

Pearson Delenda Est!

How to write a terrible textbook and make millions doing so.

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Introduction

Hume once said that "If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school of metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." And perhaps this is true. But he did not predict, and could not predict the existence of *Statistics: Informed Decisions Using Data*. Doubtless if he had he would have determined that even some texts containing "reasoning concerning quantity or number" deserve to be committed to the flames as well. ¹

A Notational Mess

The content of the book is presented in a disorganized and baffling way. Through only the shallowest of draughts the reader is introduced to a variety of different topics, the formalization of which is often left for later. The concept of the normal distribution is introduced five chapters before (Sullivan, Michael 150) an equation or even a name is given to it (Sullivan, Michael 383). There

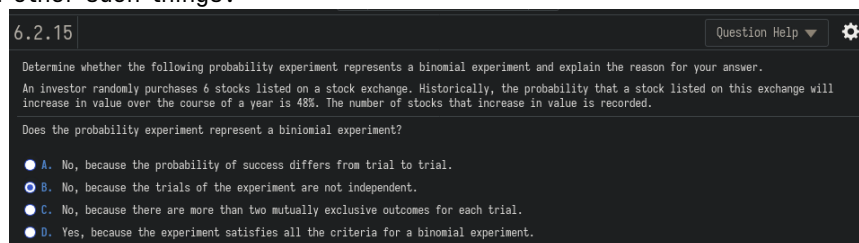
¹To illustrate using set notation: $(\mathbb{P} \cap \mathbb{B}) \subset \mathbb{F}$ where \mathbb{P} is the set of all things made by Pearson, \mathbb{B} is the set of all books, and \mathbb{F} is the set of all things that should be set on fire. The theorem $(\mathbb{P} \cap \mathbb{E}) \subset \mathbb{G}$ is also true, with \mathbb{E} being the set of all executives and \mathbb{G} being the set of all things that should be guillotined. However, should Robespierre's Conjecture hold, $\mathbb{E} \subset \mathbb{G}$ is also true, making the latter trivial and obvious.

is also a tendency towards nonstandard language with the chapter on enumerative combinatorics being especially egregious for never mentioning that it is describing combinatorics, potentially leaving the reader at a loss if they want to find more information on the subject. To compound this frequent nonstandard terminology there is the rotating use of nonstandard notation which is added and removed, often without explanation.

A Platform

But, of course, *Statistics: Informed Decisions Using Data* does not content itself with being merely a bad book, but strives to also provide a bad platform for an equally ruinous series of homework questions. The platform itself is slow, byzantine, and regularly undergoes UI changes in the middle of the course. The questions themselves often seem to be a product exclusively of the imagination of the writers of the book. In one case they ask students to generate random numbers from a grid of random numbers given a series of coordinates. At other points the answers provided to the questions are simply wrong.² Such inventions, errors, and overall badness make it a bad book, but do not make it clearly *terrible*. Indeed for it to be *terrible* it must become sort of awe inspiring, not merely tepid. To do that, the next trick is required.

²In one case the "correct" answer is taken to be that the price of a stock is an independent event from all other stocks. This is incorrect as the price of a stock on the market is not independent of all other stocks, which has been demonstrated by various economic crashes, the existence of synthetic options, and other such things.



A Money Pit Bigger than a Yacht

Unfortunately the luxury of being able to answer such questions is both \$70 and the copy is only available for the duration of the course. This makes it not only more expensive than most of its competitors but also useless as a reference text.³ In fact the digital version, despite being thousands of times cheaper to distribute, costs more than the physical copy of the same book on Amazon, which you would get to keep forever and would not require an absurd always-online system to access it. Therefore, we may wonder, where does this \$70 go? The transmission and delivery of the electronic text costs at most pennies, and could cost even less if it were in a PDF or EPUB format that could be sent as a full copy. The cost to write it is, assuming all 29 people listed on the inner cover spent a year writing it (which is doubtful) and were paid \$100 000 in wages, the total cost to write it would be a mere \$2.9 million. As for editing – given the errors – I cannot imagine much more than fifteen minutes was spent looking at it, the editor stuck in furtive onanistic bliss imagining the profits that it will provide the company and the students who will have to pay for it, covering the book in white strands of approval. Therefore, one might ask, where do the tens of millions of dollars in profit lead?

Corruption

The answers are lobbying, marketing, and profits. The cost does not lie in the textbook itself, it cannot, but rather lies in the adjuncts thereof: marketing the textbook to schools, teachers, and standards organizations. Indeed Pearson does do so extensively, bribing education commissioners with free trips⁴, paying millions of dollars to lobbyists in congress to promote their tests⁵, and doing other things to manipulate laws in their favor. The price is paid by the students, but the students ultimately have no real

³If one were so inclined, though they have worked very hard to ensure that no one could possibly want that, which in a sense makes it irrelevant that it is a rental: no one is buying the text to learn the subject matter anyways.

⁴Pearson Sends Education Commissioners on Free Trips – The New York Times

⁵Report: Big education firms spend millions lobbying for pro-testing policies – The Washington Post

say in it and have to pay millions per year for poorly written textbooks. As such Pearson can simply skim their profits, producing increasingly irrelevant and terrible textbooks year over year.

Counter Argument

Now, some incorrect people may look at this and conclude that it is actually a good textbook because, while it may have been viscerally unpleasant, I am still receiving good grades in that class and therefore, obviously, have learned from the textbook. Like children with terminal cancer such arguments have a short lifespan in which they quickly wither and die under their own action. While it is true that I learned, it is not true that it was a product of the textbook. Before the course I had read another textbook on statistics to prepare myself and have thus far found it to be an excellent foil to the Pearson textbook, providing me with an understanding of statistics from a source that was not completely intolerable.

Conclusion

So, in summary, if I could make an informed decision, perhaps even using data, I would avoid using the textbook *Statistics: Informed Decisions Using Data*.

Ergo, ego censeo Pearson esse delendam.