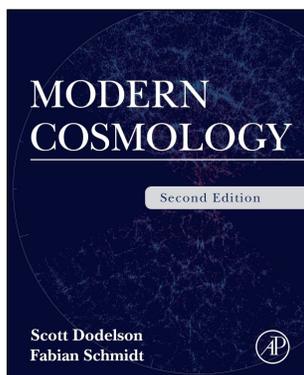
“I use foundational references when I am starting a new project.”¹⁵

– **Researcher, Life Sciences (location not given)**

According to staff of the University of North Florida Library (USA), “books can be invaluable sources for extended scholarly research and should be considered as integral parts of the research arsenal.”¹⁶

“Books are an essential tool for researchers and have a significant impact on the quality and depth of research.”¹⁷

– **Assistant Professor, Egypt**



More popular course textbooks from Elsevier

14 Elsevier survey of book authors, 2022

15 ibid

16 Books: Their Role in Research, University of North Florida Library, 2014 (accessed June 14, 2024)

17 Books on ScienceDirect user survey, Elsevier, 2023

Enabling research and professional proficiency

The knowledge and application learned from books helps students progress to an academic or research career path. High quality scholarly books from reputable publishers are models for how to think creatively and communicate clearly, expose approaches to tackling important problems and demonstrate how to conduct research with integrity. These are all qualities that today's employers desire in those coming into the workforce.

*86% of employers surveyed agree that exposure to a wide range of topics and viewpoints is an important contributor to preparing students for the workforce*¹⁸.

In today's world, becoming a successful scholar or researcher requires "... a great deal of understanding about a wide array of topics in addition to the expertise required to master a given field of study ..." ¹⁹ and books play a pivotal role in helping achieve these goals.

*"Books help to improve research quality [and] demonstrate different research approaches, which enhances researchers' skills and understanding."*²⁰

– Haimanot Birhanu, Lecturer and System Librarian, Jimma University, Ethiopia



*"Books help me to visualize new aspects or future research projects."*²¹

– Dr. Marcelino Carrera Rodríguez, Instituto Politécnico Nacional, México

*"Foundation research [from books] becomes a strong basis in every decision-making and operational implementation activity in the company."*²²

– Researcher, Engineering & Material Sciences
(location not given)

18 American Association of Colleges and Universities survey of executives and hiring managers, 2023

19 Droegemeier, Kelvin K. Demystifying the Academic Research Enterprise: Becoming a Successful Scholar in a Complex and Competitive Environment (p. 18). The MIT Press, 2024 (accessed June 14, 2024).

20 Books on ScienceDirect user survey, Elsevier, 2023

21 International survey of Books on ScienceDirect, Elsevier, 2023

22 Elsevier survey of book authors, 2022

Conclusion

The goal of educational excellence is to develop the skills and abilities of students to high levels of achievement in their chosen fields. As this overview shows, learning materials, including books, are recognized as being crucial elements in preparing students to move successfully from undergraduate studies to higher levels of academia or career-readiness.

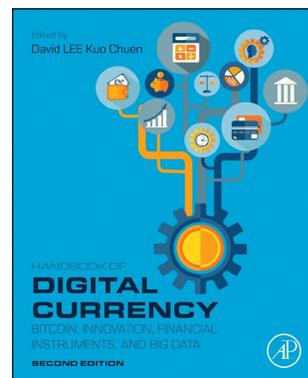
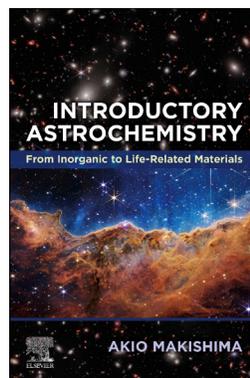
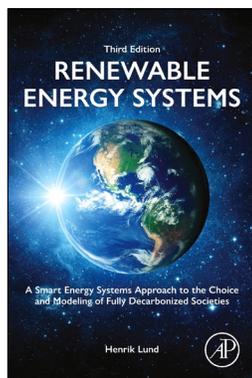
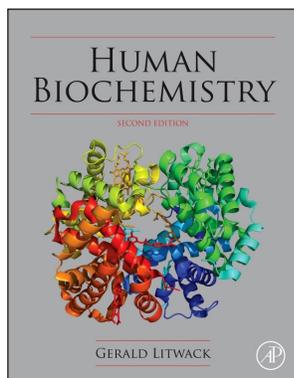
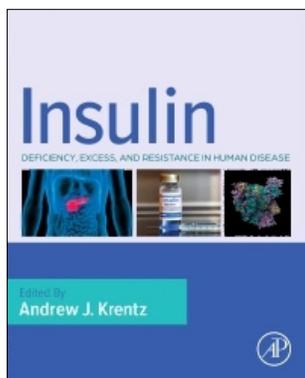


“Books play a very important role in learning about research. They have a more pedagogical presentation and a systematic collection of knowledge.”²³

– Robert Mann, Professor of Physics and Applied Mathematics, University of Waterloo, Canada

One UK library succinctly sums up the value of books in higher education: “Academic books are a trusted source of information because they are written by experts and usually edited by peers before they can be published. They will also contain a full reference list of sources used and often an index to help you quickly find the information you need.”²⁴

Top foundational reference books from Elsevier



“Thanks to books, researchers are inspired to build on existing knowledge instead of reinventing the wheel and explore innovative approaches to research problems based on their findings.”²⁵

– PhD candidate, Morocco

²³ Elsevier survey, conducted by DeltaThink, 2023

²⁴ London South Bank University Libraries (accessed June 12, 2024)

²⁵ Books on ScienceDirect user survey, Elsevier, 2023

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