

A Survival Guide to the Misinformation Age: Scientific Habits of Mind


By David J. Helfand

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We all swim in a sea of Big Data, dangerously vulnerable to the unscientific thinking that now replaces the critical faculties we used to rely on. We seek simple explanations where complexity is required. But as we endeavor to solve global problems of energy, food, and water shortages, a planetary biodiversity crisis, and emerging threats to our public health, the development of scientific habits of mind becomes even more essential for our survival. We fear numbers and prefer neat and simple solutions to complex problems, but scientific reasoning plays a central role in combating misinformation and is one of our best tools for meeting the upcoming crises of our century. From confronting our fear of quantitative reasoning and demystifying graphs to elucidating the key concepts of probability and data analysis and the use of precise language and logic, this book supplies an essential set of apps for the frontal cortex while making science both accessible and entertaining. Who says it has to be dull to learn to think like a scientist? Who says only a few can do it? Not David Helfand, one of our nation's leading astronomers and science educators. Helfand has taught scientific habits of mind to generations of Columbia University undergraduates, where he continues to wage a provocative and necessary battle against sloppy thinking and the encroachment of misinformation.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

A Survival Guide to the Misinformation Age is a no-holds-barred paean to the scientific mode of thinking. Helfand's wide-ranging, interdisciplinary, humorously cynical intellect comes through at every turn.

(J. Craig Wheeler, University of Texas at Austin)

A Survival Guide for the Misinformation Age is an impassioned plea for science literacy. Given the state of the world today, in which scientifically underinformed voters elect scientifically illiterate politicians, David Helfand has written the right book at the right time with the right message. Read it now. The future of our civilization may depend on it.

(Neil deGrasse Tyson, astrophysicist, American Museum of Natural History)

David Helfand's *Survival Guide to the Misinformation Age* gives readers a chance to spend time with one this country's clearest and best critical thinkers. Helfand channels Steven Pinker's ability to dissect language with John Alan Paulos's ability to explain numbers with Richard Dawkins' ability to explain our existence (to obtain food, to avoid being food, and to reproduce) with George Carlin's ability to make us laugh. Using personal anecdotes (he's a Red Sox fan), Helfand teaches us how to think through questions as diverse as why the moon doesn't make us lunatics to why it only takes twenty-three people to have a 50:50 chance that two will have the same birthday. A real pleasure.

(Paul Offit, University of Pennsylvania)

Important and timely.

(*Library Journal*)

Helfand's work is an admirable response to a long-standing problem of sloppy thinking.

(*Publishers Weekly*)

Helfand is a man brimming with incredible insights on the universe.

(*Dave's Universe*)

A must-read for anyone presuming to call themselves a scientist and a should-read for anyone just trying to make sense of the overwhelming volume of data and real and concocted 'proofs' of nearly everything that spews forth from the Internet on demand. This book provides a road map for teaching students how to both celebrate science and how to view their primary source of information with skepticism and caution. Every

science teacher should read this book.

(John Ziegler *NSTA Recommends*)

For those with an arts and humanities background, this book offers many valuable lessons.... For everyone else it provides a vital antidote to the ills of misinformation by teaching systematic and rigorous scientific reasoning.

(Marina Gerner *Times Literary Supplement*)

Highly recommended.

(*CHOICE*)

How I wish everyone would read, appreciate, and follow [David J. Helfand's] guidance.

(*Physics Today*)

From the Inside Flap

We live in the Information Age, with billions of bytes of data just two swipes away. Yet how much of this is mis- or even dis-information? A lot of it is, and your search engine can't tell the difference. As a result, an avalanche of misinformation threatens to overwhelm the discourse we so desperately need to address complex social problems such as climate change, the food and water crises, biodiversity collapse, and emerging threats to public health. This book provides an inoculation against the misinformation epidemic by cultivating scientific habits of mind. Anyone can do it--indeed, everyone must do it if our species is to long survive on this crowded and finite planet.

This survival guide supplies an essential set of apps for the pre-frontal cortex while making science both accessible and entertaining. It will dissolve your fear of numbers, demystify graphs, and elucidate the key concepts of probability, all while celebrating the precise use of language and logic. David Helfand, one of our nation's leading astronomers and science educators, has taught scientific habits of mind to generations in the classroom, where he continues to wage a provocative, unending battle against sloppy thinking and the encroachment of misinformation.

From the Back Cover

David J. Helfand is the former chair of the Department of Astronomy at Columbia University where he has served on the faculty for nearly four decades. He has also been a visiting scientist at the Danish Space Research Institute and the Sackler Distinguished Visiting Astronomer at Cambridge University. He was a founding tutor and served as president and vice chancellor at Quest University Canada; he recently completed a term as president of the American Astronomical Society. He has published commentary in *Nature*, *Physics Today*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*, among other publications.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mellisa White:

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Arturo McDaniel:

Some people said that they feel uninterested when they reading a guide. They are directly felt that when they get a half portions of the book. You can choose the particular book A Survival Guide to the Misinformation Age: Scientific Habits of Mind to make your own personal reading is interesting. Your personal skill of reading talent is developing when you similar to reading. Try to choose simple book to make you enjoy you just read it and mingle the feeling about book and studying especially. It is to be initially opinion for you to like to open up a book and read it. Beside that the publication A Survival Guide to the Misinformation Age: Scientific Habits of Mind can to be your brand new friend when you're sense alone and confuse using what must you're doing of that time.

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