

4.3 — Pricing Strategies

ECON 306 • Microeconomic Analysis • Fall 2022

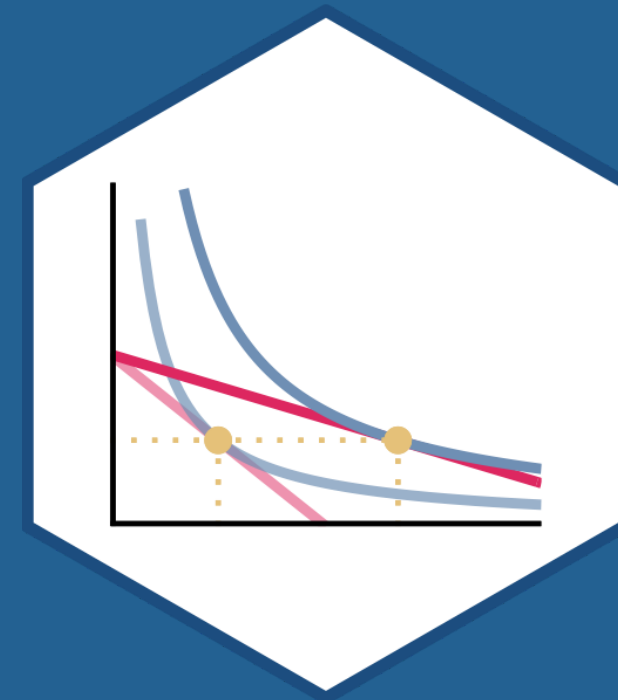
Ryan Safner

Associate Professor of Economics

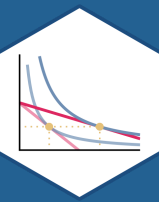
[✉ safner@hood.edu](mailto:safner@hood.edu)

[🐙 ryansafner/microF22](https://github.com/ryansafner/microF22)

[🌐 microF22.classes.ryansafner.com](https://microF22.classes.ryansafner.com)



Outline



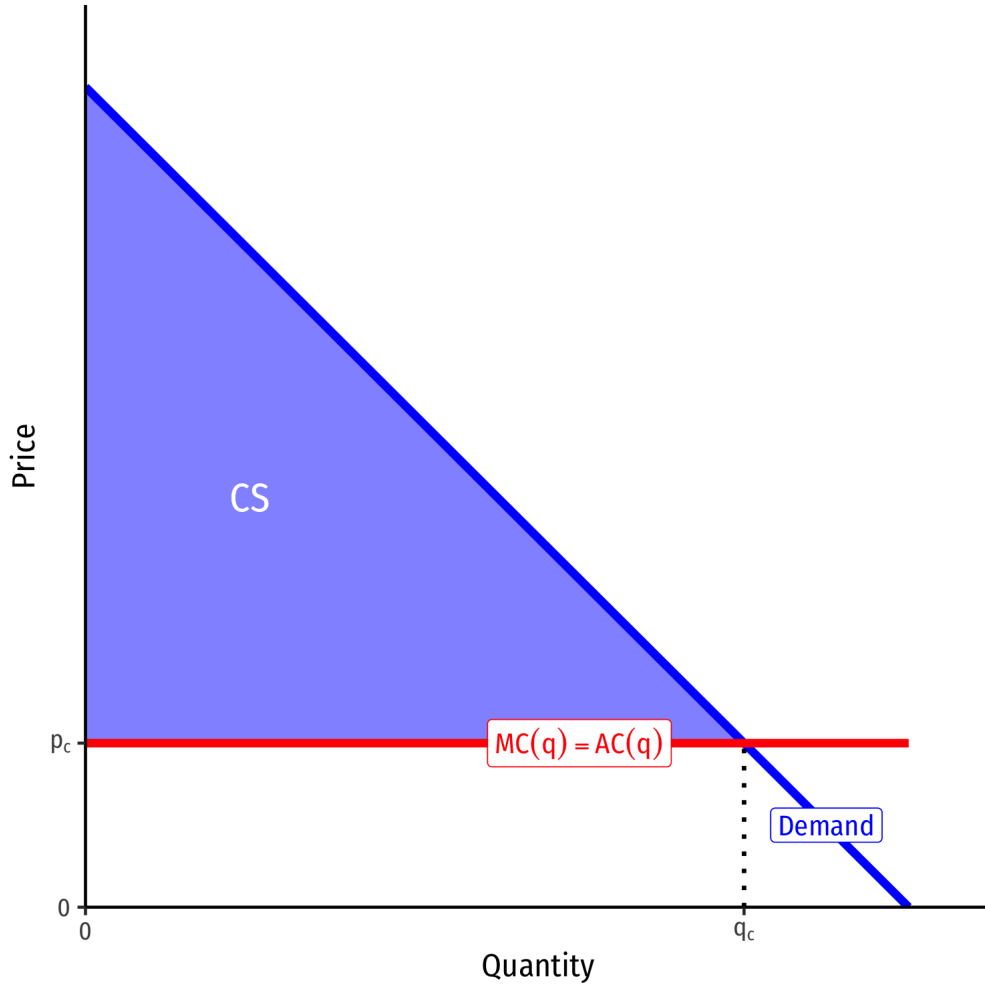
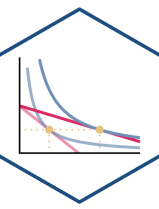
1st-Degree Price Discrimination

3rd-Degree Price Discrimination

Is Price Discrimination Good or Bad?

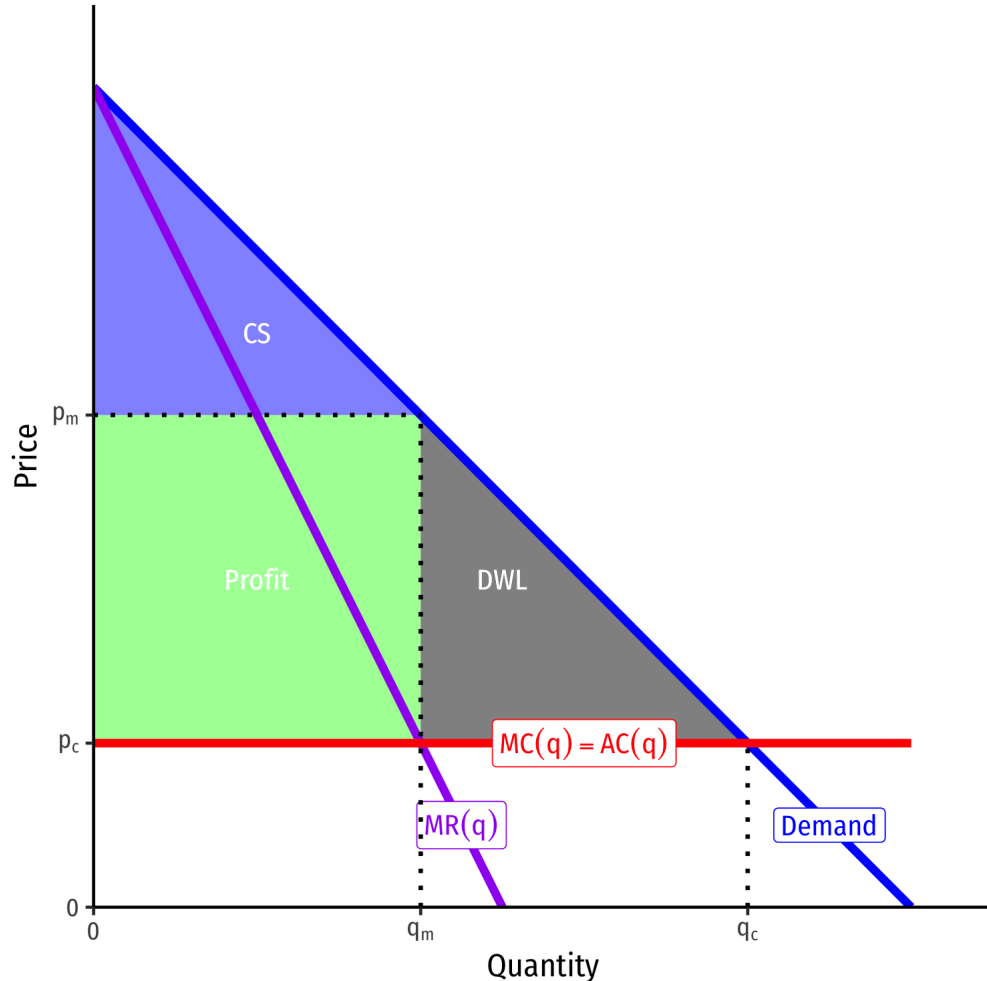
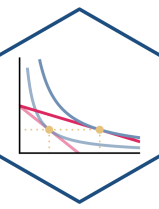
2nd-Degree Price Discrimination

Profit-Seeking Firms



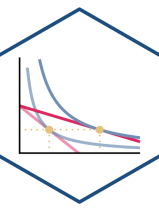
- Any firm with market power seeks to maximize profits
- Wants to (1st) **create** a surplus

Profit-Seeking Firms and Appropriability



- Any firm with market power seeks to maximize profits
- Wants to (1st) **create** a surplus and then **appropriate some of it as profit**
 - i.e. convert **CS** \rightarrow π
- Consumers are *still* better off than without the firm because it creates value (**consumer surplus**)
 - Just not as *best-off* as under perfect competition

Most Firms Create More Value than They Can Capture!



William Nordhaus

(1941-)

Economics Nobel 2018

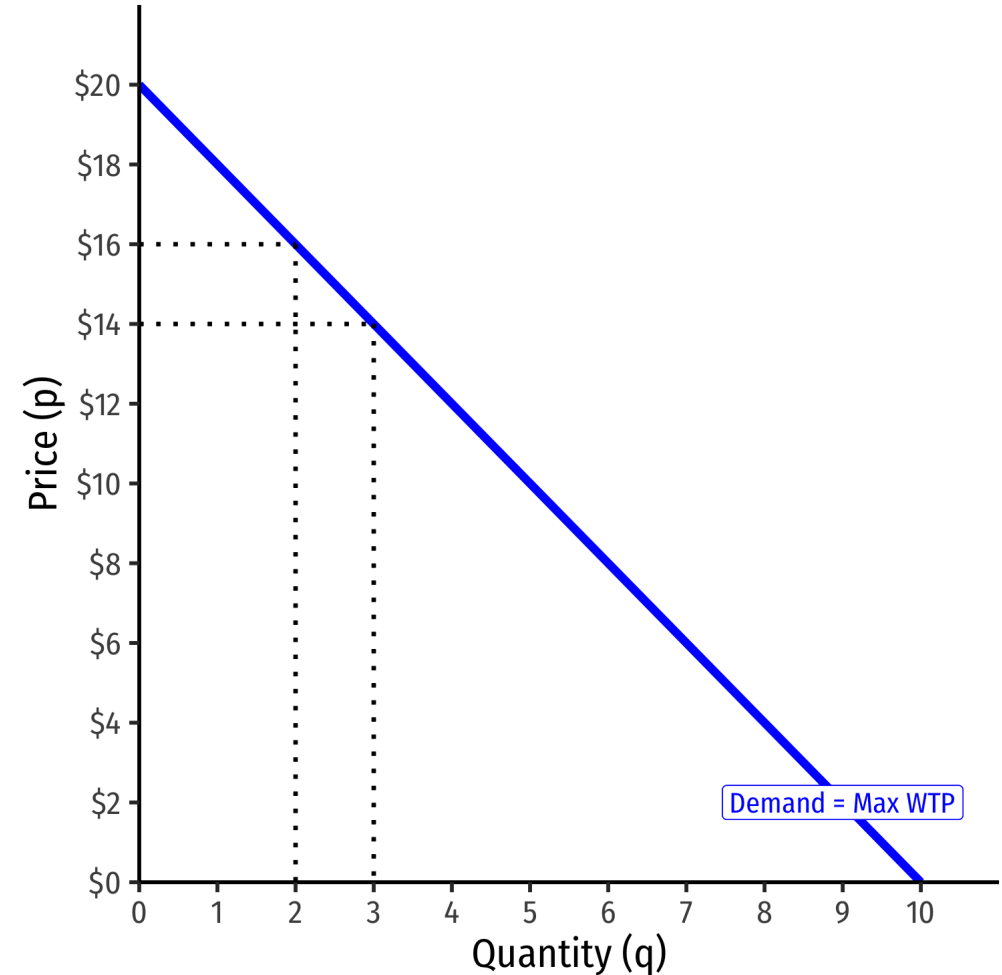
“We conclude that [about 2.2%] of the social returns from technological advances over the 1948-2001 period was captured by producers, indicating that most of the benefits of technological change are passed on to consumers rather than captured by producers,” (p.1)

Nordhaus, William, 2004, "[Schumpeterian Profits in the American Economy: Theory and Measurement](#)," *NBER Working Paper* 10433

Price Discrimination



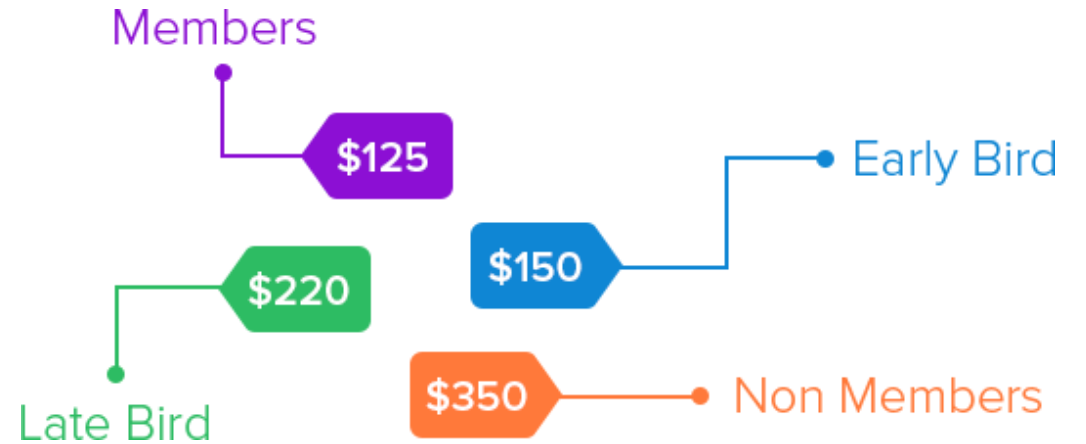
- The most obvious way to capture more surplus is to raise prices
 - But **Law of Demand** \implies this would turn many customers away!
- Also, we saw that if a firm wants to sell more units, it has to lower the price on all units!



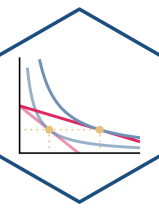
Price Discrimination



- Instead, if firm could charge **different** customers with *different WTP* **different** prices for **the same goods**, firm could convert more **consumer surplus** into **profit**
- “Price discrimination” or “Variable pricing”



The Economics of Pricing Strategy I



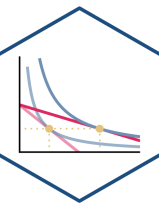
- Two conditions are required for a firm to engage in variable pricing:

1) Firm must have market power

- A competitive firm must charge the market price



The Economics of Pricing Strategy I



- Two conditions are required for a firm to engage in variable pricing:

1) Firm must have market power

- A competitive firm must charge the market price

2) Firms must be able to prevent resale or arbitrage

- Clever customers buy in your lower-price market to resell it in your higher-price market



The Economics of Pricing Strategy II



- Firm *must acquire information* about the variations in its customers' demands
- Can the firm identify consumers' demands **before** they buy the product?



