

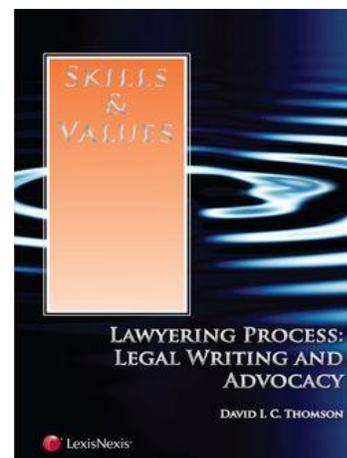
Hybrid Textbooks  
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***John C. Dwan Professor of Practice David Thomson has been using his own hybrid textbook to teach legal writing for the last two years. Instead of having all of the reading material in print, some of it is in print, and the rest is online. Here is a report from David about how it is working out:***

There are many law textbooks today that have a companion website, but few that integrate print and online resources into a combined hybrid text. The advantage of such a format is that they are widely customizable by the professor to fit their style of teaching. Being hybrid, such books can also take advantage of what I refer to as the difference between “lean back” and “lean forward” reading. That is, what is provided in print is the material that students should read with their feet up on the desk, with a highlighter in hand, *leaning back*. And when they finish that, we want them to go online to review the supplemental material online, *leaning forward* in a less passive learning mode and interacting with the material online. The publisher, LexisNexis, named this book design the Skills & Values Series of hybrid law school textbooks (a deliberate reference to the MacCrate Report), and I share Series editing duties with Professor Scott Burnham (Gonzaga). There are now 16 books in the series written by well-known law professors around the country, and they cover many of the main law school course topics, such as Contracts, Property, Civil Procedure, and Administrative Law.

One of the great advantages of this book design is not obvious, but is highly advantageous to the adopting professor, in two fundamental ways. First, adopting one of these texts brings with it a copy of a fully populated courseware site as a companion to the book for the professor and students to use. It is full-featured too - if you are familiar with Blackboard, you will know your way around Web Courses (which is where these sites are constructed). So if you adopt a Skills & Values text, it comes with your courseware site for the semester, and it is *already set up* with supplemental material keyed to each chapter of the book. Second, we all teach our courses - however similar the titles and objectives might be - in somewhat different ways. The second non-obvious advantage of this design is that if the adopting professor does not like a certain handout or example online - it is not in the print book (where it might confuse students), but rather online, and thus can be easily replaced with your own preferred approach. Delete the example provided. Upload your own.

While on sabbatical in the spring of 2013, I created a Skills & Values book for legal writing. Having used it



for two years, I have reached the conclusion that it is working pretty well – even better than I expected. But why? Primarily for three reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, I saw no diminution of performance on the part of my students from the time before I substituted my own textbook for the one I had been using previously in each course. My rubrics in each course, and grading at the end of each semester, are statistically the same before and after the switch. The quality of the work product they produce is the same. Their achievement of the learning goals for each course are functionally indistinguishable. So I believe students are still learning the requisite material and meeting my learning goals for each course, even with the new textbook.

Second, one of the reasons I created these books is that I have long worried that our students are not doing the reading we assign. Or not regularly anyway. In the first year “socratic” classes, the threat of being called on in class seems to get students to read the material, at least most of the time. I generally do not like teaching with sticks, but prefer to offer carrots instead. In a skills class it is even more awkward. You can certainly start each class with a quiz on the assigned reading, and I have known colleagues who do that. But again, I would rather not. To me, it sets up a power dynamic of “I’m the teacher, you’re the student” when I would rather create a more collaborative learning environment, one in which we are both working together toward a shared goal.

So, instead of assigning 30 pages of reading for each class, I assign the 5-6 pages that constitutes each chapter in these new textbooks. I thought that was about what a student would do before class (in “lean back” mode), without requiring a quiz to keep them honest. But I didn’t know. I did have a student say something very interesting to me, though. She said: “I can tell you that when I look at my reading for the night, I am much more likely to do the 6 page reading assignment first, and then tackle the 30 page assignments.” Aah. I hadn’t thought of that. But it makes sense.

Third, the written feedback I have received from students about these books has been strongly positive. Each semester, I have prepared a short questionnaire about the book and asked students to give me some feedback about it, during the semester. And, at the end of the semester, our standard student evaluation form asks students to make comments about the teaching materials that were assigned by the professor. Both of the evaluation instruments have provided strongly positive responses.

I use a mid-semester evaluation I received this sort of feedback: “Loved the length,” “Just right,” “The length is perfect,” and “Yes, it felt like a good amount of reading.” There were two comments (out of 14) that sought more content in the book. For example, one student wrote “I think a little more content would be helpful.”

On the end of year evaluations this year - the official versions the school administers, there were many similar comments. In the LP course a student commented on the official evaluations: “I really appreciated that the course materials were succinct,” and another simply wrote: “Loved the book! Short and to the point.” One student wrote this longer comment: “Overall, I thought that the

materials were important to the subjects we were learning, not superfluous extra reading, and that the hybrid [nature] of the textbook and online interactive material was extremely effective.” Several students did note, however, that the book and website could work better together, and that is something I need to work on in the future.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the trick to the future of law school publishing will be in striking the right balance between what students need in print, and then selecting the right things to make available online to go with it. To provide just enough in print to lay the proper groundwork, and no more. Eventually, perhaps it will all come together in the iPad (or similar device). But for some time I believe there will still be value in the print/online hybrid format. And even the online site will need to be judicious about what it includes. Just enough, and no more. The sweet spot lives somewhere in that balance.