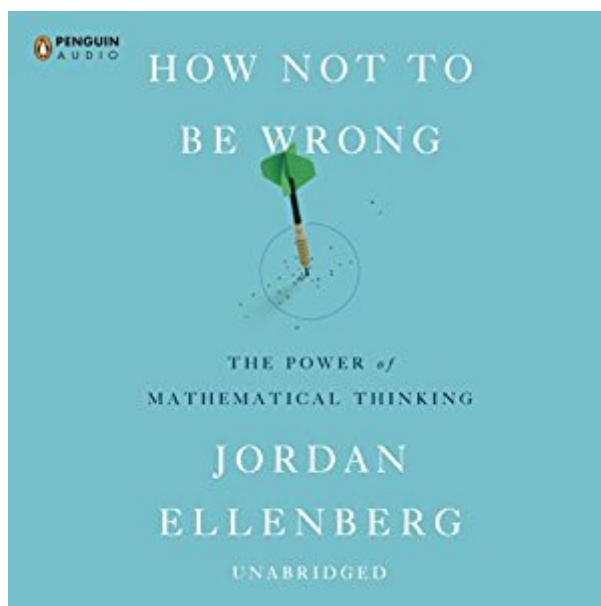


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How Not To Be Wrong: The Power Of Mathematical Thinking



Synopsis

The Freakonomics of math - a math-world superstar unveils the hidden beauty and logic of the world and puts its power in our hands. The math we learn in school can seem like a dull set of rules, laid down by the ancients and not to be questioned. In *How Not to Be Wrong*, Jordan Ellenberg shows us how terribly limiting this view is: Math isn't confined to abstract incidents that never occur in real life, but rather touches everything we do-the whole world is shot through with it. Math allows us to see the hidden structures underneath the messy and chaotic surface of our world. It's a science of not being wrong, hammered out by centuries of hard work and argument. Armed with the tools of mathematics, we can see through to the true meaning of information we take for granted: How early should you get to the airport? What does "public opinion" really represent? Why do tall parents have shorter children? Who really won Florida in 2000? And how likely are you, really, to develop cancer? *How Not to Be Wrong* presents the surprising revelations behind all of these questions and many more, using the mathematician's method of analyzing life and exposing the hard-won insights of the academic community to the layman-minus the jargon. Ellenberg chases mathematical threads through a vast range of time and space, from the everyday to the cosmic, encountering, among other things, baseball, Reaganomics, daring lottery schemes, Voltaire, the replicability crisis in psychology, Italian Renaissance painting, artificial languages, the development of non-Euclidean geometry, the coming obesity apocalypse, Antonin Scalia's views on crime and punishment, the psychology of slime molds, what Facebook can and can't figure out about you, and the existence of God. Ellenberg pulls from history as well as from the latest theoretical developments to provide those not trained in math with the knowledge they need. Math, as Ellenberg says, is "an atomic-powered prosthesis that you attach to your common sense, vastly multiplying its reach and strength." With the tools of mathematics in hand, you can understand the world in a deeper, more meaningful way. *How Not to Be Wrong* will show you how.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I run across a lot of books that I add to my to-be-read list and then forget about until after their publication dates or I stumble upon the book in the library or bookstore. *How Not to Be Wrong* was initially one of those books, but it sounded so good that I found myself obsessively thinking about it and started a search for a pre-publication copy. Since I'm not a librarian, didn't win a copy via First Reads, and don't have friends at Penguin Press, it took some time and effort, but having procured a copy and read it, I can say that it was well worth my time and \$6.00. *How Not to Be Wrong* is a catchy title, but for me, this book is really about the subtitle, *The Power of Mathematical Thinking*. Ellenberg deftly explains why mathematics is important, gives the reader myriad examples applicable to our own lives, and also tells us what math can't do. He writes,

“Mathematics is the extension of common sense by other means” and proceeds to expound upon an incredible number of interesting subjects and how mathematics can help us better understand these topics, such as obesity, economics, reproducibility, the lottery, error-correcting codes, and the existence (or not) of God. He writes in a compelling, explanatory way that I think anyone with an interest in mathematics and/or simply understanding things more completely will be able to grasp. Ellenberg writes “Do the Math” for Slate, and it's evident in his column and this book that he knows how to explain mathematical ideas to non-mathematicians, and even more so, seems to enjoy doing so with great enthusiasm. I won't pretend that I understood everything discussed in this book, but it's such an excellent book that I also bought the hardcover (so I have an index which my pre-pub copy does not), and reread the book so I do have a much more thorough understanding. I've wished for a book like this for a long time, and I'd like to thank Jordan Ellenberg for writing it for me!

Though quite biased, I enjoyed the witty voice and thought-provoking lessons explained throughout the book, and I believe the importance of the message that one should always question the assumptions in life is something that cannot be overemphasized.

I am enjoying it. I just might not be smart enough to follow some of it, but it's interesting and

although I do need to re read some sections to "get it", I'm enjoying it.

A great math book for people who do not care for math. Fantastic stories of how sometimes simple math can be used to solve seemingly unrelated problems or make people money. Best explanation yet that I have seen for why playing the lottery is generally not a good idea. But the author does tell you how math smart people played in one case. A fun book to read.

Excellent book. If you read *The Signal and the Noise* by Nate Silver, this book takes some of those same topics but to a whole new level! Keep a pen or pencil ready and work out some of the math problems in this book for a unique math-learning experience!

This is an excellent introduction to logical thinking. Unfortunately, our schools no longer teach logic. More and more, they don't teach anything at all. And people believe what they want to believe, logic be damned. There are several very good books that attempt, as this book does, to marshal evidence, reason, and just plain common sense to convince people to actually think. But these books are as a voice crying in the wilderness. People believe what they want to believe, or what they are told to believe, and it is the people who claim to think for themselves who are most likely to echo, word for word, what they hear in the media. And if you think you're an exception to this rule, you're probably wrong. A good test of whether you have something to learn from this book: when was the last time you admitted that you were wrong?

I learned about the underlying mathematical principles of life! Since I am not someone who is mathematically inclined and am 68 years old, I had to read some pages twice. However, most of the book was comprehensible and fascinating. I wish my calculus professor had started with his short pages on calculus! This is a great read for people who think they are math phobes or think they aren't interest in mathematical principles.

What helped me most about this was Ellenberg's keen understanding of his own position of writing a book on math without using math wrong. Instead of using anecdotal stories to prove his point he used his point to explain anecdotal stories. I've even gone on to use microplanes to solve a few optimization problems of my own.

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