The Economics of Pricing Strategy III

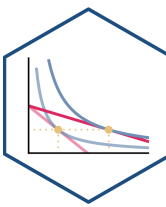
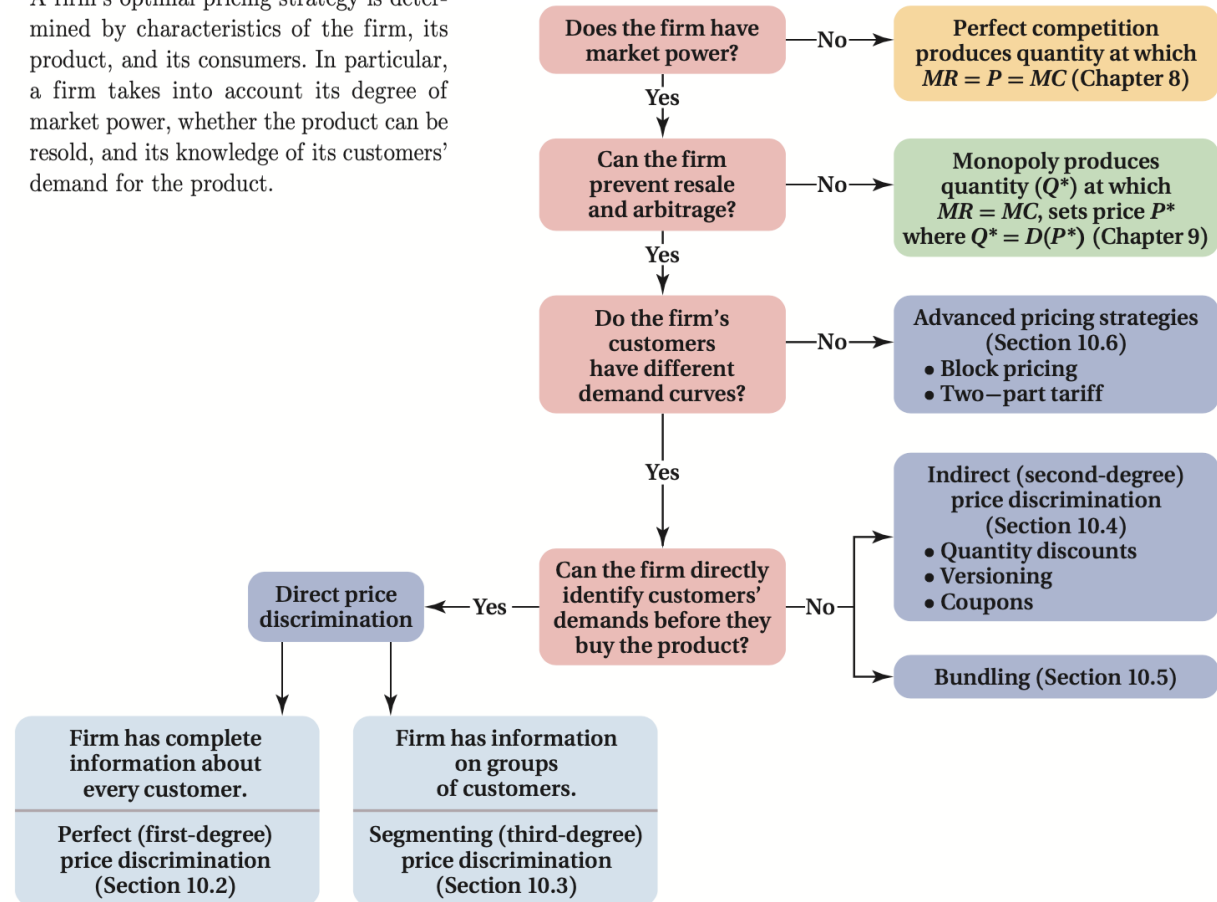


Figure 10.1 An Overview of Pricing Strategies

A firm's optimal pricing strategy is determined by characteristics of the firm, its product, and its consumers. In particular, a firm takes into account its degree of market power, whether the product can be resold, and its knowledge of its customers' demand for the product.



The Economics of Pricing Strategy IV



- With **perfect information** \implies **Perfect** or **1st-degree price discrimination**
- **Charge a different price to each customer** (their max WTP)



The Economics of Pricing Strategy V



- With **imperfect information** \implies **3rd-degree price discrimination**
- Separate customers into groups (by demand differences) and charge each group a different price



The Economics of Pricing Strategy VI



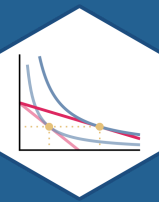
- **2nd-degree price discrimination:** More **indirect** forms of pricing: tying, bundling, quantity-discounts
 - Firm does **not** have enough information to categorize customers into groups
 - Consumers **self-select** into their own group

Quantity Discounts

10% OFF	15% OFF	20% OFF
5-10 BOOKS	11-19 BOOKS	20+ BOOKS
Promo code: Holiday5+	Promo code: Holiday11+	Promo code: Holiday20+

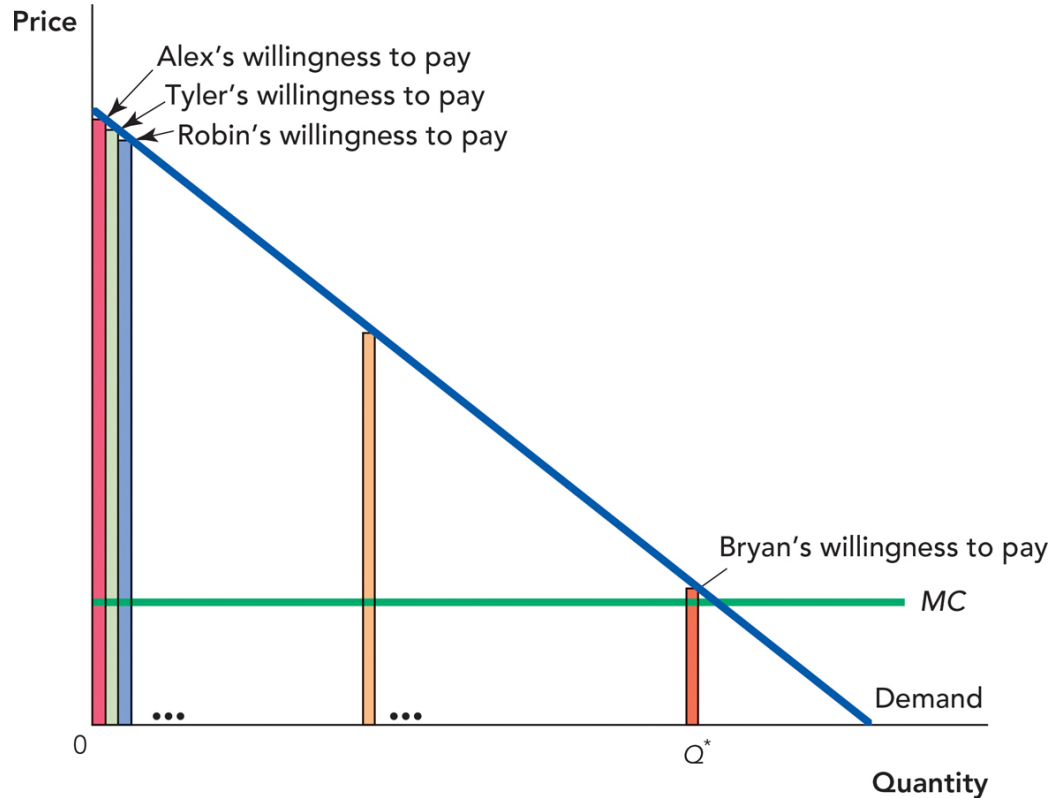
Place your order by Friday, December 13 to receive your books in time for the holidays.

This special holiday offer will end on December 20, 2019!



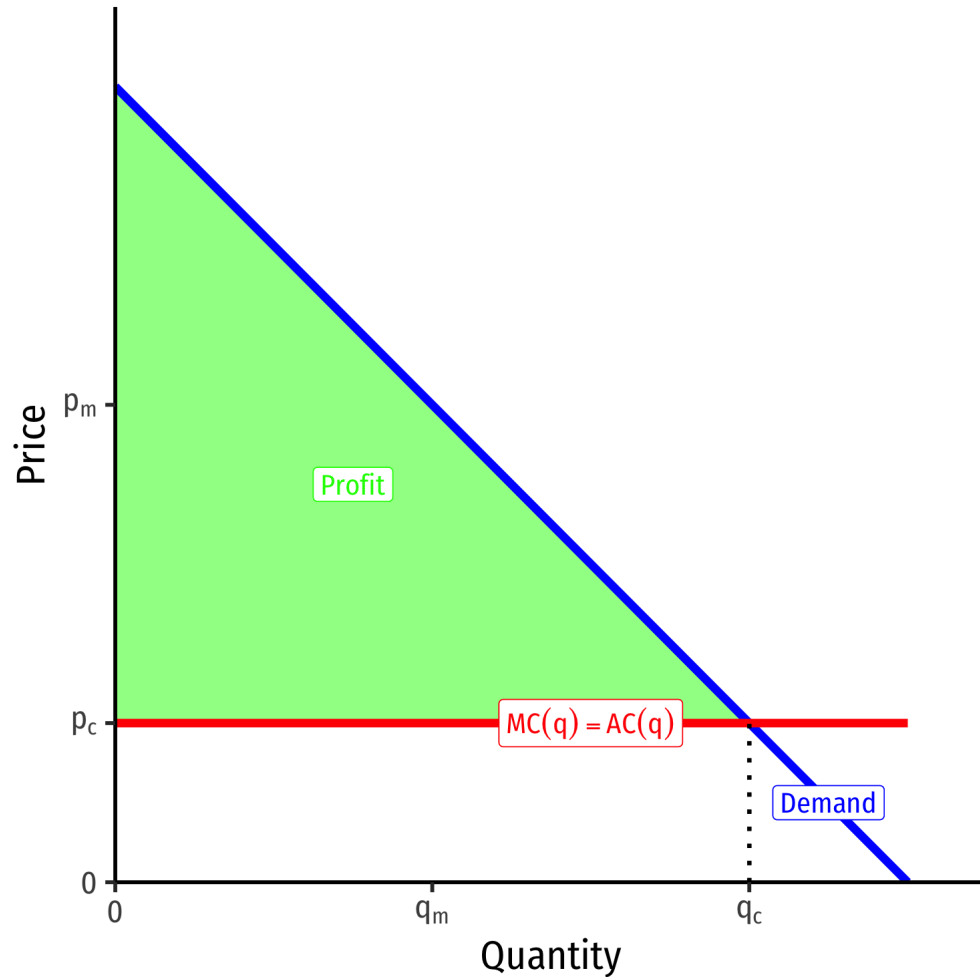
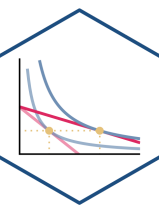
1st-Degree Price Discrimination

1st-Degree Price Discrimination I



- If firm has *perfect information* about every customer's demand before purchase:
- **Perfect** or **1st-degree price discrimination**: firm charges *each* customer their maximum willingness to pay
 - “walks” down the market demand curve customer by customer

1st-Degree Price Discrimination II



- Firm converts *all* consumer surplus into profit!
- Produces the competitive amount (q_c)!

1st-Degree Price Discrimination: Example

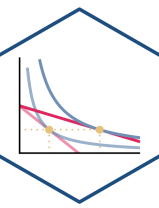
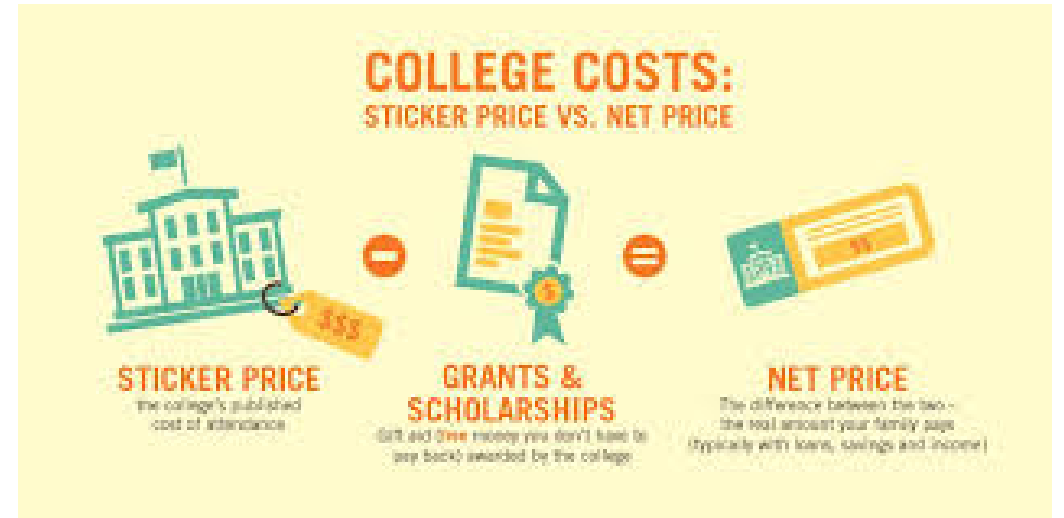


TABLE 1 4. 1 Price Discrimination at Williams College, 2001–2002

Income Quintile	Family Income Range	Net Price After Financial Aid
Low	\$0–\$23,593	\$1,683
Lower Middle	\$23,594–\$40,931	\$5,186
Middle	\$40,932–\$61,397	\$7,199
Upper Middle	\$61,398–\$91,043	\$13,764
High	\$91,044+	\$22,013

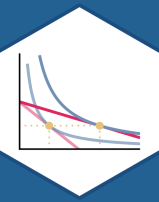
Note: Students who did not apply for financial aid paid \$32,470.

Source: Hill, Catharine B., and Gordon C. Winston. 2001. Access: *Net Prices, Affordability, and Equity at a Highly Selective College*. Williams College, DP-62.



