



College Textbooks

Introduction

Textbooks purchased by college students may be exempt from New York State and local sales and use taxes. This bulletin explains the requirements that must be met for these purchases to be exempt from tax.

What is eligible?

Required or recommended textbooks purchased by students who are enrolled full time or part time in an institution of higher education are exempt from sales tax.

An *institution of higher education* is one that is either recognized and approved by the Regents of the University of the State of New York, or accredited by another accrediting agency or association that is also recognized by the Regents of the University of the State of New York. Institutions of higher education include colleges and universities, professional and technical schools, and libraries and museums that conduct educational programs leading to a post-secondary degree, certificate, or diploma.

Qualifications for exempt purchase

For a purchase to be exempt from sales tax:

- The textbook must be purchased by a full- or part-time student who is enrolled at an institution of higher education and be for use in his or her course.
- The textbook must be required or recommended for the student's course, either by the instructor or by the institution.
- The student must provide a valid student identification card or other evidence of enrollment at the time of purchase.
- The vendor must either have a list of eligible textbooks or receive a properly completed [Form ST-121.4](#), *Textbook Exemption Certificate*, from the student.

Exempt purchases

Purchases may be made from any bookstore, including college or university bookstores, retail bookstores, by mail order (including email), over the Internet, or by other means. The textbook must be for a course the student is taking that is offered by an educational institution. However, the course does not have to be part of the curriculum for a particular degree, certificate, or diploma.

This exemption applies to purchases of new or used textbooks required or recommended by the educational institution or the instructor of the course. This includes course-packs and workbooks required or recommended by the institution or instructor. The exemption applies whether the textbook is in printed form or on CD-ROM, DVD, or other optical disc.

The exemption does not apply to supplies, notebooks, etc., or to books not required or recommended for a course.

Student identification

If the student is purchasing a textbook in person, the student must show the vendor his or her valid identification card issued by an institution of higher education.

If the student does not have an identification card, the student must provide other evidence of enrollment. The student must give the vendor the name and address of the institution where he or she is enrolled and his or her student identification number, if the institution has assigned one. Some other examples of proof of enrollment are:

- the student's receipt showing the student's name, the name of the institution, and payment to the institution for tuition or for a course for which the textbook is required or recommended;
- a dated registrar's statement that the person is enrolled as a full- or part-time student at the institution; or
- other current documentation issued by the institution that indicates the student's name, the institution's name, and the period of enrollment.

If a student is purchasing a textbook over the Internet or by mail order, and therefore cannot present his or her valid identification card to the vendor, the student must furnish his or her name, address, valid student identification number, and the name and address of the institution.

Vendor's responsibility

If the educational institution or the course instructor has given the vendor a list of eligible textbooks, the vendor may sell any book on the list exempt from tax to an eligible student.

If the institution or instructor has not given a list of eligible books to the vendor, the student may obtain a copy of the list and give it to the vendor. The vendor may then sell any book on the list exempt from tax to the student.

If the textbook list is not available at the time of purchase, the vendor may sell a textbook exempt from tax if the student gives the vendor a properly completed [Form ST-121.4](#), *Textbook Exemption Certificate*.

If the student purchases a book in person and claims the textbook exemption, the vendor must check the student's identification to verify that he or she is a current student at an educational institution.

To substantiate exempt sales to students, the vendor must keep the following:

- a copy of the required or recommended list of books, furnished by the course instructor or institution of higher education;
- a copy of the instructor's or institution's list furnished by the student; or
- [Form ST-121.4](#), *Textbook Exemption Certificate*, required to be furnished by a student as previously described.

If the student purchases a book over the Internet or by mail order and claims the textbook exemption, in addition to a copy of the list of books or [Form ST-121.4](#), *Textbook Exemption Certificate*, the vendor must retain and associate the student identification card number and other student identification information with the sales record for the transaction.

Refund

A student may be eligible for a refund of sales tax if the student purchased a qualifying textbook and paid sales tax. The student can apply for a refund by filing [Form AU-11, Application for Credit or Refund of Sales or Use Tax](#). [Form AU-11](#) should be sent to the address indicated on the form, along with an explanation of the basis for the refund request, a copy of the sales receipt showing the sales tax paid, and other documentation necessary to substantiate the refund, as described above (e.g., a copy of the student's identification card, a copy of the list of required or recommended books, etc.). Generally, [Form AU-11](#) must be filed within three years of the purchase date. See Tax Bulletin [How to Apply for a Refund of Sales and Use Tax \(TB-ST-350\)](#).

Note: A Tax Bulletin is an informational document designed to provide general guidance in simplified language on a topic of interest to taxpayers. It is accurate as of the date issued. However, taxpayers should be aware that subsequent changes in the Tax Law or its interpretation may affect the accuracy of a Tax Bulletin. The information provided in this document does not cover every situation and is not intended to replace the law or change its meaning.

References and other useful information

Tax Law: Section 1115(a)(34)

Memorandum:

[TSB-M-98\(4\)S](#), *Sales and Use Tax Exemption For College Textbooks*

Bulletins:

[Record-Keeping Requirements for Sales Tax Vendors \(TB-ST-770\)](#)
[How to Apply for a Refund of Sales and Use Tax \(TB-ST-350\)](#)