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# A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper

*By John Allen Paulos*



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In this lively volume, mathematician John Allen Paulos employs his singular wit to guide us through an unlikely mathematical jungle—the pages of the daily newspaper. From the Senate and sex to celebrities and cults, Paulos takes stories that may not seem to involve math at all and demonstrates how mathematical naïveté can put readers at a distinct disadvantage. Whether he's using chaos theory to puncture economic and environmental predictions, applying logic to clarify the hazards of spin doctoring and news compression, or employing arithmetic and common sense to give us a novel perspective on greed and relationships, Paulos never fails to entertain and enlighten.



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## **Editorial Review**

### **Amazon.com Review**

In this book the author of *Innumeracy : Mathematical Illiteracy and Its Consequences* reveals the hidden mathematical angles in countless media stories. His real life perspective on the statistics we rely on and how they can mislead is for anyone interested in gaining a more accurate view of their world. The book is written with a humorous and knowledgeable style that makes it great reading.

### **From Publishers Weekly**

Paulos (*Beyond Innumeracy*) examines the often overlooked mathematical angle behind news stories in this informally written, enlightening survey. He uses simple arithmetic to expose consumer fallacies, electoral tricks and sports myths; applies the concept of self-reference to puncture inflated news reporting or celebrity coverage; and assesses health risks and accounts of racial or ethnic bias using probability and other tools. The Temple University math professor also investigates whether SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) scores are a predictor of success in college; the enormity of the cost of the savings-and-loan bailout; safety considerations in GM trucks. Loosely modeled on the format of a daily newspaper, his analysis ranges from politics to crime to lifestyles and obituaries, with discussions of futurists' attempts to spot global trends, "man-on-the-street" reaction stories, deceptive advertisements, meaningless precision. A timely antidote to mathematical naivete. QPB, Library of Science, Natural Science Book Club, Astronomy Book Club, Reader's Subscription and Newbridge Executive Program alternates. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

### **From Library Journal**

Whenever mathematicians or scientists read a newspaper or magazine article, they have a tendency mentally to compose a letter to the editor taking issue with the conclusions or mode of presentation. Most are content to leave these letters unsent, but not Paulos (*Beyond Numeracy*, LJ 4/1/91). He writes not only letters but also op-ed articles in his continuing effort to combat the innumeracy of the general public. In this book, he presents a collection of these compositions, covering almost every type of feature that might appear in your daily paper, from the front page to the advertisements. Some of these pieces are new, and some have appeared elsewhere. They are mathematically undemanding, humorous, and instructive. Hopefully, the reader will learn from them to apply a dose of mathematical common sense when reading the papers rather than automatically accepting everything that appears. For popular math collections. ?Harold D. Shane, Baruch Coll., CUNY Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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