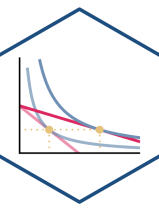
Big Data and Perfect Price Discrimination



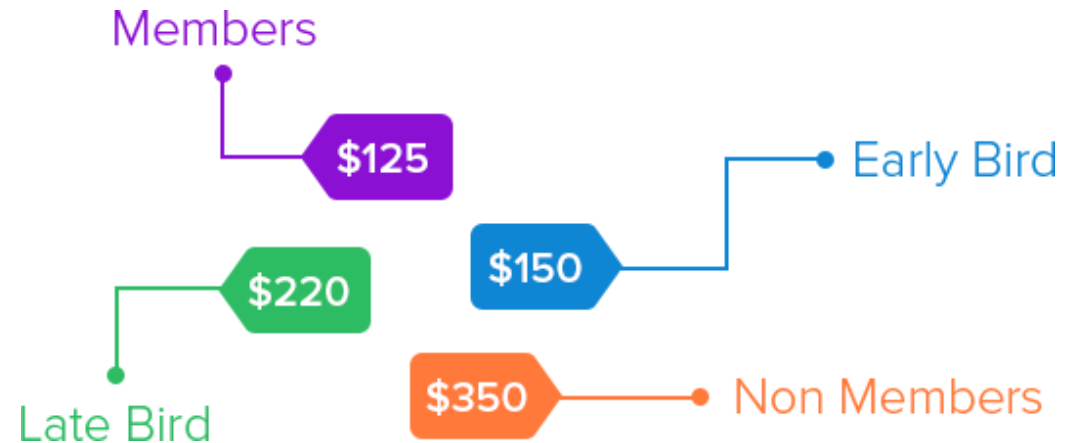


3rd-Degree Price Discrimination

3rd-Degree Price Discrimination I



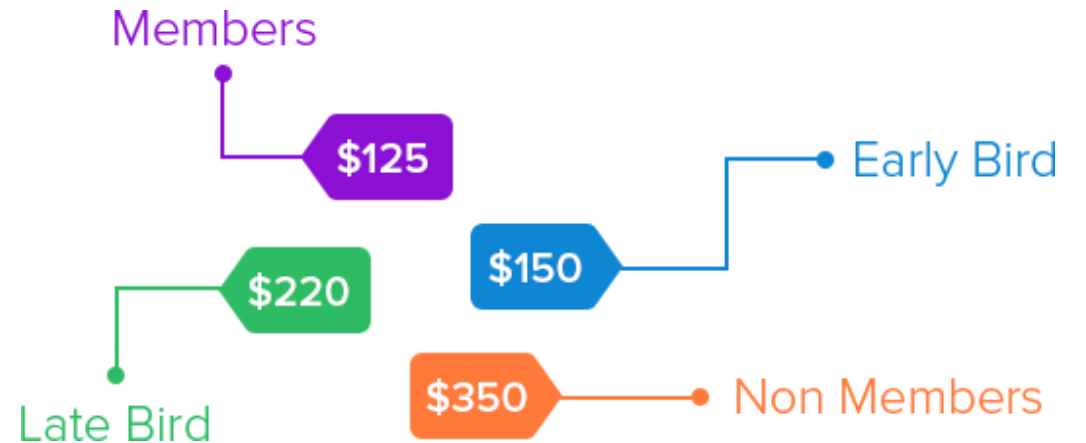
- Firms almost never have perfect information about their customers
- But they can often separate customers by **observable characteristics** into **different groups** with similar demands *before purchasing*



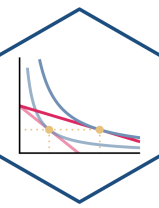
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination I



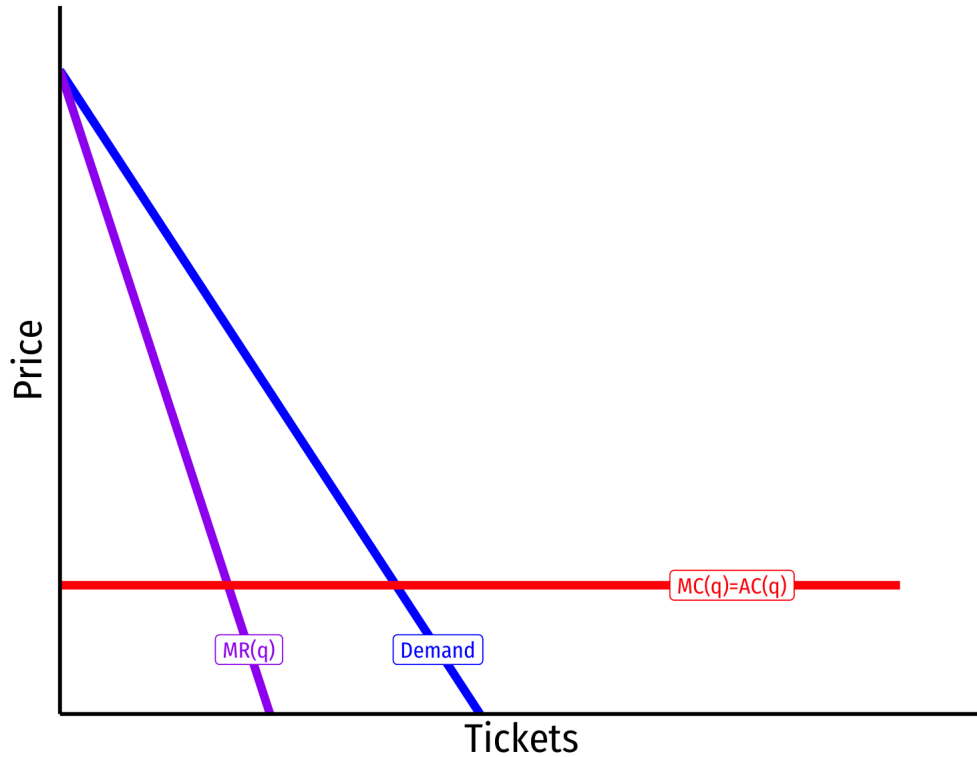
- Firms **segment** the market or engage in **3rd-degree price discrimination** by charging different prices to different *groups* of customers
- By far the most common type of price-discrimination



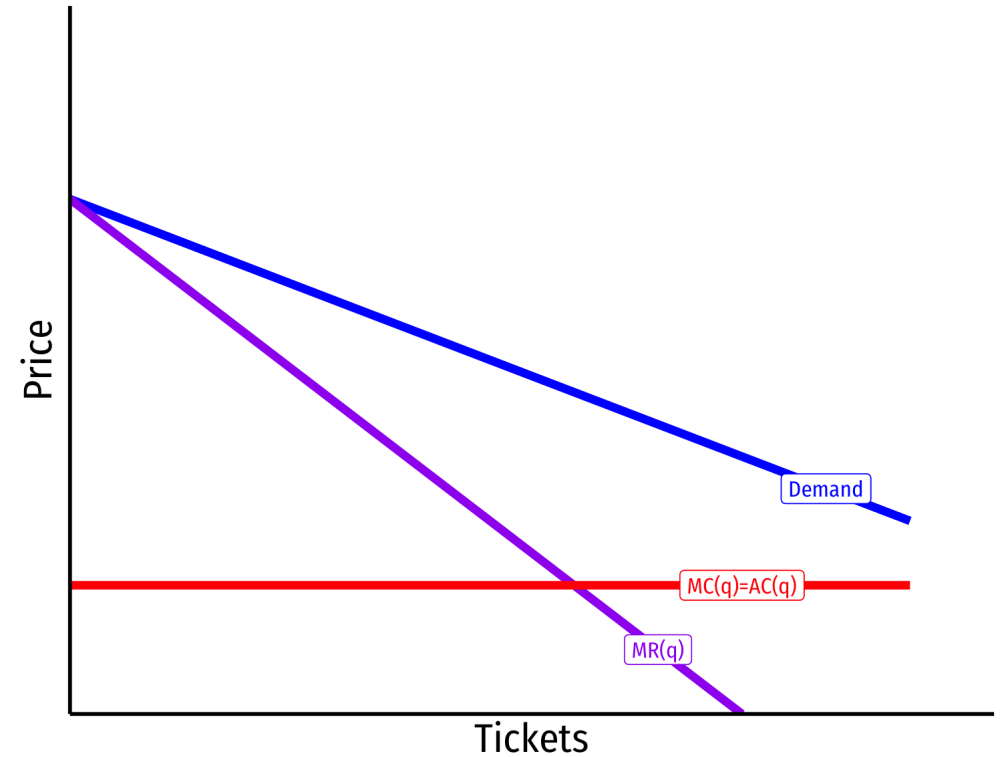
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination II



Business Travelers (Less Elastic)

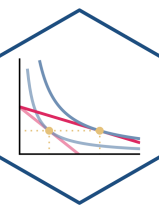


Vacationers (More Elastic)

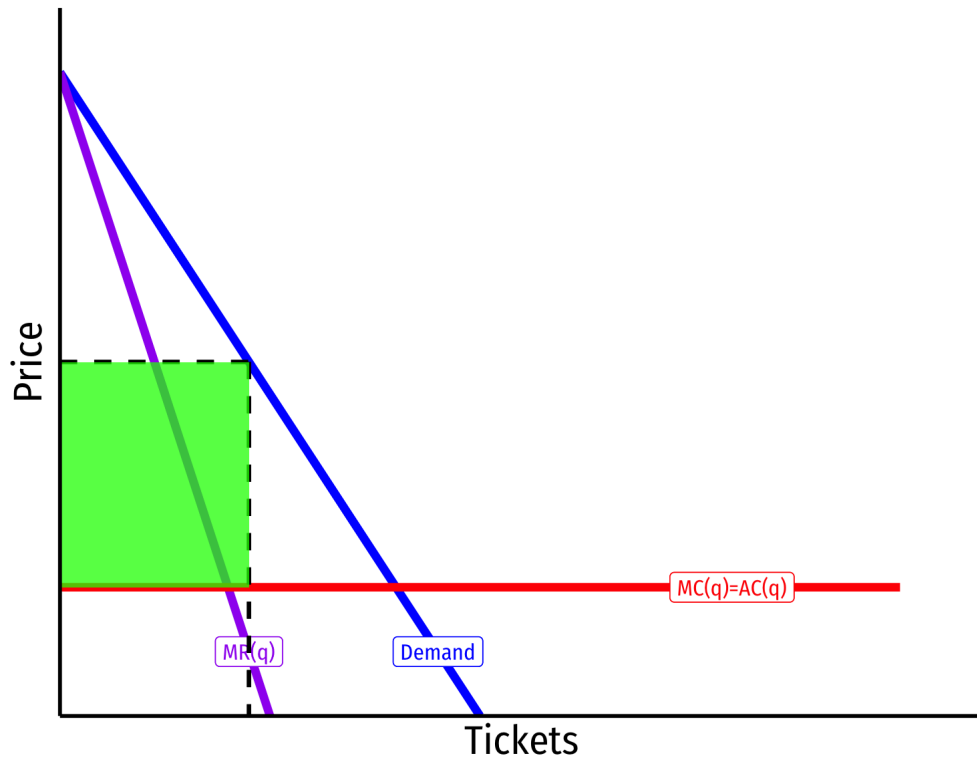


Consider airlines: different groups of travelers have different demands & price elasticities

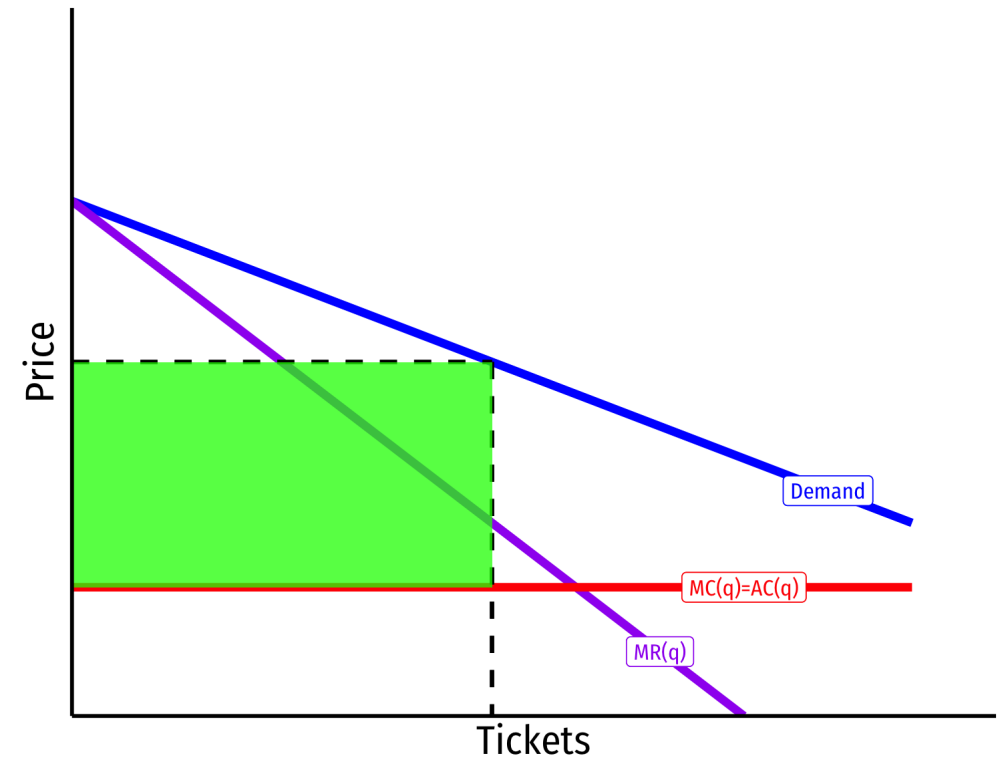
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination II



Business Travelers (Less Elastic)

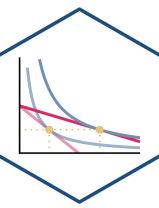


Vacationers (More Elastic)

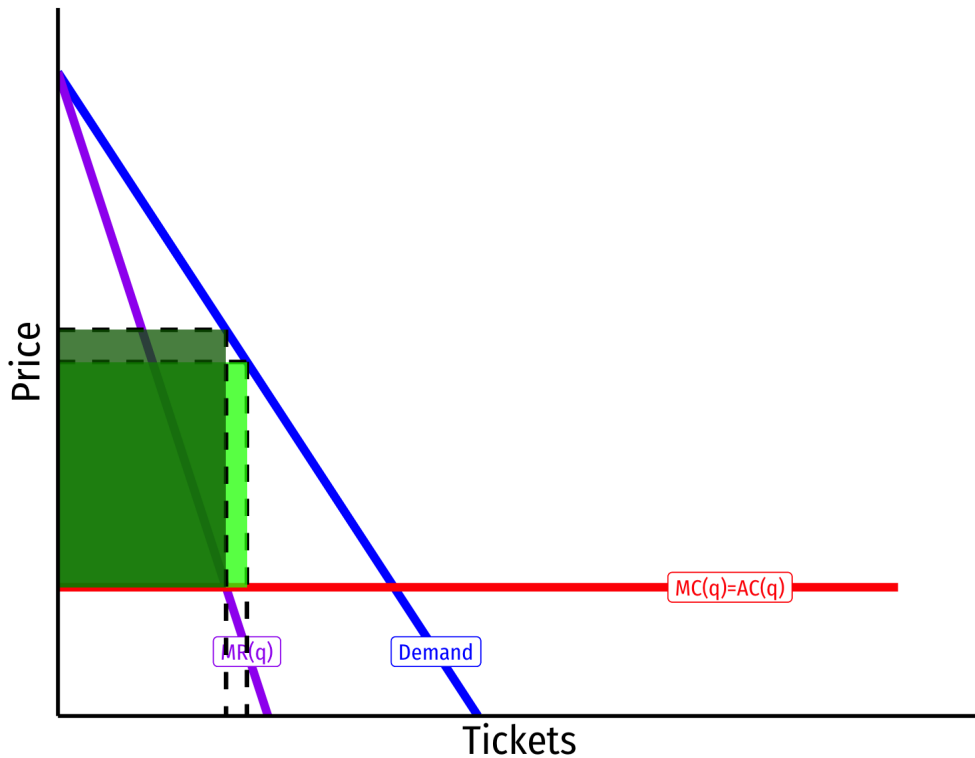


The firm could charge a **single price** to all travelers and earn some **profit**

