

Journalist's Resource

Research on today's news topics

REPORTING, RESEARCH, TIP SHEETS

Tips for journalists working with math, statistics: A list of key resources

Tags: [budget](#), [economy](#), [local reporting](#), [property taxes](#)



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Using and understanding math and financial terms is a regular part of practically every journalism beat. Reporters review government budgets, analyze population trends and scrutinize the findings of research studies. As part of the reporting process, they also do a lot of calculations. Journalists need to be able to present numerical information in simple, straightforward ways so the public can understand how certain

changes will or could impact their pocketbooks — for example, how much homeowners will pay in property taxes after their county government reassesses local property values or how much tuition has risen among the colleges and universities in a certain region.

To help with this important work, Journalist's Resource has pulled together a list of math-related resources that should be useful to media professionals regardless of experience level and background:

One-on-one assistance

[STATS.org](#), a collaboration between Sense About Science USA and the American Statistical Association, has six statisticians and one mathematician on hand to help journalists figure out numbers and statistics. Reporters also can get help gauging the quality of a specific research study and accurately describing the statistical data presented within it.

Online math forums

[Ask Dr. Math](#) is a question-and-answer service affiliated with the National Council of Teachers of

Mathematics. The website is aimed at math students, but other people can use it to ask specific questions about math or math problems.*

Guidance from fellow journalists

[Newsnumbers.info](#) is a website created by Rich Exner, a data analysis editor at Cleveland.com. The site offers journalists guidance on a variety of math-related topics, including calculating property taxes, interpreting workforce numbers, using U.S. Census data correctly and reporting on the cost of college sports.

The “[Newsroom Math Crib Sheet](#)” was put together by Steve Doig, a professor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

Self-directed math classes

“[Math for Journalists: Help with Numbers](#)” is a free, 3-hour class offered through Poynter’s News University. It covers topics such as working with fractions, comparing numbers by creating ratios, ranks and rates and understanding the difference between percentage points and percent.

“[Understanding and Interpreting Polls](#),” also a free, 3-hour class at Poynter, teaches journalists how to analyze survey data and determine the legitimacy of a poll.

Online calculators, converters

The NewsLab online training center has compiled [a list of online calculators](#) to help with a variety of math tasks, including calculating percentage change and converting distance, speed and temperature into different units of measurement.

This [Consumer Price Index inflation calculator](#) was developed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The [WeirdConverter](#) is a tool for comparing sizes and weights that can help give audiences perspective. It will tell you that, for example, a hockey puck weighs as much as 37 sheets of paper and a chicken weighs about the same as five cans of soda.

Journalist’s Resource would like to thank Rebecca Goldin, professor of mathematical sciences at George Mason University and the director of STATS.org, for help in creating this tip sheet.

*An earlier version of this post stated that Ask Dr. Math is operated by Drexel University. Drexel no longer provides the service.

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We welcome feedback. Please contact us [here](#).

