



Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and Its Consequences

By John Allen Paulos

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Why do even well-educated people understand so little about mathematics? And what are the costs of our innumeracy? John Allen Paulos, in his celebrated bestseller first published in 1988, argues that our inability to deal rationally with very large numbers and the probabilities associated with them results in misinformed governmental policies, confused personal decisions, and an increased susceptibility to pseudoscience of all kinds. *Innumeracy* lets us know what we're missing, and how we can do something about it.

Sprinkling his discussion of numbers and probabilities with quirky stories and anecdotes, Paulos ranges freely over many aspects of modern life, from contested elections to sports stats, from stock scams and newspaper psychics to diet and medical claims, sex discrimination, insurance, lotteries, and drug testing. Readers of *Innumeracy* will be rewarded with scores of astonishing facts, a fistful of powerful ideas, and, most important, a clearer, more quantitative way of looking at their world.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

This is the book that made "innumeracy" a household word, at least in some households. Paulos admits that "at least part of the motivation for any book is anger, and this book is no exception. I'm distressed by a society which depends so completely on mathematics and science and yet seems to be indifferent to the innumeracy and scientific illiteracy of so many of its citizens."

But that is not all that drives him. The difference between our pretensions and reality is absurd and humorous, and the numerate can see this better than those who don't speak math. "I think there's something of the divine in these feelings of our absurdity, and they should be cherished, not avoided."

Paulos is not entirely successful at balancing anger and absurdity, but he tries. His diatribes against astrology, bad math education, Freud, and willful ignorance are leavened with jokes, mathematical or the sort (he claims) favored by the numerate.

It remains to be seen if *Innumeracy* will indeed be able, as Hofstadter hoped, to "help launch a revolution in math education that would do for innumeracy what Sabin and Salk did for polio"--but many of the improvements Paulos suggested have come to pass within 10 years. Only time will tell if the generation raised on these new principles is more resistant to innumeracy--and need only worry about being incomputable. --*Mary Ellen Curtin*

Review

"Our society would be unimaginably different if the average person truly understood the ideas in this marvelous and important book." ?*Douglas Hofstadter*

"[An] elegant ... Survival Manual ... Brief, witty and full of practical applications." ?*Stefan Kanfer, Time*

From the Inside Flap

Dozens of examples in innumeracy show us how it affects not only personal economics and travel plans, but explains mischosen mates, inappropriate drug-testing, and the allure of pseudo-science.

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