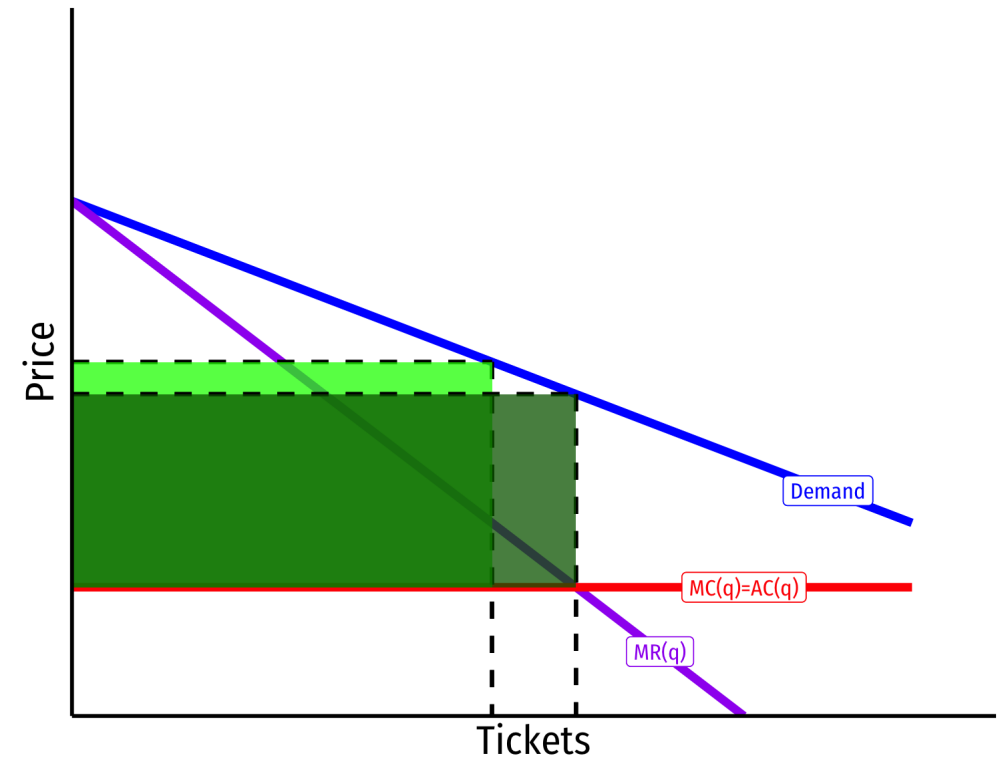
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination II



Business Travelers (Less Elastic)



Vacationers (More Elastic)



With **different prices**: raise price on inelastic travelers, lower price on elastic travelers, earn **more profit!**

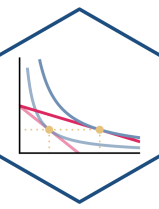
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Examples I



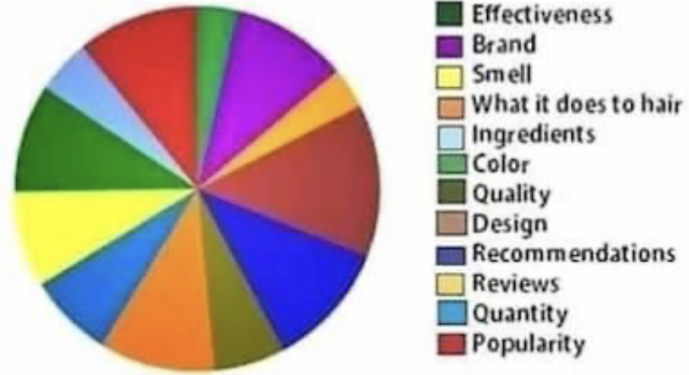
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Examples II



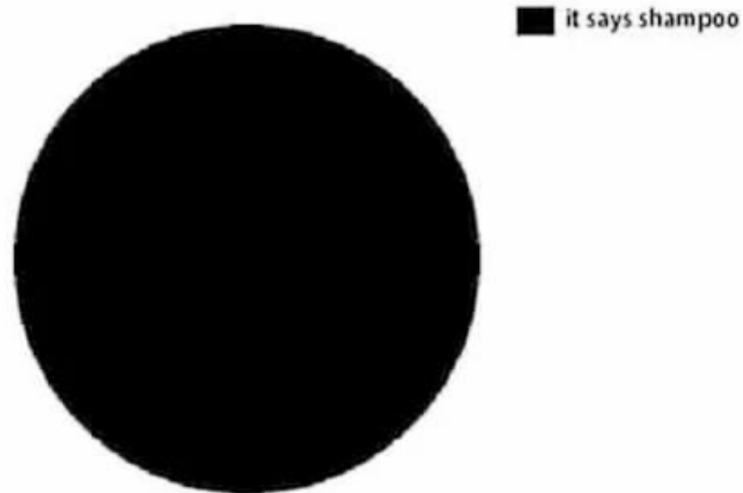
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Examples II



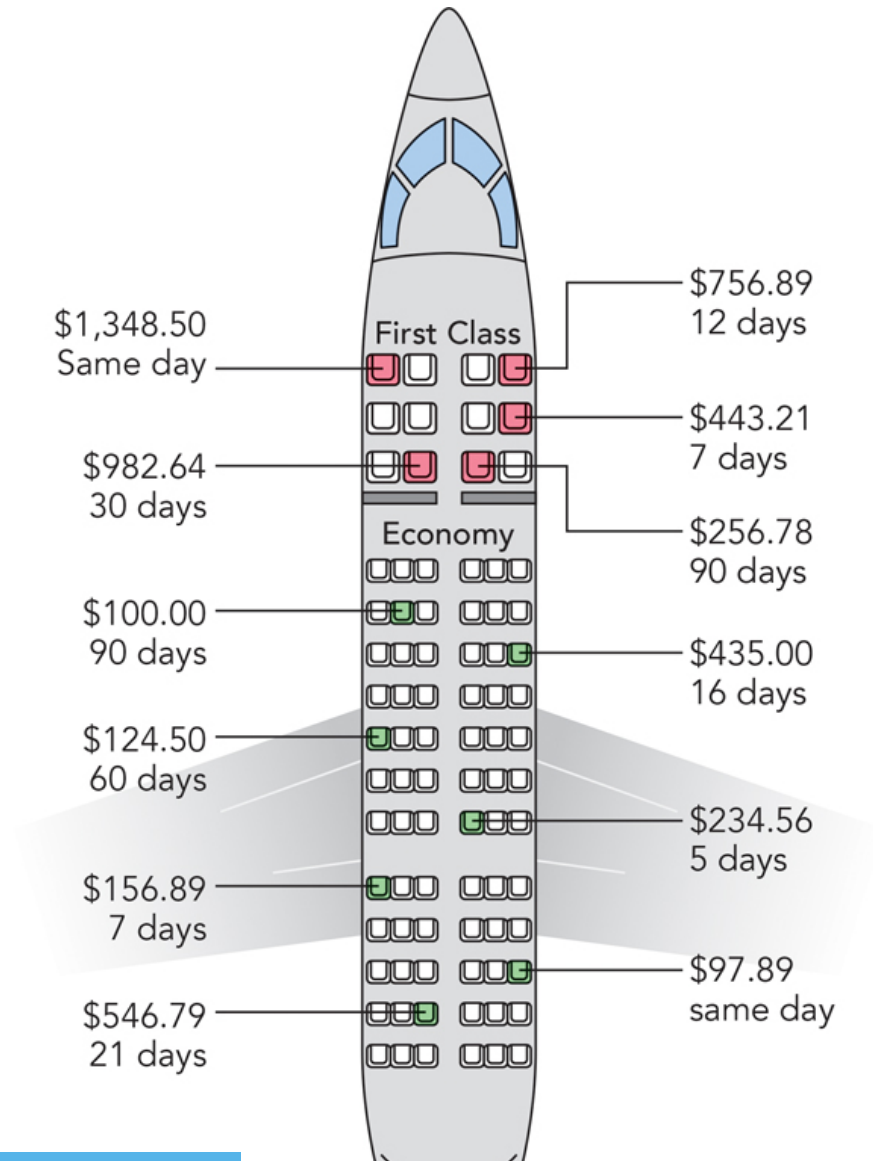
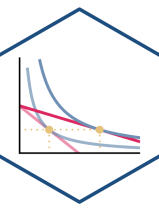
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HOW MEN CHOOSE SHAMPOO:



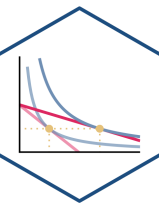
3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Examples III



3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Examples IV



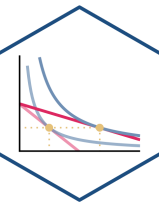
Sales



- **Price-inelastic** buyers will buy something (a necessity?) now regardless of whether or not it is “on sale”
- **Price-elastic** buyers will be attracted to buying something when price is lower
- Stores lower prices on rare occasions to attract price-sensitive shoppers (will lose profits on price-insensitive shoppers who buy during the sale!)
 - Black Friday: many price-insensitive shoppers stay away to avoid crowds!



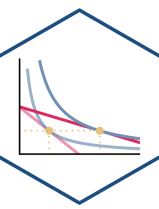
Coupons



- **Coupons** also are designed to bring in more price-elastic shoppers
 - Often lower income, very sensitive to price, worth the hassle of collecting & using coupons
- Store sells at higher price (to capture profit from price-insensitive shoppers who can't be bothered with coupons) and brings in profits from price-sensitive shoppers who use coupons to pay lower price

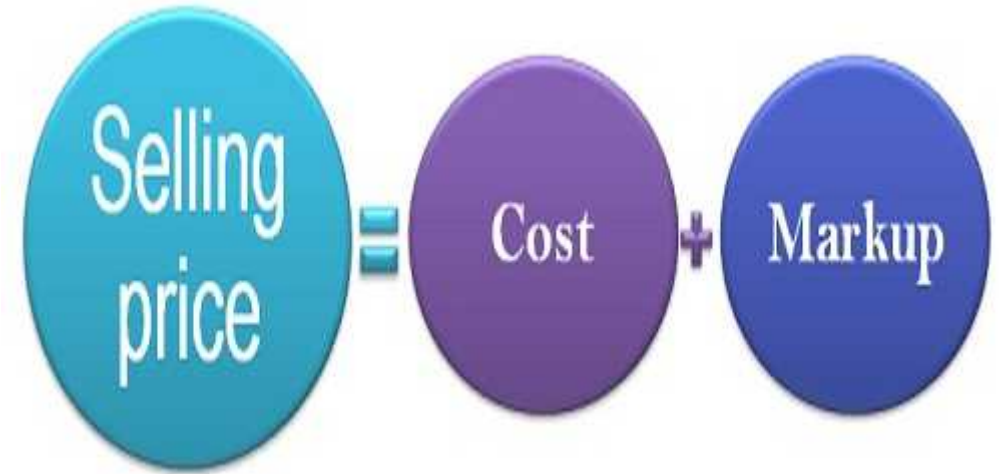


Pricing and Markup

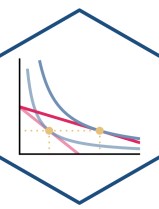


- How much should each segment be charged?
- Firm treats each segment as a *different* market
 1. Find q^* : $MR(q) = MC(q)$
 2. Raise p^* to maximum WTP (Demand)
- Lerner index implies optimal markup for each segment, again:

$$\underbrace{\frac{p - MC(q)}{p}}_{\text{Markup \% of Price}} = -\frac{1}{\epsilon}$$



3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Numerical Example



Example: Suppose you run a bar in downtown Frederick, and estimate the nightly demands for beer from undergraduates (U) and graduates (G) to be:

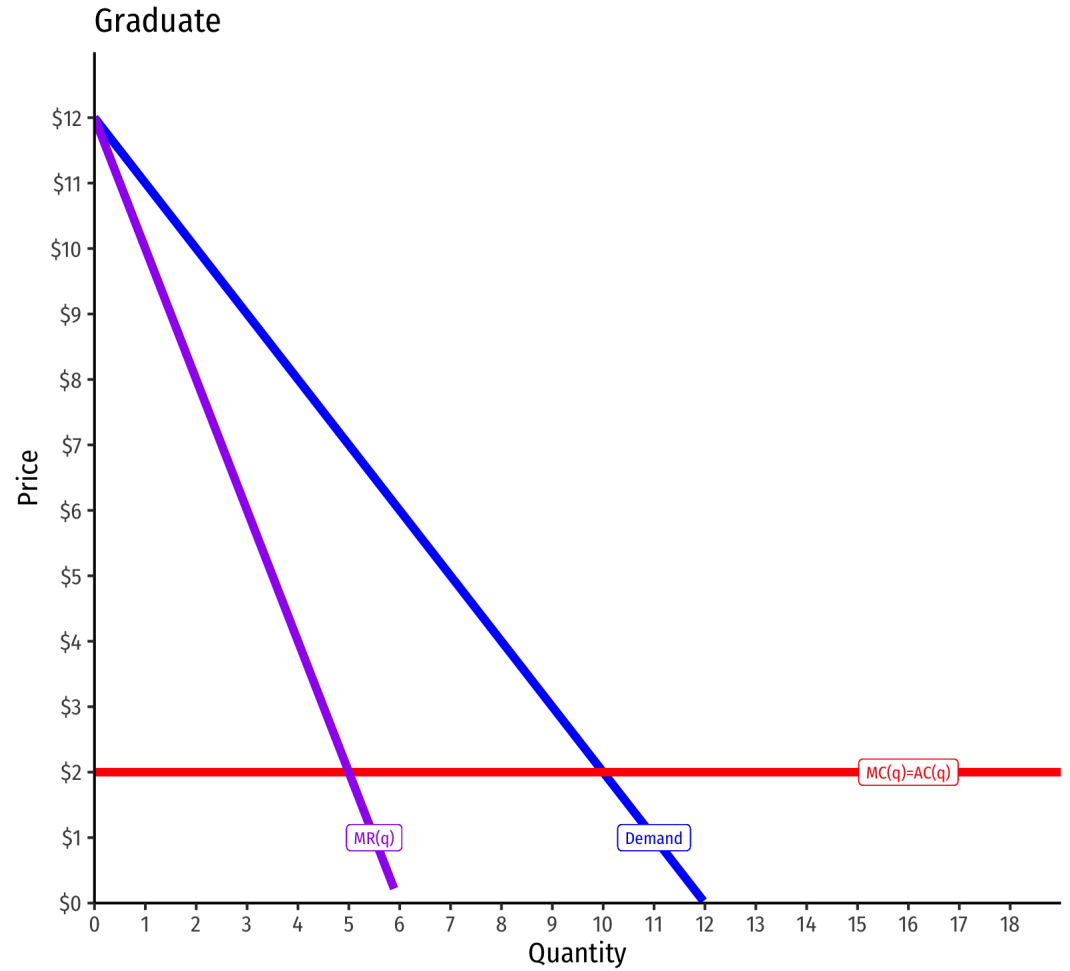
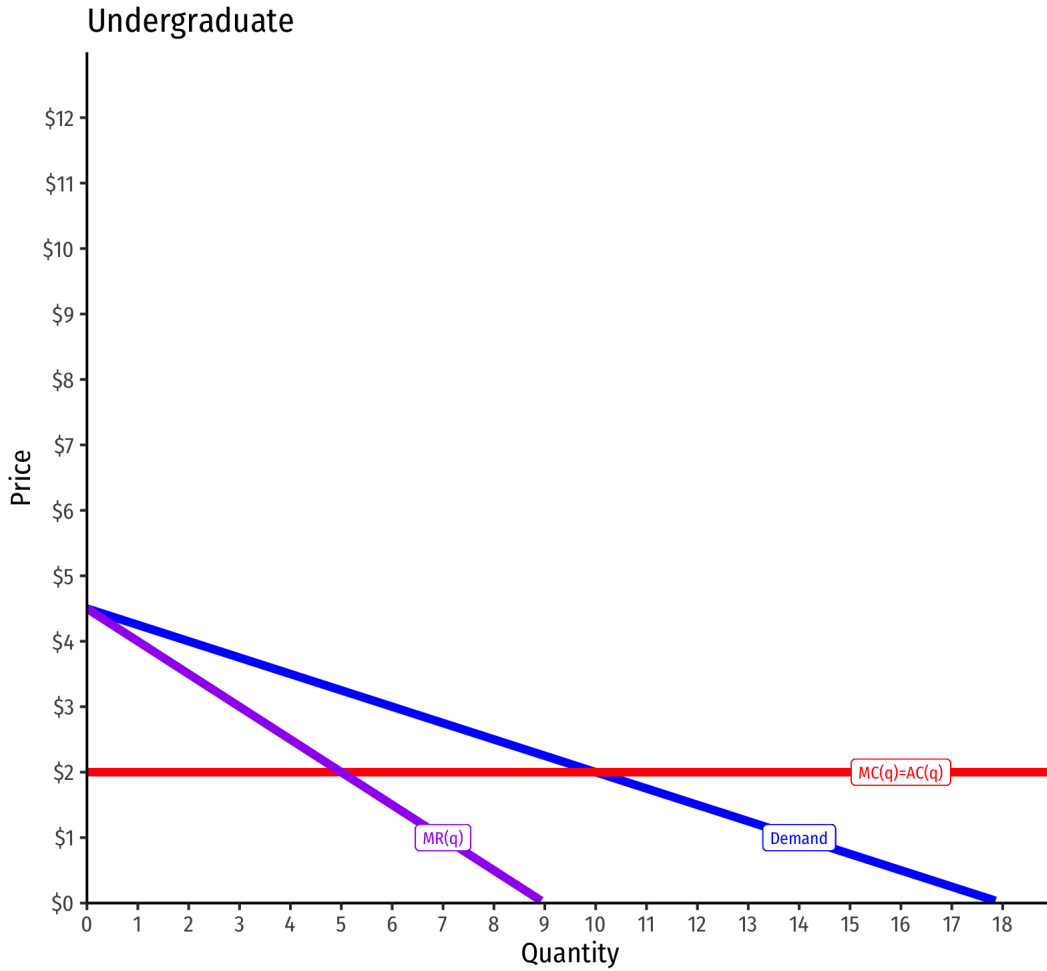
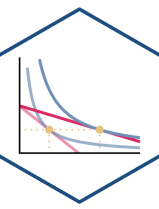
$$q_U = 18 - 4p_U$$

