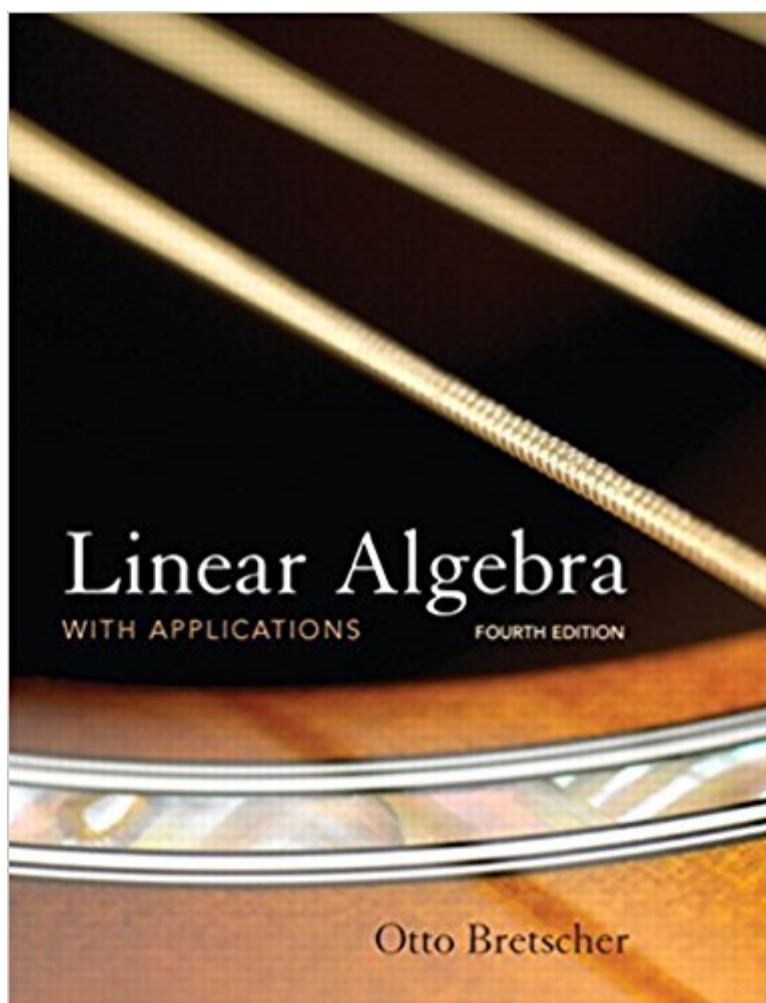


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Linear Algebra With Applications, 4th Edition



Synopsis

KEY BENEFIT: This trusted reference offers an intellectually honest, thought-provoking, sound introduction to linear algebra. Enables readers to grasp the subject with a challenging, yet visually accessible approach that does not sacrifice mathematical integrity. Adds over 400 new exercises to the problem sets, ranging in difficulty from elementary to more challenging. Adds new historical problems taken from ancient Chinese, Indian, Arabic, and early European sources. Strengthens geometric and conceptual emphasis. A comprehensive, thorough reference for anyone who needs to brush up on their knowledge of linear algebra.

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Customer Reviews

I go to a small competitive liberal arts school with a lot of serious math students, where this book is renowned for being horrendous. No one's quite sure why all the professors still use it - maybe one of them is friends with the author - but I've never heard a student defend or compliment it. The text focuses on phrasing ideas as pedantically and densely as possible, without discussing the significance or logic behind them. Occasionally, an example use or higher-level rationalization is given, but typically the chapters are just a jungle of definitions and proofs by algebraic simplification or induction. I'm no stranger to theoretical math or mathematical notation, and neither are many of my peers. However, this book makes absolutely no attempt to tell you **why** anything it contains is profound, let alone worthwhile. It spends a long time, for example, proving and discussing very specific and painfully boring shortcuts to computing determinants. While that may become useful when implementing some high-performance matrix processing library, I can't imagine it's a valuable

