

Physics



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Spotlight Reviews

56 of 65 people found the following review helpful:

The best algebra-based physics text available., May 7, 2001

Reviewer: vladimir estragon "monkey"(Falls Church, VA USA) -See all my reviews

While struggling with Giancoli's terrible book, I looked for a better textbook online, and found three other candidates. After buying them all and reviewing them, I returned all of them except for this one.

This is a great physics textbook for those preparing for the MCAT on their own, or for those in an algebra-based physics class. Compared to Giancoli's text, it is fantastic. Why?

1. Plenty of example problems while reading, fully explained in an intelligent and careful manner. Not two or three per chapter, but sometimes ten or more. Again, with

exhaustive descriptions.

2. Clear, concise text that truly educates you as you read. Not a rehashed summary of familiar concepts, with important "givens" left out. Some text book authors are simply capable of writing text that teaches (Ege is a great example, for Organic Chemistry). Some should not be writing at all. To be good at physics problems, you first have to understand the concepts. Really understand them. This book explains them the way they need to be explained.

3. Excellent diagrams and tables. At first, I thought the ubiquitous graphics were just eye-candy, as they are (as always, refer to the worst example) in Giancoli's book. But every diagram is useful, and clearly explains a concept.

4. Student Solutions Manual. The most frustrating thing about physics seems to be the unavailability of solutions manuals to go with textbooks. Why this is so, for a field of study that relies so heavily on detailed explanations of problems, makes no sense to me. For all of the other sciences I've studied for preparation for medical school (including calculus), I've easily been able to get my hands on manuals detailing all problems and their solutions. In the realm of physics, though, there seems to exist an elitist attitude that only instructors should have these 'magic books', from which they will dole out a solution or two to desperate students. How colossally stupid. This textbook is somewhat subject to this failing, in that the Student Solutions Manual contains answers to "selected" problems (roughly 21% per chapter). However, the fact that it has a solutions manual at all lifts it above the other offerings, especially -- you guessed it -- Giancoli's horrible book, which offers no manual to speak of (the "Study Guide" is a useless piece of garbage with no solved problems; don't buy it). In addition, though the solutions manual lacks all the answers, the ones it does have are well-explained and well-drawn, similar to what's in the text. Hopefully one day a physics textbook author will decide to stop treating students like monkeys and publish a great book that educates via giving as much information as possible, not rationing it. This is surely an antiquated practice whose time should end now.

For a fuller understanding of some of the concepts, I also recommend buying a calculus-based text to supplement this one. "Fundamentals of Physics" (same publisher -- Wiley) is a good (and popular) book. I like the 5th edition more than the 6th (it seems less cluttered), although the Student Solutions Manual for the 5th is out of print. If your calculus is rusty, there's hardly any in the first half of the book, and what is there is not complicated -- standard derivatives and integrals. It's a good book to have for gaining a very solid understanding of the concepts, although of a level above what's needed for the MCATs.

Finally, the best review book for MCAT physics is called just that: NOVA's "MCAT Physics". Schaum's outline for pre-Med physics is so lousy, it's amazing. What's even more amazing is how uneven the quality of education materials is. You really have to look around, unfortunately.

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