$$q_G = 12 - p_G$$

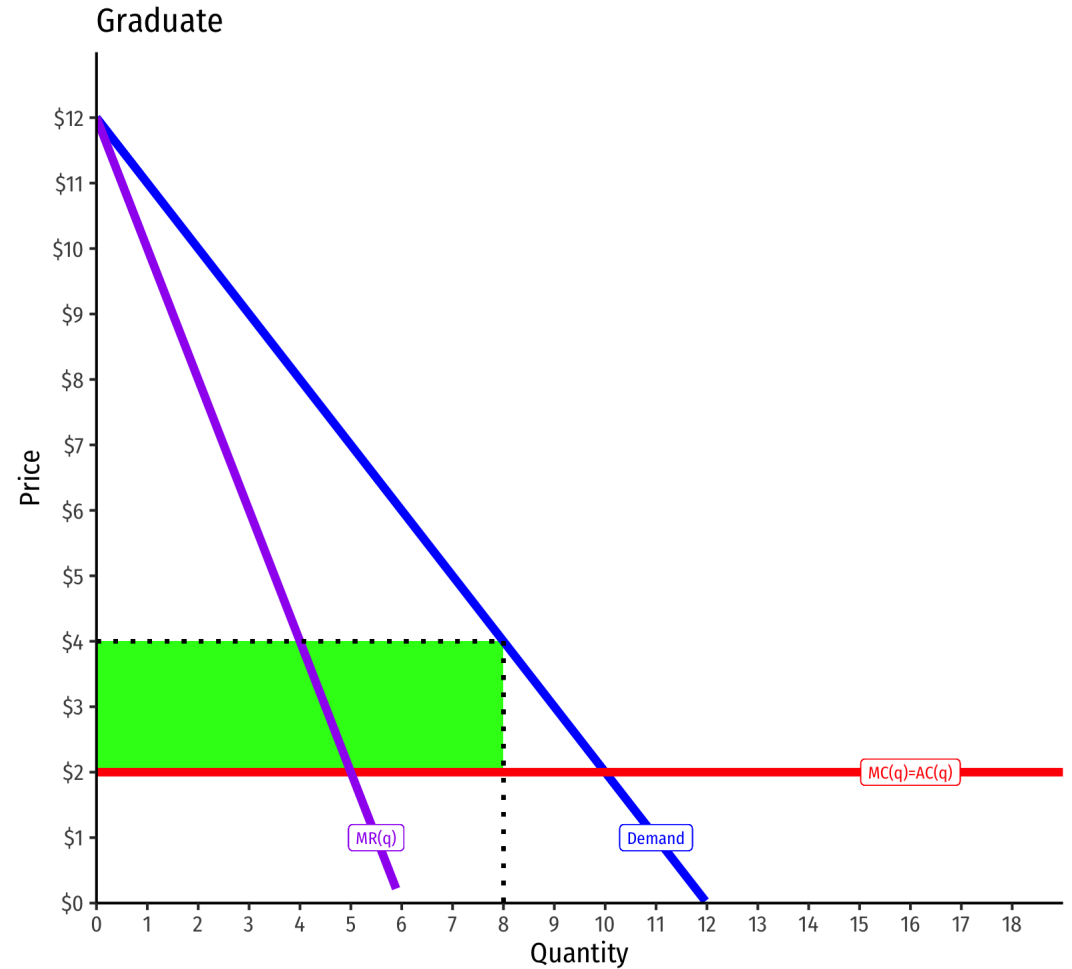
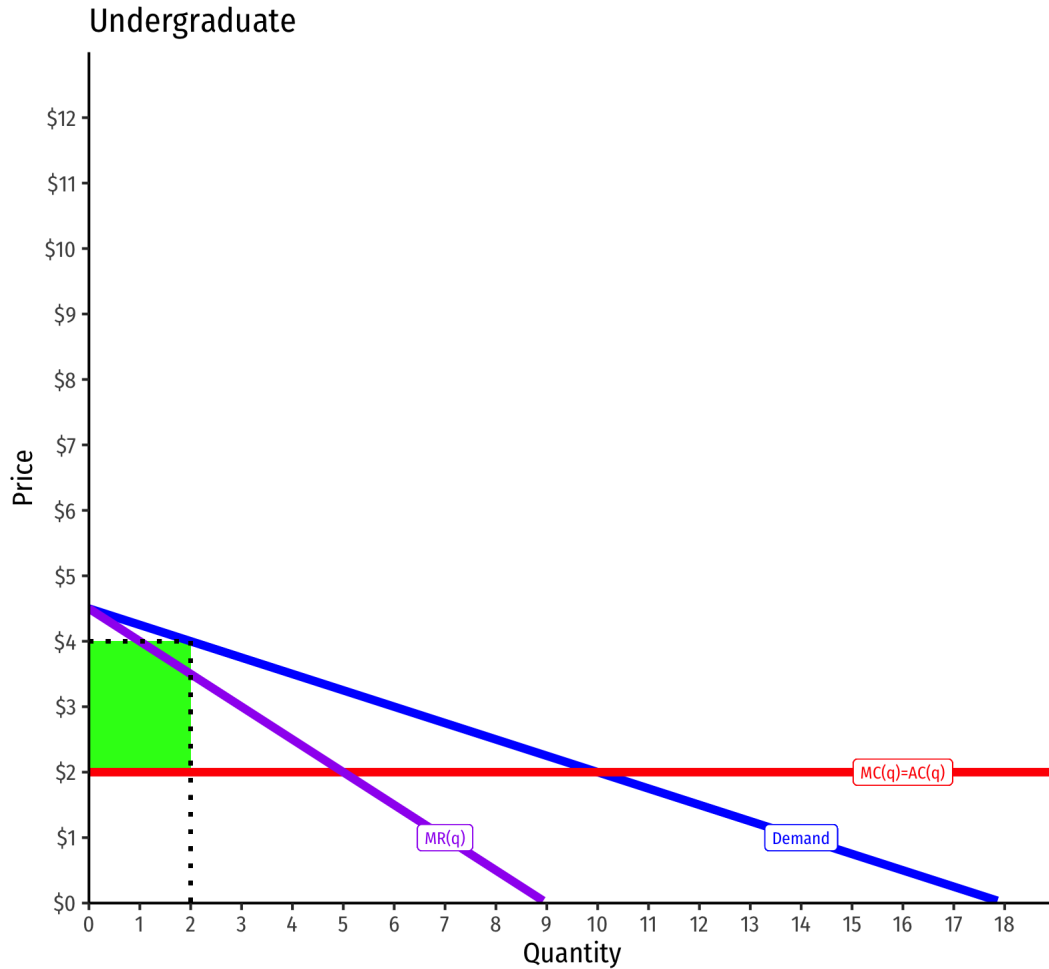
Assume the only cost of producing a beer is a constant marginal (and average) cost of \$2.

1. If your bar had to charge a uniform price for beer, how much profit would the bar earn?
2. If you could price discriminate, how much profit would the bar earn?

3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Numerical Example

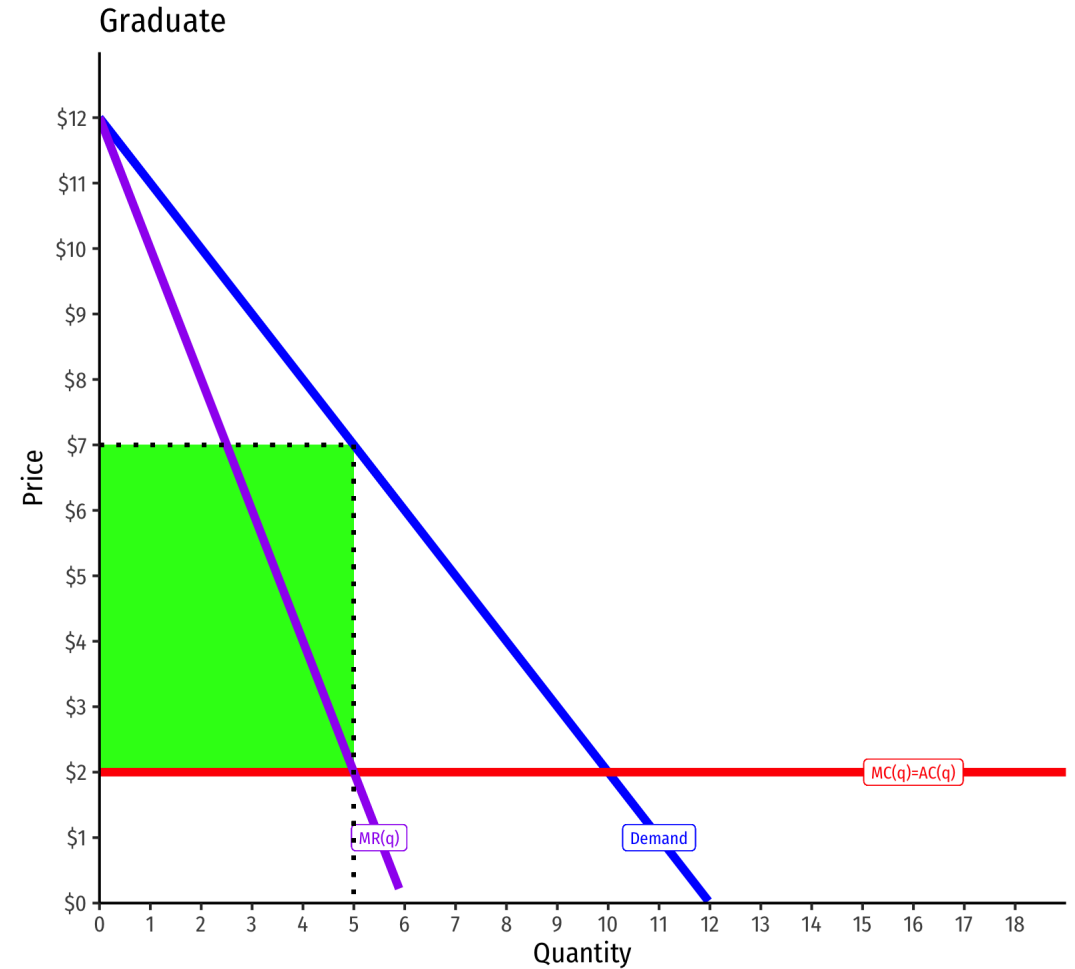
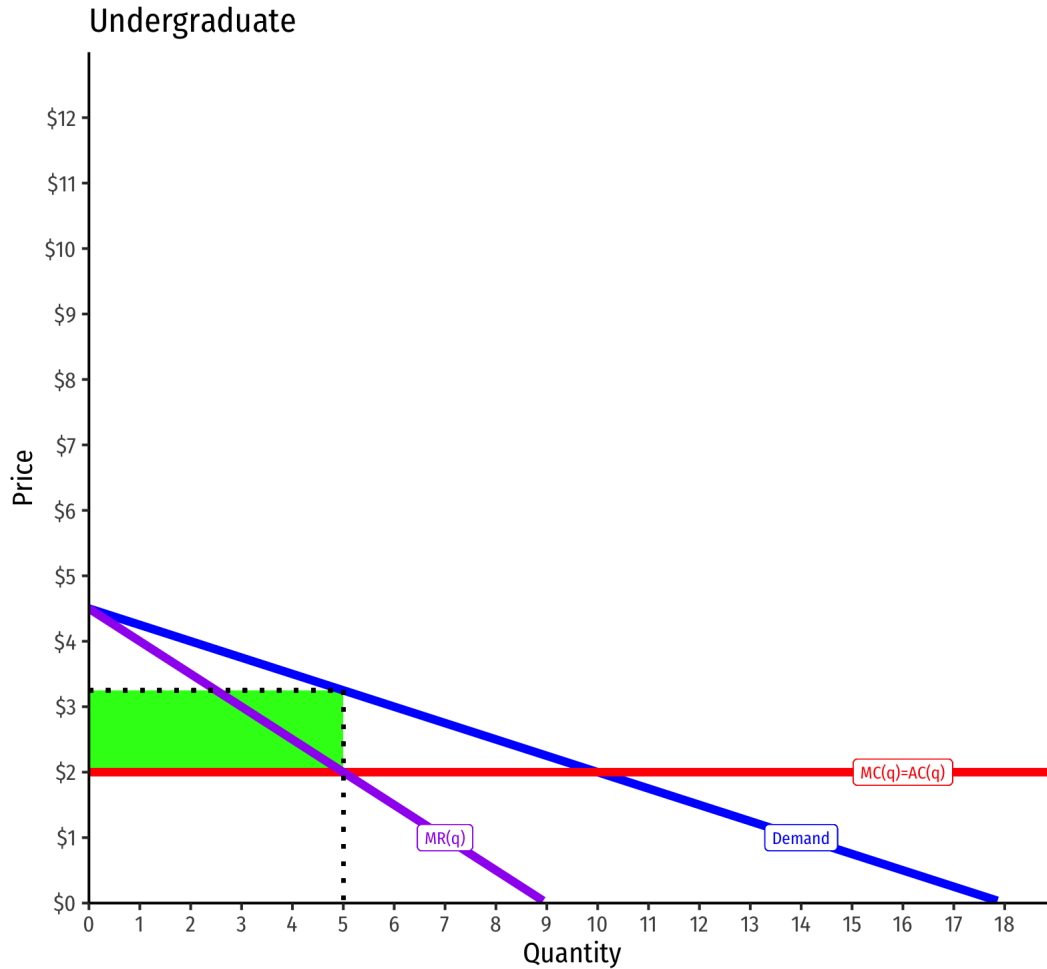


