

John Allen Paulos

John Allen Paulos (born July 4, 1945) is an American professor of mathematics at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He has gained fame as a writer and speaker on mathematics and the importance of mathematical literacy. Paulos writes about many subjects, especially of the dangers of mathematical innumeracy; that is, the layperson's misconceptions about numbers, probability, and logic.

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Early life

Paulos was born in Denver, Colorado and grew up in Chicago, Illinois and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he attended high school. After his Bachelor of Mathematics at University of Wisconsin (1967) and his Master of Science at University of Washington (1968), he received his Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison (1974). In an interview he described himself as lifelong skeptic.^[1] He was also part of the Peace Corps in the seventies.^[2]

Career

His academic work is mainly in mathematical logic and probability theory.

His book *Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy and its Consequences* (1988) was a bestseller and *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper* (1995) extended the critique. In his books Paulos discusses innumeracy with quirky anecdotes, scenarios and facts, encouraging readers in the end to look at their world in a more quantitative way.

John Allen Paulos



Born	July 4, 1945
Nationality	American
Alma mater	<u>University of Wisconsin–Madison</u>
Known for	Author of books and articles on a variety of topics, especially the combatting of innumeracy
Awards	In 2003 <u>AAAS Award</u> , in 2013 <u>JPBM Award</u>
Scientific career	
Fields	<u>Mathematics</u>
Institutions	<u>Temple University</u>
Doctoral advisor	Jon Barwise
Website	<u>math.temple.edu/~paulos</u> (<u>https://math.temple.edu/~paulos/</u>)

He has also written on other subjects often "combining disparate disciplines", such as the mathematical and philosophical basis of humor in *Mathematics and Humor* and *I Think, Therefore I Laugh*, the stock market in *A Mathematician Plays the Stock Market*, quantitative aspects of narrative in *Once Upon a Number*, the arguments for God in *Irreligion*, and most recently "bringing mathematics to bear on...biography" in *A Numerate Life*.^[3]

Paulos also wrote a mathematics-tinged column for the UK newspaper *The Guardian* and is a Committee for Skeptical Inquiry fellow.^[4]

Paulos has appeared frequently on radio and television, including a four-part BBC adaptation of *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper* and appearances on the *Lehrer News Hour*, *20/20*, *Larry King*, and *David Letterman*.^[5]

In 2001 Paulos taught a course on quantitative literacy for journalists at the Columbia University School of Journalism. The course stimulated further programs at Columbia and elsewhere in precision and data-driven journalism.

His long-running "ABCNews.com" monthly column *Who's Counting*^[6] deals with mathematical aspects of stories in the news. All the columns over a 10- year period are archived here.^[6]

He is married, father of two, grandfather of four.

Paulos tweets frequently at [@JohnAllenPaulos](https://twitter.com/JohnAllenPaulos)^[7]

Awards

Paulos received the 2013 JPBM (Joint Policy Board for Mathematics) Award for Communicating Mathematics on a Sustained Basis to Large Audiences.^[8]

Paulos received the 2003 AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Award for Promoting the Public Understanding of Science and Technology.^[9]

In 2002 he received the University Creativity Award at Temple University^[10]

Paulos' article "Counting on Dyscalculia," which appeared in *Discover Magazine* in 1994, won a Folio Award that year^[11]

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Mathematics is no more computation than literature is typing.

John Allen Paulos, *Innumeracy*

The most amazing coincidence of all would be the complete absence of all coincidences.

John Allen Paulos, "Irreligion"

Uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security.

John Allen Paulos, "A Mathematician Plays the Market"

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- *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper* (<https://archive.org/details/mathematicianrea0000paul>). Basic Books. 1995. ISBN 978-0-465-04362-0.
- *Once Upon a Number: The Hidden Mathematical Logic of Stories* (<https://archive.org/details/onceuponnumber00john>). Basic Books. 1998. ISBN 978-0-465-05158-8.
- *A Mathematician Plays the Stock Market* (<https://archive.org/details/mathematicianpla00paul>). Basic Books. 2003. ISBN 978-0-465-05480-0. (British edition titled *A Mathematician Plays the Market*)
- *Irreligion: A Mathematician Explains Why the Arguments for God Just Don't Add Up* (https://archive.org/details/irreligionmathem00paul_0). Hill and Wang. 2007. ISBN 978-0-8090-5919-5.
- *A Numerate Life - A Mathematician Explores the Vagaries of Life, His Own and probably Yours*. Prometheus Books. 2015. ISBN 978-1-63388-118-1.
- Potpourri of Writings (<http://johnallenpaulos.com/writings.html>)
- "He Conquered the Conjecture" (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/23863>), essay by Paulos on Grigory Perelman from *The New York Review of Books*
- Metric Mania (<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/magazine/16FOB-WWLN-t.html?scp=2&sq=paulos&st=cse>)
- Measuring Bacteria With a Yardstick (<https://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/22/opinion/22PAUL.html?ex=1078549200&en=1bbd1e85c6ec0af5&ei=5070>)
- Romantic Crushes and Bayes Theorem (<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/15/science/the-advanced-metrics-of-attraction.html>)
- Stories vs. Statistics, NYT Opinionator piece (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/stories-vs-statistics/?hp>)
- How Much Oil Is Spilling? (<https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/WhosCounting/oil-spilling-gulf-mexico-bp-basic-calculations/story?id=10705575>)

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External links

- [Paulos' website \(https://math.temple.edu/~paulos/index.html\)](https://math.temple.edu/~paulos/index.html)
- [Review excerpts of Paulos' books \(https://math.temple.edu/~paulos/booksandreviews.html\)](https://math.temple.edu/~paulos/booksandreviews.html)
- [Paulos speaking \(http://thesciencenetwork.org/programs/beyond-belief-enlightenment-2-0/john-allen-paulos\)](http://thesciencenetwork.org/programs/beyond-belief-enlightenment-2-0/john-allen-paulos) at [Beyond Belief](#) conference, 2007
- [Paulos' columns \(https://abcnews.go.com/search?searchtext=%22John%20allen%20paulos%22%20%22who%27s%20counting%22%5C\)](https://abcnews.go.com/search?searchtext=%22John%20allen%20paulos%22%20%22who%27s%20counting%22%5C), "[ABCNews.com](#)"
- [Paulos' columns \(http://browse.guardian.co.uk/search/Education?search=%22john+allen+paulos%22&search_target=/search/Education/Education&fr=cb-guardian\)](http://browse.guardian.co.uk/search/Education?search=%22john+allen+paulos%22&search_target=/search/Education/Education&fr=cb-guardian), [The Guardian](#)
- [John Allen Paulos \(https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4256703/\)](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4256703/) at [IMDb](#)
- [Appearances \(https://www.c-span.org/person/?39679\)](https://www.c-span.org/person/?39679) on [C-SPAN](#)
- [Interview about Paulos' life in math \(https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/mathed/episodes/2018-12-20T07_19_14-08_00\)](https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/mathed/episodes/2018-12-20T07_19_14-08_00)

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