
BOOK REVIEW: Field, A. (2005). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

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I readily admit to being a stats nerd. It is an understatement to say that I was excited when offered the opportunity to teach a graduate-level data analysis course at my university. I knew, however, that while I was envisioning lively discussions about the wonders of multiple regression, my math-phobic students were dreading the experience.

I stumbled across Andy Field's text through what I am now convinced was divine intervention during an Amazon.com search. Most statistics texts, though instructive, are effective cures for insomnia. Their complex jargon, intimidating formulae, and formal writing styles leave students frazzled and overwhelmed. Field, unlike any other statistics author I have encountered, manages to convey the intricacies of statistical analysis in a way that is rigorous, user-friendly, and, yes, entertaining. As a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Sussex, Field is a rare combination of mathematical brilliance and communication excellence. His instinctive understanding of statistics is matched only by his impressive and award-winning ability to make the subject matter so accessible to students.

The 780-page text (priced on Amazon below \$US50) comprises 16 chapters, a glossary, and the typical appendices one would expect to find in a statistics book (e.g., critical values of the t -distribution). An accompanying CD-ROM contains datasets referenced in the text along with answers to end-of-chapter exercises.

This second edition is designed for SPSS version 13 and is populated with helpful screen shots and output tables. I use SPSS version 14 and had no problems following the text. Field says that earlier versions of the software should

be compatible with the second edition. For those using SPSS version 9 or earlier, Field includes on the CD-ROM an SPSS overview from the first edition to guide users through some differences in data entry.

The first three chapters provide an overview of statistical concepts, an orientation to the SPSS environment, and an introduction to parametric assumptions and data exploration. Field is a stickler for testing assumptions prior to parametric testing. Throughout the text, he aptly covers relevant assumptions and redirects readers to non-parametric methods when assumptions are violated.

Subsequent chapters are dedicated to specific statistics, namely: correlation, least-squares regression, logistic regression, t -test for means, ANOVA, ANCOVA, factorial ANOVA, repeated-measures ANOVA designs, mixed design ANOVA, non-parametric tests, MANOVA, exploratory factor analysis, and tests used for categorical data.

I particularly like how each section of every chapter is identified by a number one, two, three, or four, indicating the level of difficulty in the subject matter presented. According to Field, level one should be easily understood by first-year undergraduates (e.g., Pearson's correlation coefficient) whereas level four is more suitable for advanced postgraduates (e.g., underlying principle of the MANOVA test statistic). I found this classification system accurate and helpful when tailoring lectures for my graduate students, as it would be impossible to cover everything this book offers in one course. Sections characterized as levels one or two are far more plentiful than those designated as levels three or four. The mathematical explanations provided in levels one through four

serve as a good reference if not covered in class.

In addition to his numbering system, Field employs an array of quirky caricatures to relay sidebar information. For example, “Smart Alex” (a play on smart alec) appears in the more difficult sections of the text; “Cramming Samantha” provides readers with a boiled-down version of the material presented. Field’s irreverent sense of humour pervades his choices of datasets. Sex, drugs, chick flicks, personal hygiene, and dancing cats are but a few of the subjects he utilizes to explain statistical testing. My experience of teaching one-way ANOVA using a Viagra dataset is one I will not soon forget (I feel certain my students share that sentiment).

Field is as engaging as he is thorough in his coverage of statistical concepts. His approach is meticulous while, at the same time, highly appealing to students. He clearly explains how to calculate, interpret, and properly report statistics. My initially terrified students experience an extraordinary boost in confidence and ability after spending a semester with Field’s text. This is a book that students keep, which is a good thing because I am not letting go of my well-worn copy.

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