3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Numerical Example



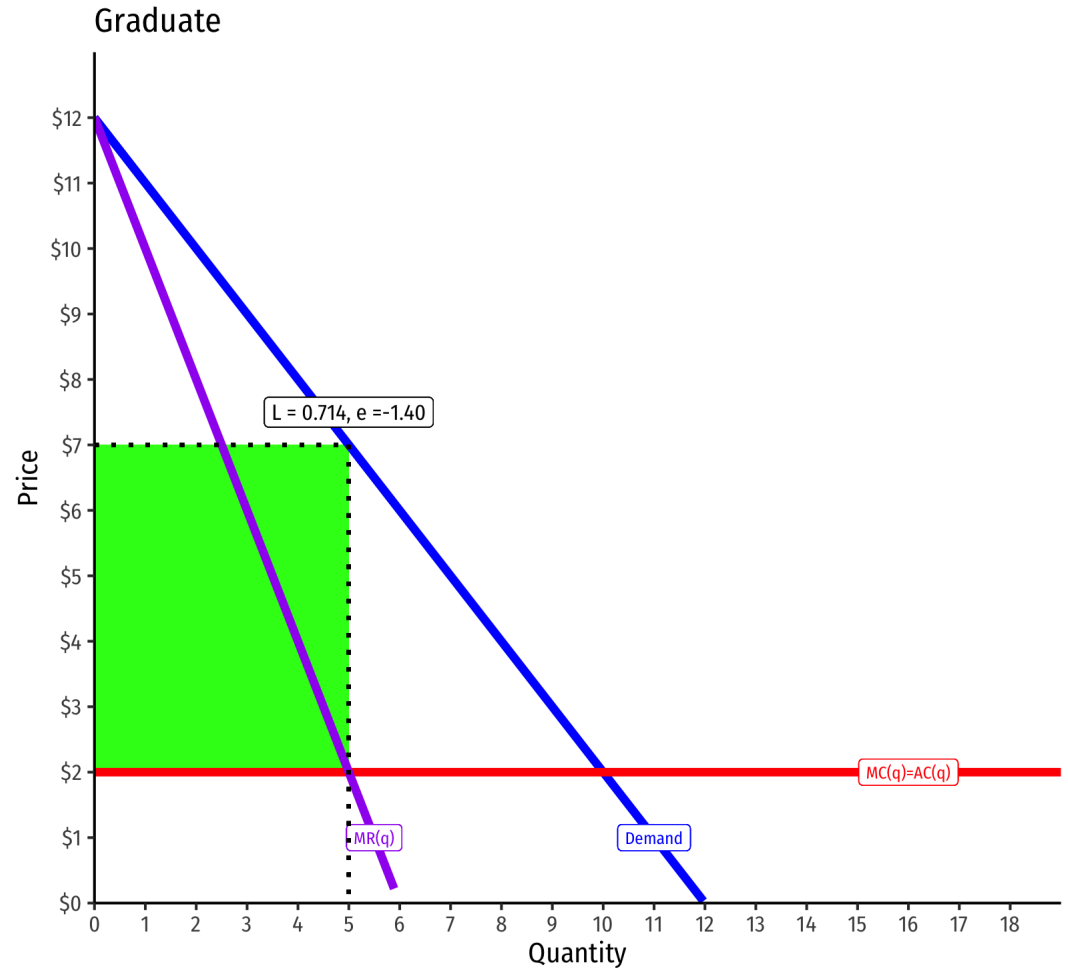
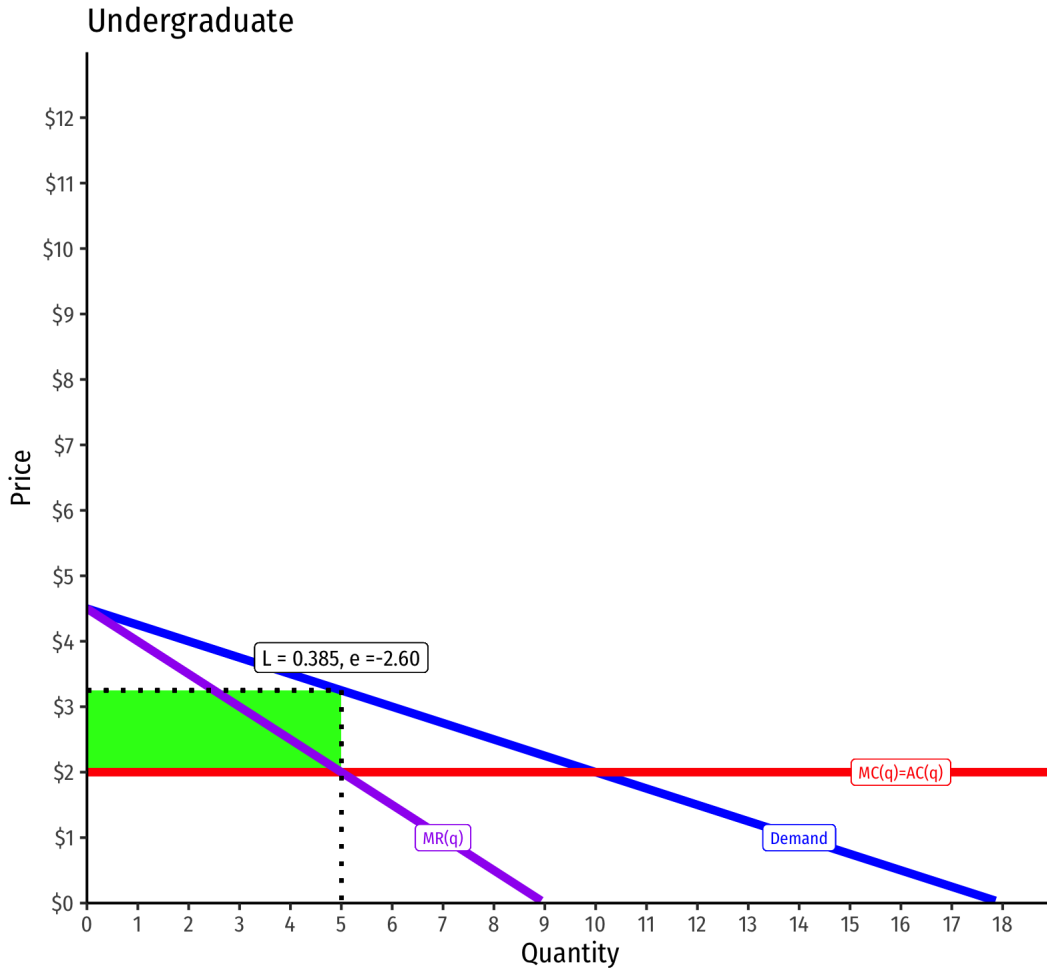
- Charging a single price: \$4, total profit of \$20

3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Numerical Example



- Charging \$3.25 to Undergrads; \$7.00 to grads; total profit of \$31.25

3rd-Degree Price Discrimination: Numerical Example



- Charging \$3.25 to Undergrads; \$7.00 to grads; **total profit of \$31.25**

Ways to Segment Markets



- By customer characteristics

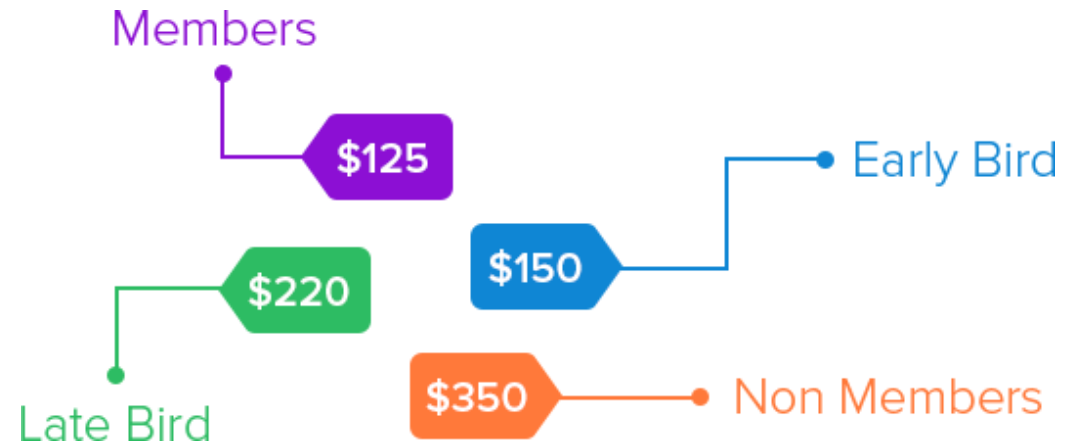
- Age
- Gender

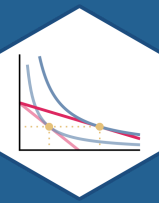
- Past purchase behavior

- repeat customers (more price sensitive)

- By location

- local demand characteristics



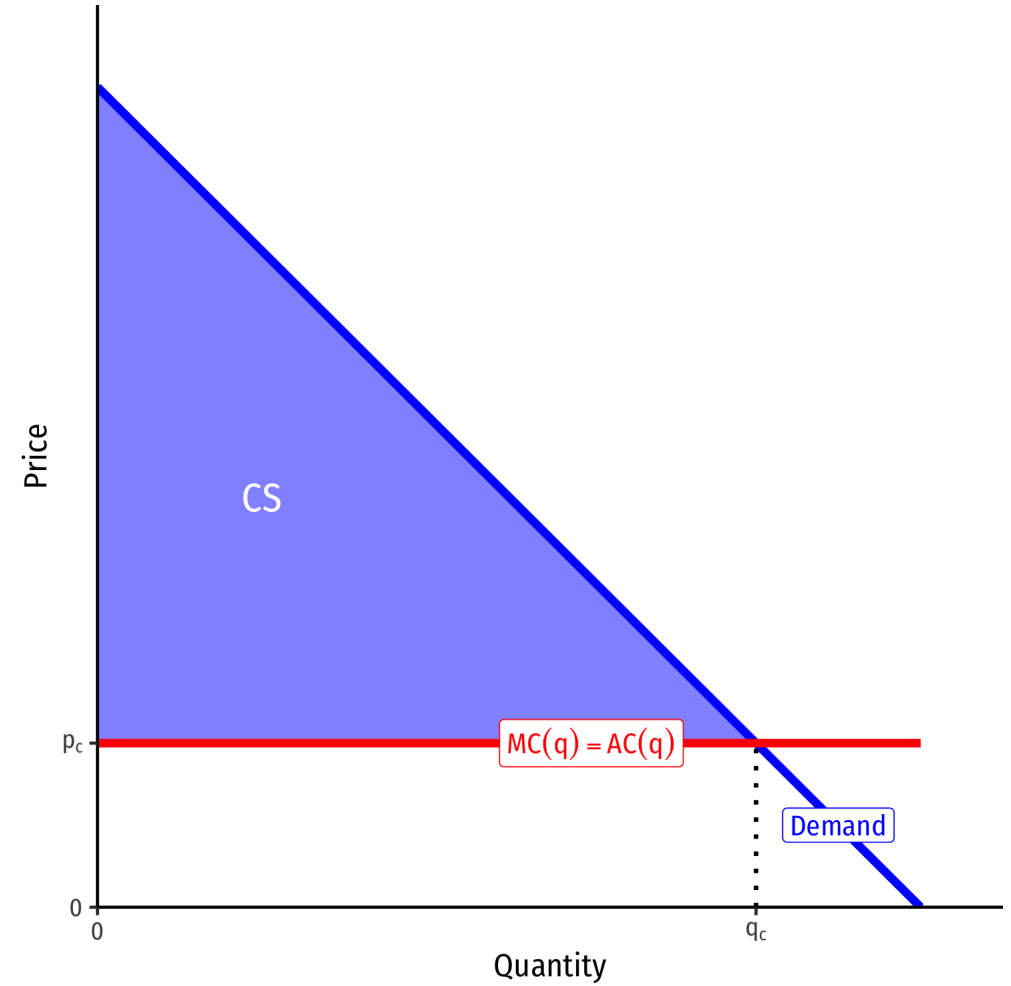


Is Price Discrimination Good or Bad?

Is Price Discrimination Good or Bad? I



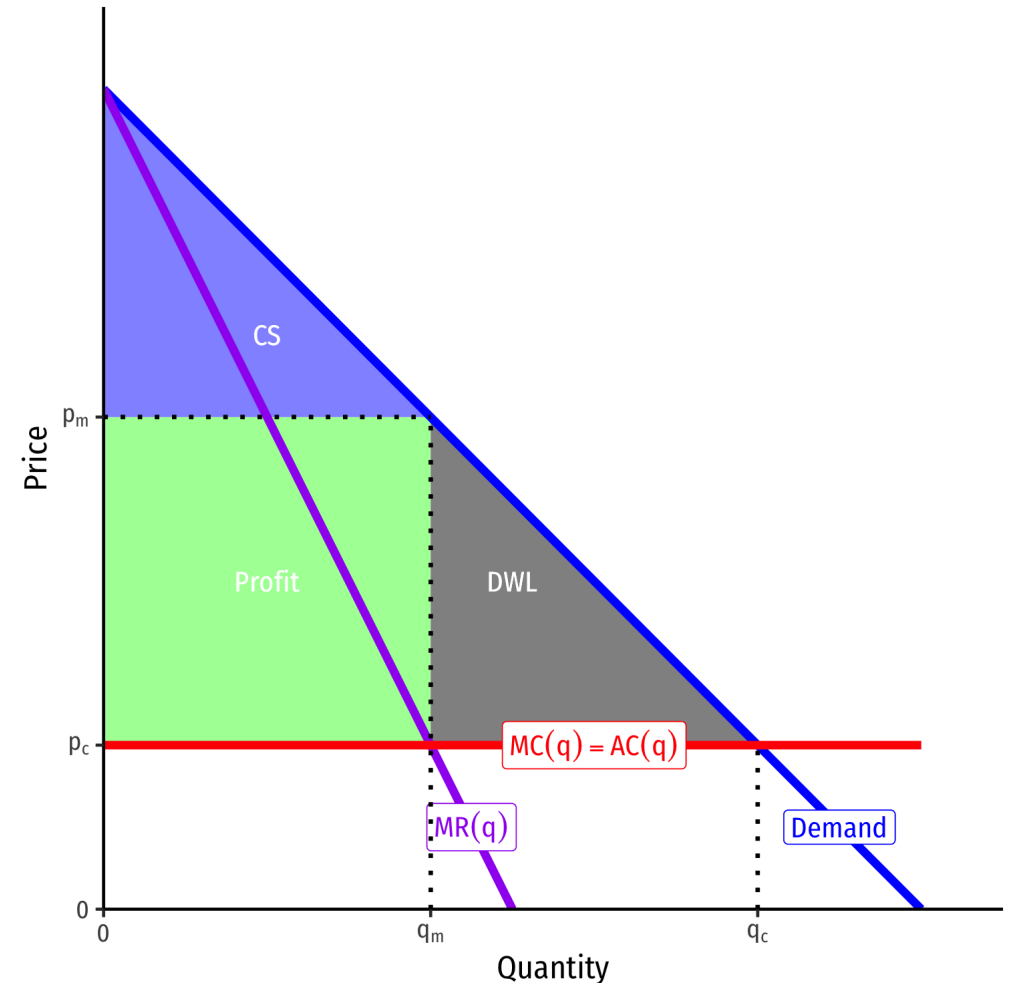
- Ideal competitive market, q^* where $p^c = MC$



