



## Memorable Textbooks

by Kim A. Pettit

*Make your scholarly books stand out.*

Of all the academic books you've read in your life, which was most memorable, and why? I posed this question to 30 people, a decidedly non-scientific sample.

"You must be joking," one person said. "There's no such thing as a memorable school book!"

"I can't remember any of the textbooks I read," complained another.

"Being an academic," said one professor, "I'm very particular about what I consider to be an academic book. That may be one reason why I have such a hard time thinking of memorable ones!"

Imagine this professor leafing through your catalog. Is he bored by your titles? Perhaps he selects one of your books for his course--will students remember reading it? Are your books eminently *forgettable*?

Your books may be academic because they are used in educational settings, take on weighty topics, are written for an academic audience, or include footnotes, bibliographies, charts, diagrams, glossaries, and indexes. Whatever the case, you want them to make an impact. How can you make your scholarly books stand out?

### ***Some answers***

A few of those I polled were quick to pinpoint the unforgettable books from their days in academia. Their answers were enlightening! Here are some of the qualities they emphasized.

Some chose books for their *thought-provoking content*. *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Victor E. Frankl, was mentioned by two friends involved in counseling ministries. The author is recognized as having founded a distinct field in psychology. Others mentioned books by such thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Calvin.

"In one college class," recalls Jolene Robinson, coordinator for our International Christian Publishing Institute (ICPI), "I read six books by African-American authors about black communities, culture and history. They made a huge impression on me because I had not been exposed to that culture. They broadened my view of the world."

"*The Life and Times of Peter the Great* by Giancarlo Buzzi," says Brad Quicksall, CCMI director of international ministry development. "It was about 800 pages, but so well-written that I actually limited the number of pages I allowed myself to read each night, because I didn't want the book to end. Peter the Great is a fascinating subject—a very complex person with an inexhaustible curiosity."

"C.S. Lewis' *Pilgrim's Regress* is a very fun read and an excellent criticism of various worldviews," recalls Doug Hering, financial services manager at Cook, and an ICPI instructor. "Lewis' vivid descriptions of the people and towns still make me chuckle."

A novel approach can work wonders. *How to Lie with Statistics*, by Darrell Huff and Irving Geis, is a short, funny book whose clear and concise explanations helped me better understand the subject. Wit has made William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White's *The Elements of Style* a classic. Good academic books don't have to be boring. Look for fresh, eloquent writing.

Clarity is key. "Many books are so complex and scholarly that the reader gets frustrated," says Susan Miller, former *InterLit* editor and now managing editor for Cook's Godprints curriculum. "This is not necessary for a book to be academic. John Stott's *Baptism and Filling of the Holy Spirit* is soundly biblical, with clarity of scholarship. It is short and readable."

For some texts to be clear, design is an important element. A biologist chose *Comparative Animal Behavior: An Evolutionary and Ecological Approach* by

Richard Maier as one of her most memorable textbooks. Why? "It had very clear and concise explanations of behavioral theories, as well as great diagrams and a great glossary." Another friend mentioned how helpful it was for her to see portraits of generals and other important figures in the history books she read in school. *The Open Veins of Latin America* by Eduardo Galeano is an eloquently-written book whose

arresting cover is indelibly etched in my mind.

Design isn't limited to original illustrations and fancy covers, however. In the revised North American edition of *The Post-Evangelical* by Dave Tomlinson, the editors ask several thinkers to comment on the text. Their sidebars, scattered throughout the book, allow readers listen in on an important conversation—and provide frequent visual breaks.

Practicality and ease of use were frequently mentioned. "My most memorable academic book is *The One Minute Manager* by Ken Blanchard," says one manager. "it is short, simple, and easy to apply. I have it read it many times and employed its principles over 20 years."

"We used *The Associated Press Style Book* in my copyediting class in college," said an editor friend. "It was simple to use and to understand, and I consulted it almost every day for years."

A friend in sales talked of *Marketing Plans Step by Step*, a book written by his college professor. "He tested his material on us," he said, "and it was so practical I still use it."

Imagine endorsements like these on the back covers of your academic books. Wouldn't you like students and teachers alike to remember *your* books? What can you do to make this happen?

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