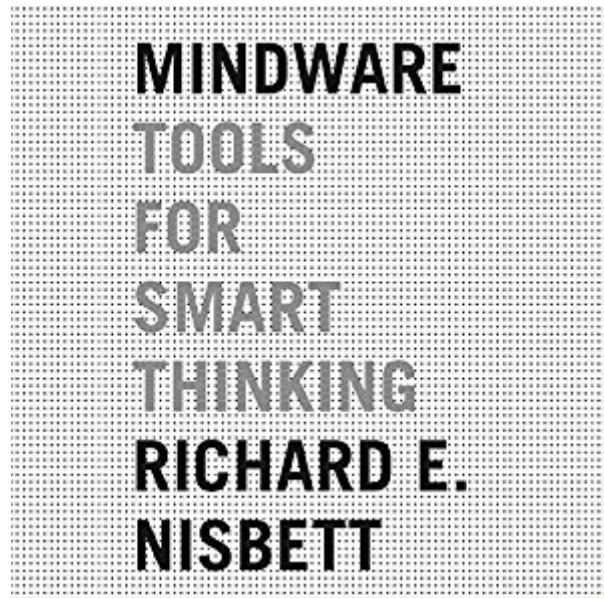




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Mindware: Tools For Smart Thinking



Synopsis

Many scientific and philosophical ideas are so powerful that they can be applied to our lives at home, work, and school to help us think smarter and more effectively about our behavior and the world around us. Surprisingly, many of these ideas remain unknown to most of us. In *Mindware*, the world-renowned psychologist Richard Nisbett presents these ideas in clear and accessible detail, offering a tool kit for better thinking and wiser decisions. He has made a distinguished career of studying and teaching such powerful problem-solving concepts as the law of large numbers, statistical regression, cost-benefit analysis, sunk costs and opportunity costs, and causation and correlation, probing how best to teach others to use them effectively in their daily lives. In this groundbreaking book, he shows that a course in a given field - statistics or economics, for example - often doesn't work as well as a few minutes of more practical instruction in analyzing everyday situations. *Mindware* shows how to reframe common problems in such a way that these powerful scientific and statistical concepts can be applied to them. The result is an enlightening and practical guide to the most powerful tools of reasoning ever developed - tools that can easily be used to make better professional, business, and personal decisions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Malcolm Gladwell thinks that *Mindware*'s author Richard Nisbett has been the most influential thinker in his life, who gave him his view of the world. High praise indeed. Harvard professor Daniel Gilbert was almost as effusive in his blurb. So too NYU professor Jonathan Haidt and Stanford professor Carol Dweck. I don't always give a lot of credence to blurbs, but in this case my

expectations were very high. I was a little disappointed. Richard Nisbett does broadly survey the field of psychology to collect interesting ideas on how to think smarter. But these ideas are not really practical tools. And his book seems to be loosely organized with anecdotes and studies mixed up together in a bit of hodge-podge. For me at least, there's no clear message from the book. It was entertaining, but that was all. One problem is that Richard Nisbett relies heavily on anecdotes and quotations to support his points, even though that kind of thing seems more impressive than it is. For example, he cites the example of Barack Obama being interviewed at Google by Eric Schmidt and answering a difficult computer science question correctly, thus amazing Eric Schmidt and all the Google employees in the audience. He should have mentioned, though, that Eric Schmidt had asked John McCain the same question a short time before, and Barack Obama's campaign staff had prepared him to give the right answer -- one that he simply parroted with no idea of what it meant. That happens too much throughout the book. Another example is Richard Nisbett's criticism of Ford for the design of its Pinto gas tank, which he says was a cold calculation that improving the design would cost \$175 million and staying with the same design and paying for deaths would be cheaper at \$45 million.

In this excellent and practical book the prominent psychologist, Richard Nisbett, translates psychological research into practical advice that will help the reader to better evaluate situations and to make better decisions. The book is in many ways similar to Kahneman's book "Thinking fast and slow", in that it explains where our reasoning, deductions and inferences tend to go wrong. However, Nisbett takes the extra step of trying to formulate simple laws that one can follow to avoid the psychological pitfalls that people often fall into. In some cases this merely means being aware that there is such a pitfall, which according to Nisbett actually helps a great deal. For example, if we are aware of our instinctual tendency to rate anecdotal evidence higher than experimental evidence, we can make a conscious effort to downplay anecdotal evidence. Similarly, even if no one uses decision theory (listing pros and cons for all alternatives we are faced with) perfectly, knowing the basics will actually help us make slightly better decisions on average. One of the more notable aspects of modern society is that we are constantly being bombarded with information and commercials. A good chunk of this book is dedicated to deciphering findings reported in the media. For example, we should be very skeptical of correlations, because correlation does not equal causation. If obese children tend to have parents that control the child's food intake, that does not mean that controlling your child's food intake will make them obese. A more likely explanation is that when a child becomes obese, parents will want to control food intake. A

huge number of similar findings are reported in the media on a daily basis.

This book really had me captivated all the way through. I find psychology to be very interesting. The book is about the limitations and shortcomings of our thinking, and how we are generally unaware of just how shaky our everyday conclusions are. The book goes into detail about the split between our conscious and unconscious processing of events, and how much of what is behind the scenes in the formation of our perceptions is unavailable to us. In the later chapters you get a nice "course" on statistics and and great information on theories of logic. These serve as a contrast to the overconfident and less than rational methods of thought most of us are prone to. I say "course" on statistics because this is nothing like the torture you may have endured or would have anticipated from a college course on statistics (I happen to enjoy statistics but I march to the beat of my own drum). Instead, you get a very easily understandable explanation of how claims like "people who have larger wedding ceremonies are more likely to stay married" are not what they're sometimes cracked up to be (namely that even if that statement is true, it does not necessarily mean that having a large ceremony will improve your chances of staying married longer. It may be that the people who have larger ceremonies do so because they have more money, and therefore have less fights over finances, and/or less stress, and/or better access to counseling services. The name given to this notion is "correlation does not equal causation"). To sum it up, this book looks at human thought, its various pitfalls, and ways to improve it from several angles. If you've read Thinking...

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