Is Price Discrimination Good or Bad? I



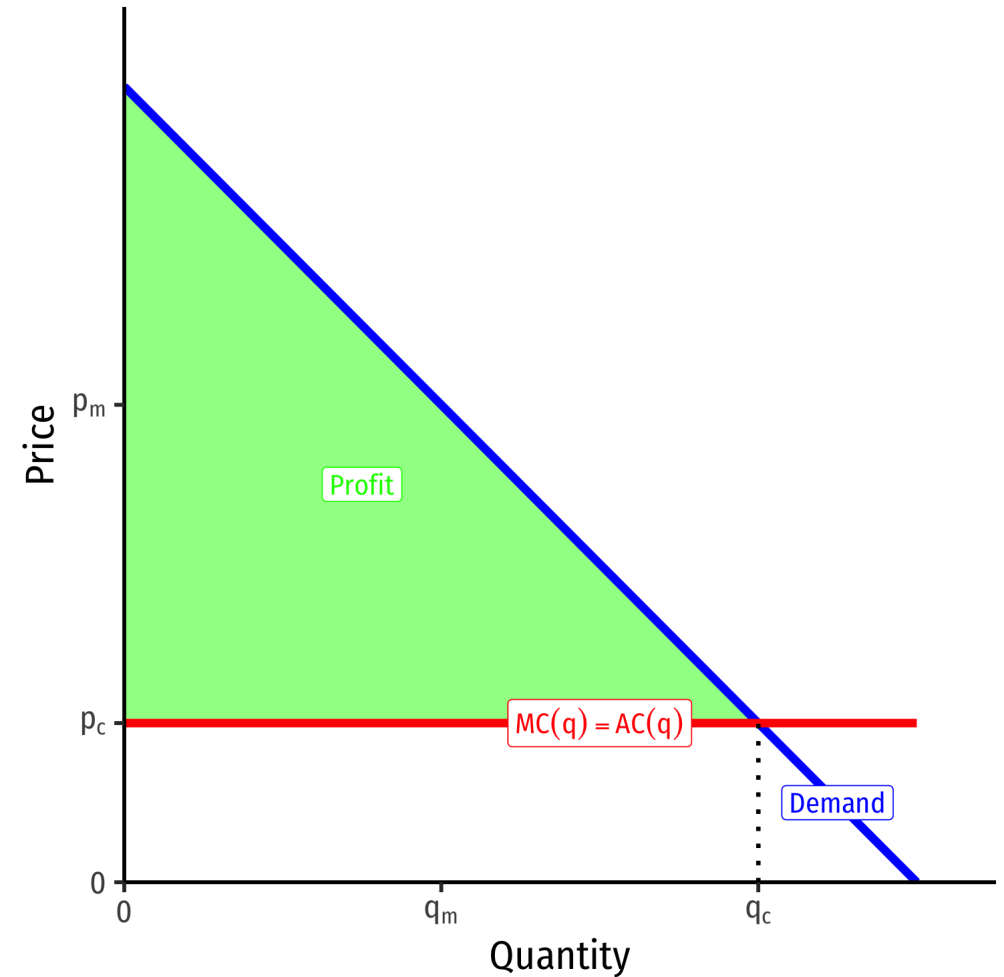
- Ideal competitive market, q^c where $p^c = MC$
- A pure monopolist would produce less q^m at higher p^m
 - reduce **consumer surplus** and create **deadweight loss**
- Transfer of some surplus from consumers to producers



Is Price Discrimination Good or Bad? I



- A price-discriminating monopolist transfers MORE surplus from consumers to producers
- But encourages monopolist to produce more than the pure monopoly level and reduce deadweight loss!
 - At best, also produces at competitive output level!



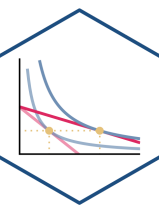
Is Price Discrimination Good or Bad? II



- Price-discrimination creates incentives for innovation and risk-taking
- Firms with high fixed costs of investment earn greater profits with price discrimination, can recover their fixed costs
- Might not invest or produce if they had to charge a uniform price



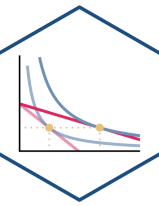
Is Price Discrimination Good or Bad? III



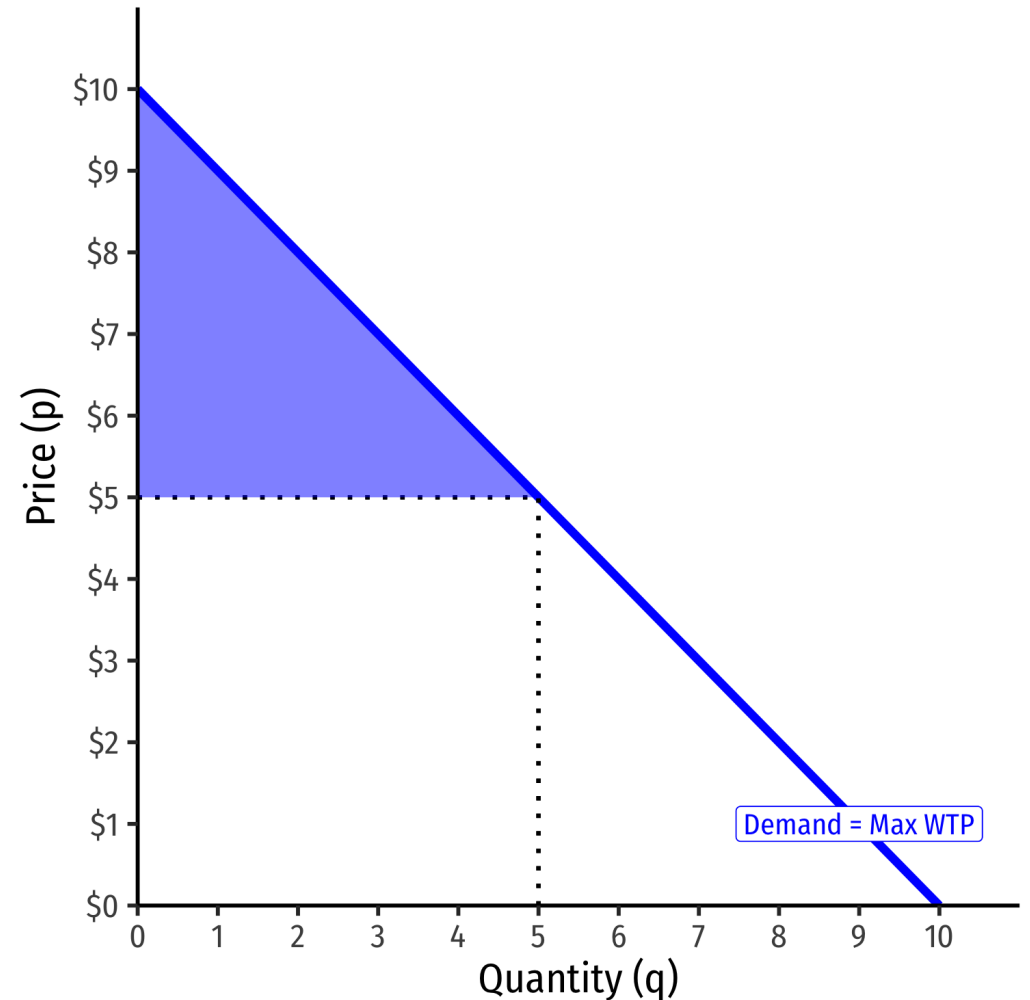
- As with markups in general, price discrimination has everything to do with **price elasticity of demand**
- If you are paying too much and losing consumer surplus, the real “problem” is that **your demand is not very elastic**
 - fewer options, a particular brand, or a necessity, limited time, etc
- If you want to pay less, **buy generic** (more elastic)



How to Be a Savvy Consumer



- Realize that any “sales” and “discounts” are calculated to make *the store* more money
- You *can* also be better off as a consumer too
- Think about your **consumer surplus**!
- If you were *already* planning to buy the product, a fall in price is **a good deal** for you
 - Your demand is less elastic
- If you *weren't* going to buy the product before, and now you do, the sale was effective for the store, and you likely don't get much surplus
 - Your demand is more elastic



Behavioral Economics



\$25
\$5 shipping

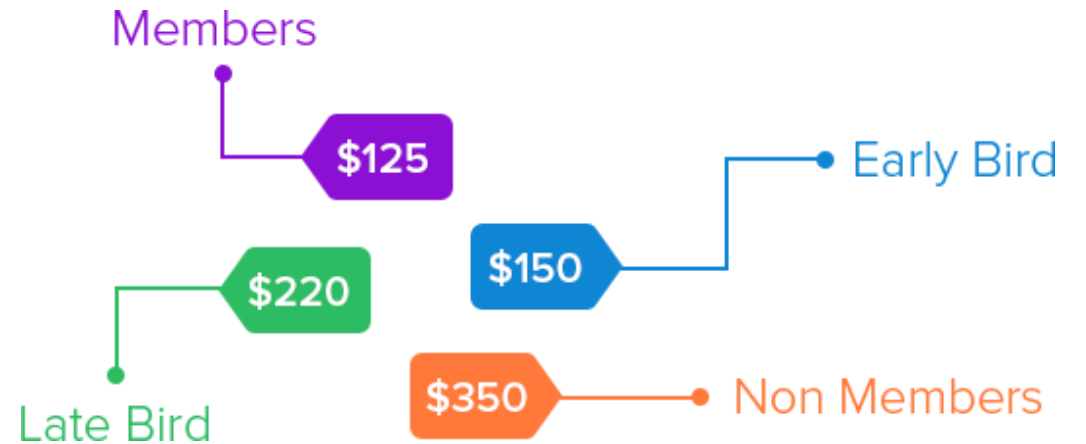


\$30
Free shipping

Price Discrimination vs. Price Differences



- **Price discrimination** is selling *identical* goods to people at different prices
- But not everytime people pay different prices means it is price discrimination
- Sometimes it is truly different goods that people are paying different prices for
 - If *costs* to firm are *different* for different versions (color, size, etc.), it is a *different* good, *not* price discrimination



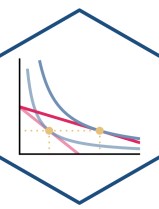
Price Discrimination vs. Price Differences



- **Example:** bottled sparkling water often higher price than Coca Cola
- Could be because sparkling water drinkers have less elastic demand than Coke drinkers
- Or could be that it is more expensive to package sparkling water (economies of scale with greater number of Coke drinkers)

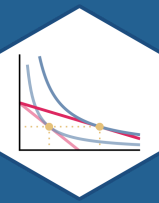


Price Discrimination vs. Price Differences



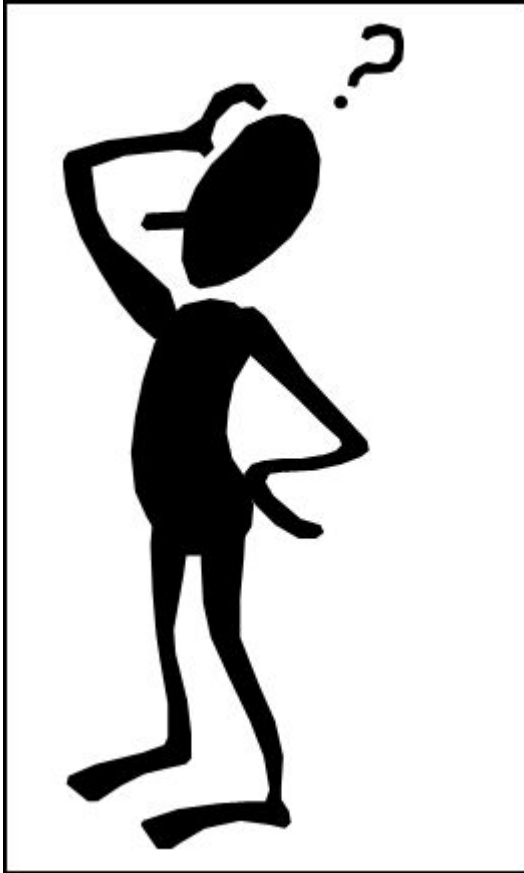
- The best way to tell the difference is to see what happens if demand changes price elasticity (and costs do not change)
 - Price discrimination requires market power, firm with market power marks up price based on $\frac{1}{\epsilon}$
 - Competitive firm only sets $p = MC$, so change in elasticity has no effect on price
- See [today's class notes](#) for a graphical demonstration





2nd-Degree Price Discrimination

2nd-Degree Price Discrimination I



- If firm *cannot* identify customers' demands or types before purchase
- **Indirect** or **2nd-degree price discrimination**: firm offers difference price-quantity bundles and allows customers **self-select** (based on preferences)

2nd-Degree Price Discrimination: Block Pricing



- **Block Pricing/Nonlinear pricing:** offer different prices for different quantities that consumers can choose
- **quantity discounting:** higher quantities offered at lower prices



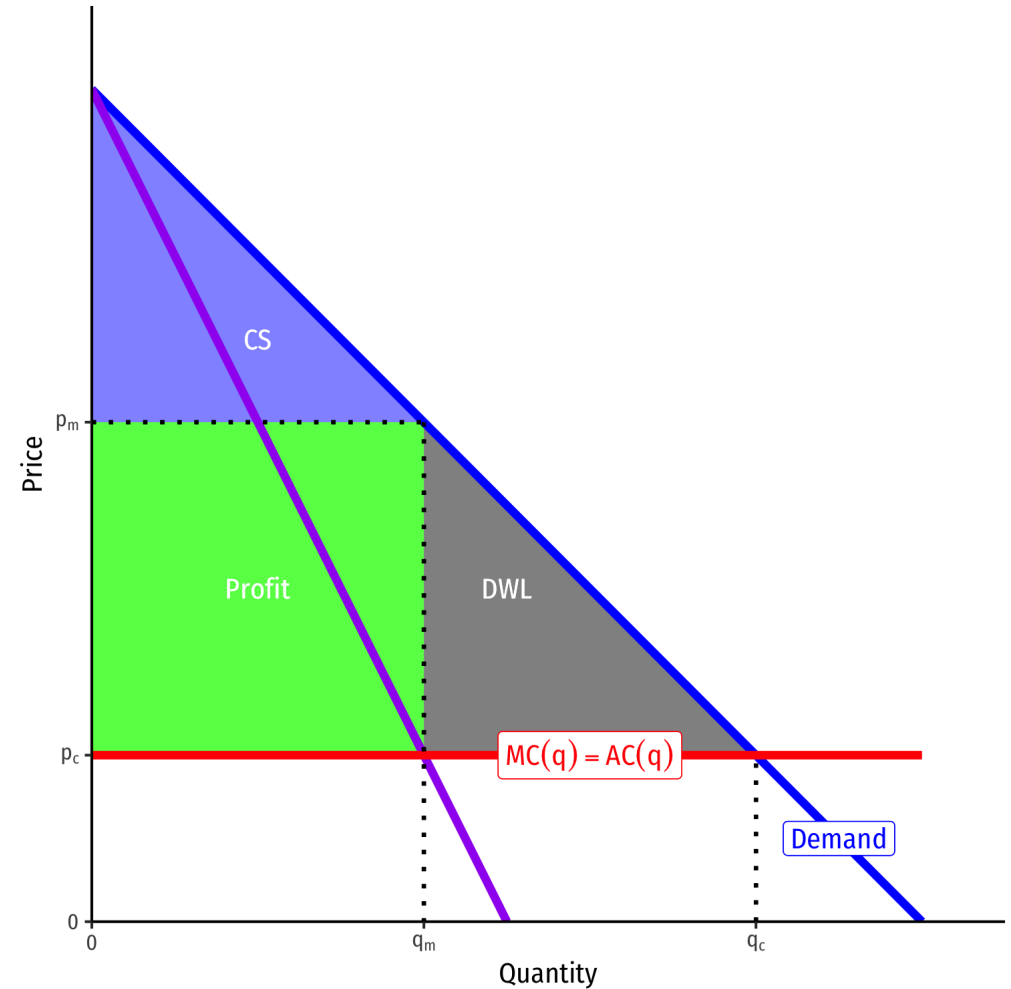
For ex:

