

Beyond the Textbook

As the original Jewish textbook, the Torah offers a model for how educators can approach textbooks in general. The Torah contains narratives about the beginning of the world and the journeys of the Jewish people along with laws that govern how the Jewish people should live. However, the narratives leave many questions unanswered; and the laws need to be applied to new situations that arise over time. Thus, the Sages and those who have followed them interpreted the words of the Torah in order to answer questions that still arise.

The textbook is a “static” roadmap providing general instructions to teach a certain topic. The teacher should bring the textbook alive by adding additional materials and adapting the content to learners’ interests and abilities. As the writer and educator Azriel Eisenberg said, “You are not teaching a textbook, but with the assistance of a textbook.

This sentiment is emphasized by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, [who points out](#) the importance of relationships in promoting learning: “What we need more than anything else is not text-books but text-people. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that pupils read; the text that they will never forget.” How do you think Heschel’s words relate to the words from Joshua 1:8?

- Remember: A textbook is not a curriculum; it is just one of the resources.
- Before using a textbook, read through it completely! Consider whether it is well-organized. Is it age-appropriate? Will it capture the interest of modern learners?
- Consider whether a textbook has appropriate support materials such as a workbook, a teacher’s guide, flashcards, summaries, guiding questions, and/or a digital component.
 - When using a textbook, consider:
 - What are the key ideas?
 - Key Vocabulary
 - Different methods to teach with the textbook
 - Prepare study guide questions (if not provided)
 - Ask learners to summarize main ideas using words, symbols, graphics, audio or visual representations using [Flip](#) or [Sketchnoting](#) respectively.
 - Design an assessment suitable for your learners
 - Map the entire curriculum during the summer.
 - Set goals for the entire year but remain flexible and ready to change gears based on the needs of your learners.
 - Have a list of digital and non-digital resources to supplement the textbook.
 - Design a variety of assessment tools to check for understanding.

לֹא יִמוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה
 הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ וְהִגִּיתָ בוֹ
 יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה לְמַעַן
 תִּשְׁמַר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל־
 הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ כִּי־אֵז
 תִּצְלִיחַ אֶת־דְּרָכְךָ וְאֵז
 תִּשְׁכִּיל:
 (יהושע א: ח)

Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful.
 (Joshua 1:8)

My Own Thoughts About Moving Beyond the Textbook