use of time in an introductory undergraduate course. Meanwhile, far more interesting and significant, and sufficiently pure topics like PageRank are only briefly glossed over in "optional" pages at the end of some sections. Maybe I'm just not brilliant enough to tap inspiration from the plodding definitions and parlor-trick equations the book methodically and painstakingly feeds you, but I suspect otherwise. It seems that this book, like most calculus textbooks, has confused "interesting" with "pedestrian" and "useful" with "applied". In doing so, it attempts to make things hard simply by drowning you in technical language, vagueness, and memorization of rather arbitrary techniques, like those for finding determinants or certain forms of eigenvectors. Unlike a harder and more notation-focused discrete math course I took, I came out of the linear algebra course that used this textbook feeling that I learned nothing interesting about how the world works, and nothing that I might use in any future intellectual pursuit. It was, aside from Chapter 1 (which I had already learned in discrete math), a waste of time.

I'm not in any way math averse, and this textbook was a factor in making Linear Algebra my least favorite class this semester. Let me summarize all of the problems I have with it in three simple words: it's too thin. Explain more. Please. This stuff is mostly new to me. Be redundant so I can skim and skip; don't be brief so that I flounder and fail. When I confronted my professor about the textbook, he said they were all like that, and that there was no "easy" way to teach linear algebra. That might be true. But I'm certain there's a "hard" way to teach it, and I'm also sure that this book gets pretty close to that. Two stars since I was able to rent it at a decent price.

I somewhat agree with the other reviewers here. My class is assigned this book, and even the professor was reluctant to use it. There is 1 thing the author should address in the next edition:- Presentation and organization of content. In my opinion, the Bretcher needs to work on rearranging a huge chunk of the content. This book deviates from traditional linear algebra books in its presentation of ideas. For example, Linear Transformations come towards the middle of other well known texts, but it's the second chapter in this book. The content organization is extremely difficult to follow for beginners. Another small point is that the end of the section exercises refer to ideas presented in the next couple sections or chapter. Image and Span are mentioned in chapter 2, but are formally presented in chapter 3. This is annoying, but manageable with a good professor. In terms of exposition, to the reader with EXTREME attention to detail, it's rewarding. The exposition is great in my opinion and the figures are also very helpful. There are more English sentences than mathspeak, which I appreciate since I'm not a math major. And it's not dumbed down either, so it's a

good read. I give this 2 stars for the horrible content organization/presentation. It REALLY makes a difference.

This textbook is unusual. The pacing is strange: there are long historical/ cultural digressions and stories, along with the usual dense mathematics. I appreciate what the authors were going for, and I found the anecdotes interesting, but the text as a whole felt schizoid. But: my main problem isn't the stories. It's the problem sets. Like other commenters have mentioned, this book presents problems that, to solve, require knowledge and techniques presented later in the book. This is the "fun" kind of frustrating for a while, but it gets irritating and counterproductive when you really need to figure out how to do this, or risk your grade. In addition, there are some terms and necessary algorithms/formulas that are introduced (ie, buried) within the problem sets themselves. They are then used, without comment, in later examples and problems. It is very easy to miss this important information, especially if your lecturer is in the habit of only assigning specific problems, or you're only bothering to attempt to solve the ones for which you have a solution (the odd-numbered problems). Overall, this is not the worst linear algebra text I've read. But its approach has some frustrating quirks.

I think a lot of the bad rep this book gets is due to the fact that it pulls in a lot of fairly advanced linear algebra topics. If your professor is using this book in a low-level linear algebra class (sophomore), I recommend bugging him/her about changing the book. I'm using this book in a class intended for seniors and first-year grad students, and I'm actually getting more out of it than the lectures. Beyond chapter 3-4, the book starts pulling in concepts and terminology that require a couple of years of calculus and diff. eqs. to grasp.

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