Quantity Range	Price
1 to 5	\$100
6 to 10	\$90
11 to 15	\$80
15 and above	\$70

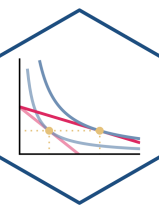
2nd-Degree Price Discrimination: Block Pricing



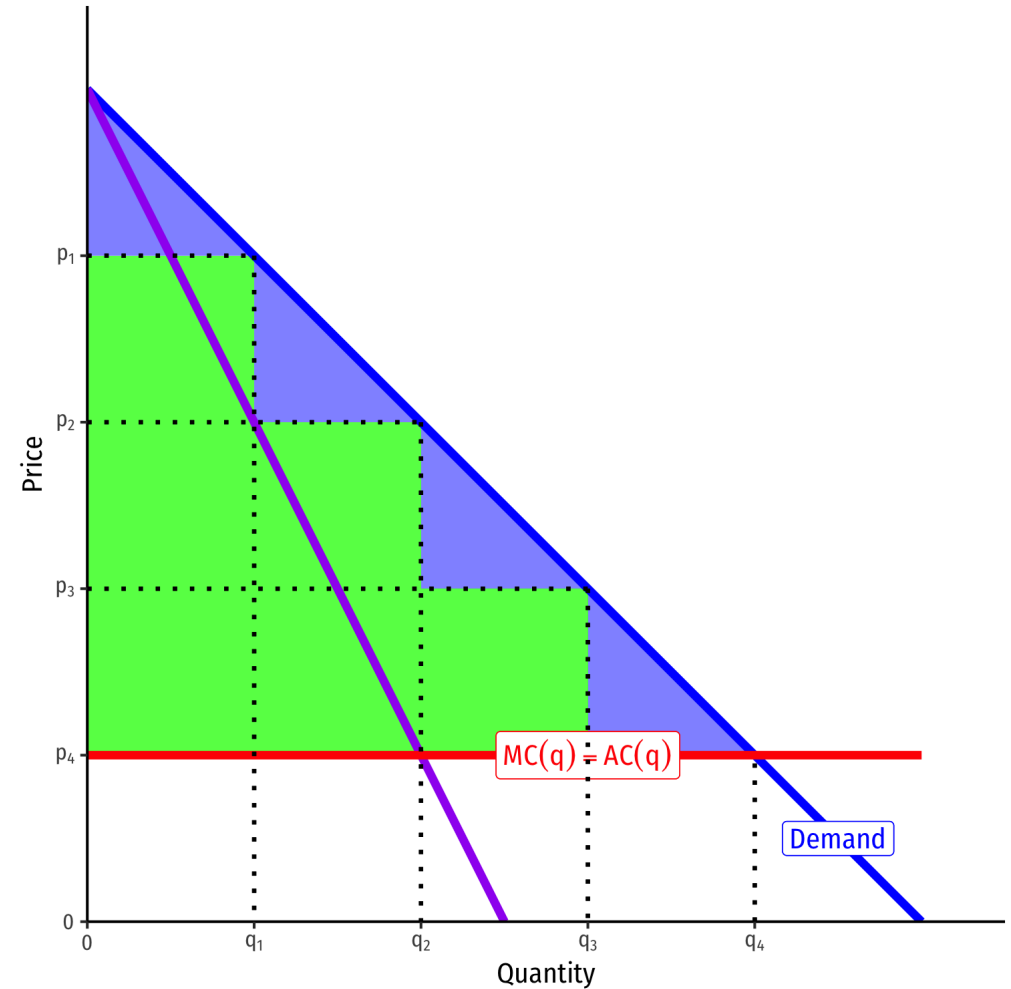
- **Example:** instead of one profit-maximizing monopoly price of p_m for q_m units, offer:



2nd-Degree Price Discrimination: Block Pricing



- **Example:** instead of one profit-maximizing monopoly price of p_m for q_m units, offer:
 - p_1 /unit for q_1 units
 - p_2 /unit for q_2 units
 - p_3 /unit for q_3 units
 - p_4 /unit for q_4 units
- Converts **DWL** into **CS** and captures more of it as **Profit**



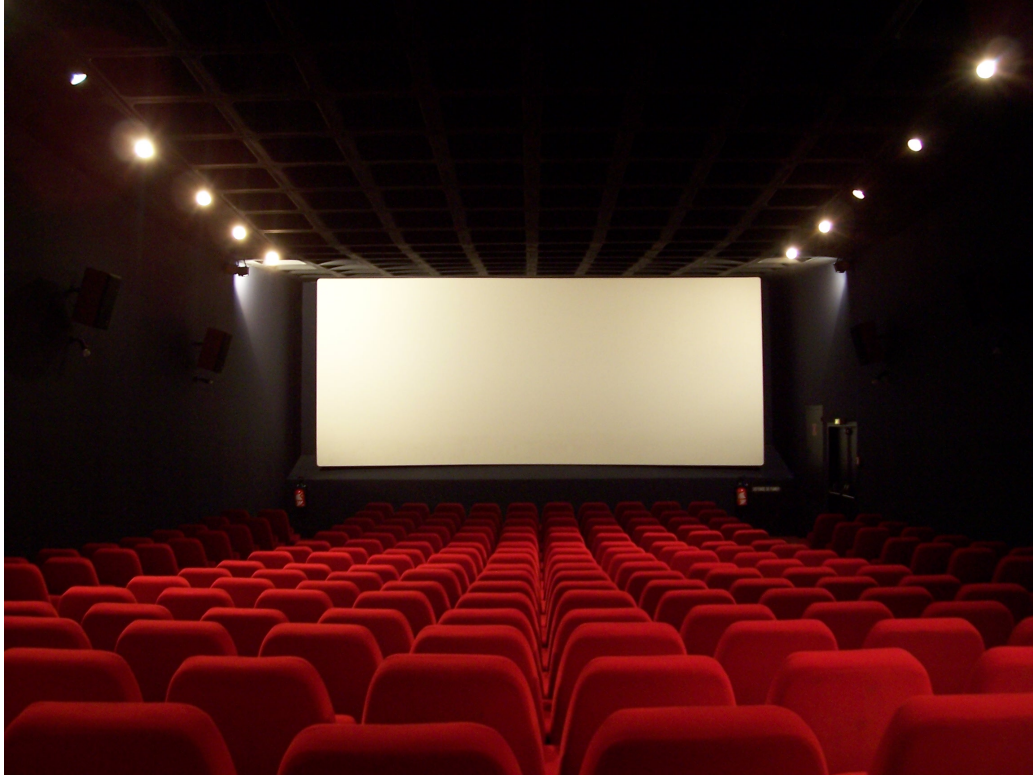
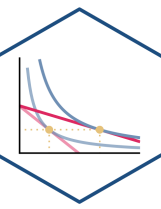
2nd-Degree Price Discrimination: Versioning



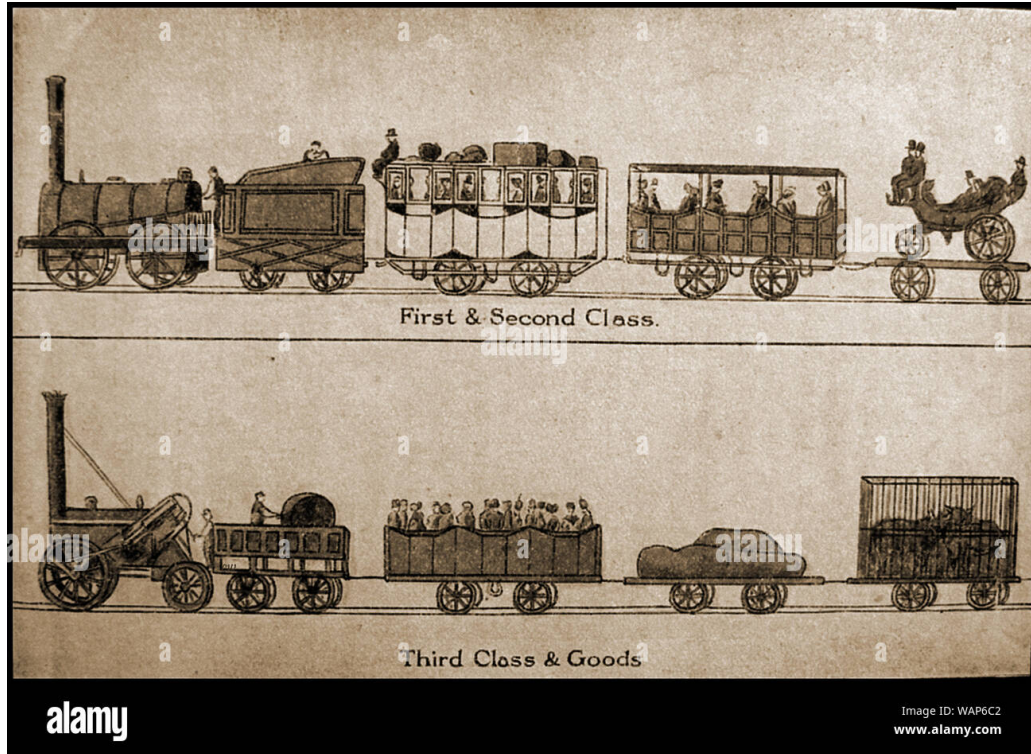
- **Versioning**: offer different prices for different *qualities* of a good (instead of *quantity*)
 - Higher (lower) prices offered for higher (lower) quality/more (fewer) features
- Must make versions **incentive-compatible** so that each type of consumer chooses version that matches their preferences
 - key: add/remove quality/features across versions to make those that have higher WTP buy more expensive version rather than cheaper version (and vice versa)



2nd-Degree Price Discrimination: Versioning



2nd-Degree Price Discrimination: Versioning



“It is not because of the few thousand francs which would have to be spent to put a roof over the third-class carriage or to upholster the third-class seats that some company or other has open carriages with wooden benches ... What the company is trying to do is prevent the passengers who can pay the second-class fare from traveling third class; it hits the poor, not because it wants to hurt them, but to frighten the rich ... And it is again for the same reason that the companies, having proved almost cruel to the third-class passengers and mean to the second-class ones, become lavish in dealing with first-class customers. Having refused the poor what is necessary, they give the rich what is superfluous.” — Jules Dupuit

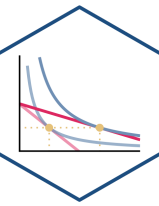
Tying I



- Firms often **tie** multiple goods together, where you must buy both goods in order to consume the product
 - One good often the “base” and the other are “refills” that you may need to buy more of
- This is actually a method of ***intertemporal price-discrimination!***



Tying II



- Companies often **sell printers at marginal cost** (no markup) and sell the **ink/refills at a much higher markup**
- **Reduce arbitrage:**
 - printer requires specific ink
 - ink only works with that specific printer



Tying II



- Segment the market into:
 1. **High-volume users:** buy more ink over time; pay more per sheet printed
 2. **Low-volume users:** buy less ink; pay less per sheet printed
- **Indirect** price-discrimination: firms **don't know** what kind of user you are in advance



Tying: Good or Bad?



- Again, a tradeoff:
- Increased profits and reduced consumer surplus, reduced deadweight loss
- Spreads fixed cost of research & development over more users



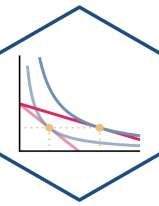
Tying: Good or Bad?



- If printers & ink were **not** tied:
 - **printers** would be **more expensive**
 - **ink** would be **cheaper**
- High-volume users would keep buying ink and save money (vs. tied)
- Low-volume users might not buy the (now expensive) printer at all!



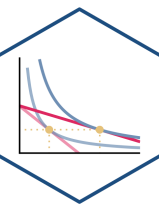
Bundling I



- Firms often **bundle** products together as a single package, and refuse to offer individual parts of the package
- Often, consumers do not want all products in the bundle
- Or, if they were able to buy just part of the bundle, they would *not* buy the other parts

Select HD with Internet and/or Phone	140+ Channels / 30+ HD	+	Includes these popular channels A&E Real Life. Drama. tbs HISTORY USA HGTV nickelodeon Discovery
Prime HD with Internet and/or Phone	210+ Channels / 55+ HD	+	ESPN FOX NEWS Regional sports networks E Comedy FOX NEWS
Extreme HD with Internet and/or Phone	290+ Channels / 75+ HD	+	Best Sports Value NFL NETWORK MLB bio. TRUE STORY NBA TV
Ultimate HD with Internet and/or Phone	385+ Channels / 110+ HD	+	Best Movie Value ESPN 3D CBS SPORTS NETWORK TENNIS CHANNEL MGM HD SPORTSMAN CHANNEL

Bundling II

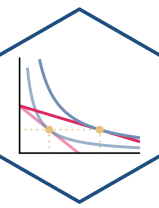


Example: Consider two consumers, each have different reservation prices to buy components in Microsoft Office bundle

- Microsoft could charge separate prices for MS Word and MS Excel

	Amy's WTP	Ben's WTP
MS Word	\$70	\$40
MS Excel	\$50	\$60

Bundling II

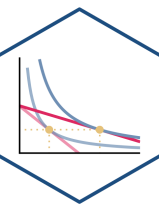


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- MS Word: both would buy at \$40, generating \$80 of revenues

Bundling II

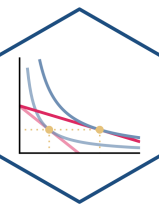


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- MS Word: both would buy at \$40, generating \$80 of revenues
- MS Excel: both would buy at \$50, generating \$100 of revenues

Bundling II

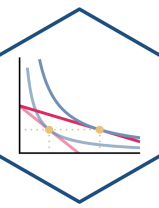


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- Microsoft could charge separate prices for MS Word and MS Excel
- MS Word: both would buy at \$40, generating \$80 of revenues
- MS Excel: both would buy at \$50, generating \$100 of revenues
- Total revenues of individual sales: \$180

Bundling II



Example: Consider two consumers, each have different reservation prices to buy components in Microsoft Office bundle

	Amy's WTP	Ben's WTP
MS Word	\$70	\$40
MS Excel	\$50	\$60
Bundle	\$120	\$100

- Microsoft could charge separate prices for MS Word and MS Excel
- MS Word: both would buy at \$40, generating \$80 of revenues
- MS Excel: both would buy at \$50, generating \$100 of revenues
- Total revenues of individual sales: \$180
- Microsoft can instead add their individual reservation prices and bundle products together to force both consumers to buy both products
- **Bundle:** both buy at \$100, generating \$200 revenue

Bundling: Good or Bad?



- Again, a tradeoff:
- Increased profits and reduced consumer surplus, reduced deadweight loss
- Spreads fixed cost of research & development over more users
- Goods with high fixed costs and low marginal costs (software, TV, music) increase profits from bundling
 - increases innovation and investment in these industries

