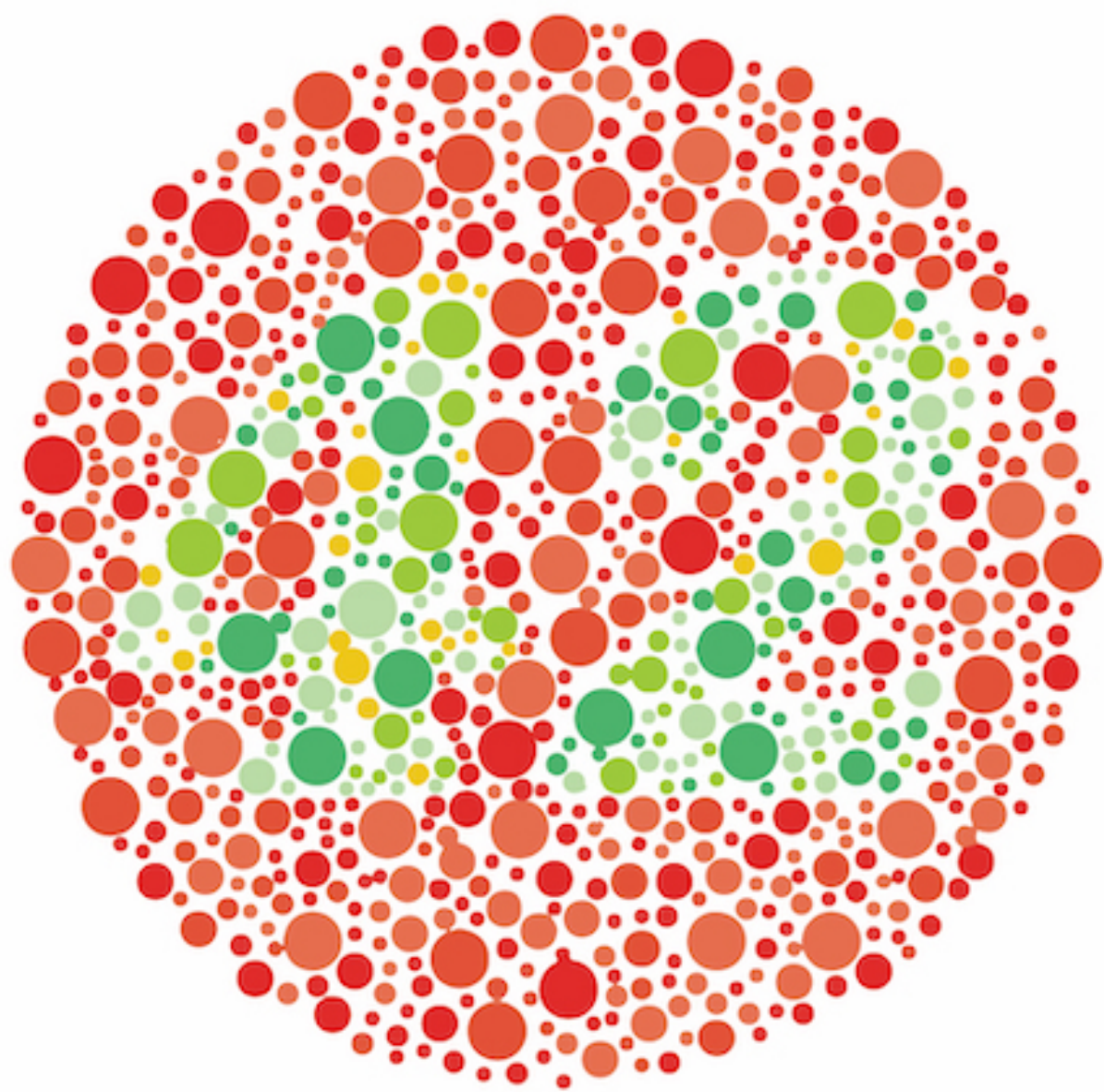


GETTING THE NUMBERS RIGHT



ADRIENNE MONTGOMERIE

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Preface

This is not a book about how to do math. What it aims to do is help editors spot trouble areas, and teach the secret handshake that will let them talk about math with their writers and subject-matter experts. (Hint: Use your digits.)

I wrote this book because numbers are in nearly every manuscript, even if they're just dates on a flyer. I wrote this book because it's common for everyone to gloss over the numbers when checking a document. We assume phone numbers are right, that dates line up, and that totals make sense. But experience should remind us that the numbers are a weak point in any file. They're as weak a link as any heading or other large text. They are where the errors like to lurk.

