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# A Mind For Numbers: How To Excel At Math And Science (Even If You Flunked Algebra)

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NUMBERS



HOW TO EXCEL AT  
MATH AND SCIENCE  
*(Even If You Flunked Algebra)*

BARBARA OAKLEY, Ph.D.



## Synopsis

Whether you are a student struggling to fulfill a math or science requirement, or you are embarking on a career change that requires a higher level of math competency, *A Mind for Numbers* offers the tools you need to get a better grasp of that intimidating but inescapable field. Engineering professor Barbara Oakley knows firsthand how it feels to struggle with math. She flunked her way through high school math and science courses, before enlisting in the army immediately after graduation. When she saw how her lack of mathematical and technical savvy severely limited her options - both to rise in the military and to explore other careers - she returned to school with a newfound determination to re-tool her brain to master the very subjects that had given her so much trouble throughout her entire life. In *A Mind for Numbers*, Dr. Oakley lets us in on the secrets to effectively learning math and science - secrets that even dedicated and successful students wish they'd known earlier. Contrary to popular belief, math requires creative, as well as analytical, thinking. Most people think that there's only one way to do a problem, when in actuality, there are often a number of different solutions - you just need the creativity to see them. For example, there are more than three hundred different known proofs of the Pythagorean Theorem. In short, studying a problem in a laser-focused way until you reach a solution is not an effective way to learn math. Rather, it involves taking the time to step away from a problem and allow the more relaxed and creative part of the brain to take over. *A Mind for Numbers* shows us that we all have what it takes to excel in math, and learning it is not as painful as some might think!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I think that this book potentially has a lot of value to offer to the reader. I came to it as someone who's going to be taking some fairly high level math/science courses in the near future, and I've been working on refreshing my mind on the subject matter and updating some of my thoughts on study techniques in hopes of making the transition a smooth one. I've been looking at a lot of materials for this, and also for some other learning-related projects I've done over the past year. Because of that background, a fair bit of what came up in this book was familiar. Some of the historical anecdotes have popped up in other books, like *Moonwalking With Einstein*. The author really isn't pretending to have invented everything she's talking about, because she makes reference to research results and has endnotes leading to more information. I don't think that this takes away all of the value of the book, though, because it's a compilation of bits of information you could otherwise gather in many different places. Basically, you're spending a few dollars to have someone sum it and try to put it into a sensible order for you. I think the target market here includes fairly sophisticated high school students, but it's overall more suitable for adults who are already reasonably educated. The author is currently running a free course (there's a paid certificate, but that's optional) through Coursera called "Learning How to Learn" where it basically says that the book and course were designed to go together. That seems about right to me, because most of the people who participate in Coursera courses regularly are those who have at least some college background. My feeling is that there's enough value in here to quite easily justify buying and reading it.

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