How to write a preface

The preface is your chance to express your vision for the book. It is also your opportunity to sell the book, so you need to answer the key question: why is another textbook needed? The preface will be read primarily by potential adopters of your text, and by the sales force that present it to them. Here you can present your entire package: your approach, your content, the text features, the web resources. Here you can explain why and how you have tailored these for your reader.

Consider give each of the following topics their own paragraph or section:

• The purpose of the book
Tell us why you wrote the book, what you think about the directions and trends of the course and the discipline, and how you have written your book to anticipate them. Tell us what the strengths and unique selling points of your book are. If this is a new edition, why is it needed and what has been improved?

• The story of the book (development process)
How did your initial ideas evolve into the final product? What kind of feedback from the market did you get during the proposal and manuscript review stage? Did the development process include surveys, focus groups or class testing? Were students involved? What information about market needs did you uncover? What did you do in the book (features, coverage, approach) to address these issues?

• The book’s organisation
What organisational plan have you followed and why? Is this a new approach to thematic structure? Are there any optional sections? Could instructors rearrange some material if desired? Consider incorporating a ‘route map’ through the book if there are various, optional paths through the material.

• Features/pedagogy/online resources
What learning features have you used in the book, and why? What is new to this edition and what is retained? Describe the purpose of special features, like boxes, opening cases, end-of-chapter material, appendices. If appropriate, talk about the colour and images and how you have planned their use throughout the text. You may want to talk about the supporting materials, such as the website, or you could make more of this in a separate section. Include every resource offered, and describe how they will be of use to instructors or students.

• Note to the students
You may want to include a note to the students who will read your book. Keep this brief, as few of them will read it! Include some suggestions about how to learn the necessary concepts for the course and how best to use your book for study.

Following the preface it is customary to have a section of Acknowledgements, which can be broken down into personal acknowledgements, thanks to those who helped with initial ideas or research/projects, and thanks to those who helped develop the project and assisted you in its preparation.