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# Statistics Every Writer Should Know

**A simple guide to understanding basic statistics, for journalists and other writers who might not know math.**



Numbers can't "talk," but they can tell you as much as your human sources can. But just like with human sources, you have to ask!

So what should you ask a number? Well, mathematicians have developed an entire field - statistics - dedicated to getting answers out of numbers. Now, you don't have to have a degree in statistics in order to conduct an effective "interview" with your data. But you do need to know a few basics.

Here, described in plain English, are some basic concepts in statistics that every writer should know...

## So, You're a Beginner?

### Mean

Let's get started...

### Median

How to find out how the "average Joe" is doing

### Percent

Ch-ch-ch-changes...

## The Next Step: Not Getting Duped

## About Robert Niles

Robert Niles lives in Southern California, where he works as a journalist and website editor.

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## Math and Statistics

 

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When an increase is really a decrease and other ways people can use numbers to trick you

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A quick look at the King of Stats

### [Margin of Error and Confidence Interval](#)

How not to get suckered by polls and other research

### [Data Analysis](#)

How to tell if these numbers are really worth writing about anyway

## Frequently Asked Questions

### [Sample Sizes](#)

"So how come a survey of 1,600 people can tell me what 250 million are thinking?"

### [Finding Data on the Internet](#)

"So where can I find the inflation rate, crime statistics, and other data?"

### [Statistical Tests](#)

"How do I pick the correct statistical test for me?"

## Moving On

### [Student's T](#)

Is your sample relevant to the larger population it is supposed to represent? Use the t-test to find out.

## Getting Help...

### [The Bookstore](#)

For those of you who would like to learn more about statistics and journalism, the author has recommended several books for additional reading.

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