Rather than becoming uber-numerate by learning to math, editors need a quick reference guide to common errors, a guide to how to check numbers using tools that are easy to find and use, and a level of understanding that will help them query the numbers intelligently. This book fills the gaps between wordsmiths, math textbooks, and technical style guides.

Editors find numbers as intimidating as most people. That is to say, some of us like numbers a lot, some of us can deal with numbers, and some of us go into a panic just glancing at a character that looks like it might be a number. This is a book for all those editors.

For those who *panic* at the sight of a number, this book aims to orient you to the kinds of math or uses of numbers that editors find in mainstream texts, so that you can sense when something is off or might make the reader judge the writer poorly. This book will not make you understand the math or why the numbers might be in error, it simply trains your eye to spot problem areas and gives you the tools to check for possible errors even if you don't understand what went wrong or can't suggest a correction. Accuracy is, after all, primarily the writer's responsibility.

For those who *can* deal with numbers, this book can serve as a quick reference and reminder of the most common types of errors and how to check them and query the author. It may help you understand what's going on a little more, so you can query with confidence.

For those who get a rush of happy hormones when they see a number — who are truly comfortable with most forms of math — this book may be sorely superficial in its explanations. What it will do for you is serve as a quick reference to confirm those number concepts that you are still learning to master and a guide to some of the tools and related formatting.

You do not need a higher ed degree to understand the math in this book. Nor will you find sports data in here — which would take a whole book of its own. This book covers the language we use to talk about mathematical concepts (like percent increases and odds, and shapes too) and some conventions and pitfalls editors come across in presenting common types of

data and their related conclusions or explanations. It also will help the editor check that geometric shapes are discussed accurately.

This book does not advocate a particular style, either. The actual treatment of numbers, their associated units, and equations are specified in industry-standard guides such as *CMOS* and in-house style guides.

This book is arranged by concept and uses real-life examples for illustration. Errors have been added to the examples for demonstration purposes, but they do reflect actual common errors.

What you will need:

- Internet access, or a calculator if you're old-school.
- Something calming (music, tea, a pet), because if you can stop telling yourself "this is hard" and you "can't do it," you'll break down the biggest hurdle.

11 Mathematical Symbols

When talking about mathematical symbols with writers and designers, it helps to use the accurate terminology (see Table 9).

Table 9 Common mathematical symbols.

Symbol	Meaning
\sphericalangle	angle
\sphericalangle	angle in a circle
Σ	sum (total of addition)
$<$	less than
$>$	greater than
\leq	less than or equal to
\geq	greater than or equal to
$=$	equal to or total
\neq	not equal to
\approx	about equal to
$:$	ratio
π	pi (3.14)
$^\circ$	degree
$\sqrt{\quad}$	square root
μ	mu

Symbol	Meaning
Δ	change
\times	multiply
\bullet	multiply
$/$	division or fraction
\div	divide
$+$	add or plus
$-$	subtract (minus) or negative
\pm	plus or minus
$\%$	percent (per 100)
$'$	prime
$''$	double prime
\therefore	therefore
\because	because
\sim	about

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About the Author

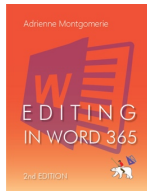


When publishers asked Adrienne to edit math workbooks, she said no. They asked her again, and again she said no. She had some number dyslexia. She wasn't "good at math" — despite taking "triple math" back in the days when there was a grade 13. About the fifth time the publisher came back with the request, Adrienne said "Fine. As long as you know I'm not good at it." After several years of editing math, Adrienne felt ok with it, and the internal critic quieted down. She even got some author credits on math workbooks for middle grades.

Adrienne wasn't nearly so scared of science, so that's mostly what she edited for the first 16 years: school science materials. Eventually, she started to teach editors to use Word and PDF markup, and teaching editors editing as well as technology now makes up about half of her work.

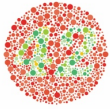
Today Adrienne lives in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, with her small family and a cat who doesn't "cat" very well. She is found editing, writing about editing, teaching editing, and being silly on social media as "scieditor."

More by This Author



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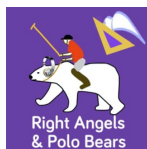
ADRIENNE MONTGOMERIE

GettingTheNumbersRight.com



ADRIENNE MONTGOMERIE

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A guide to spotting common problems with numbers

by Adrienne Montgomerie

GettingTheNumbersRight.com

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