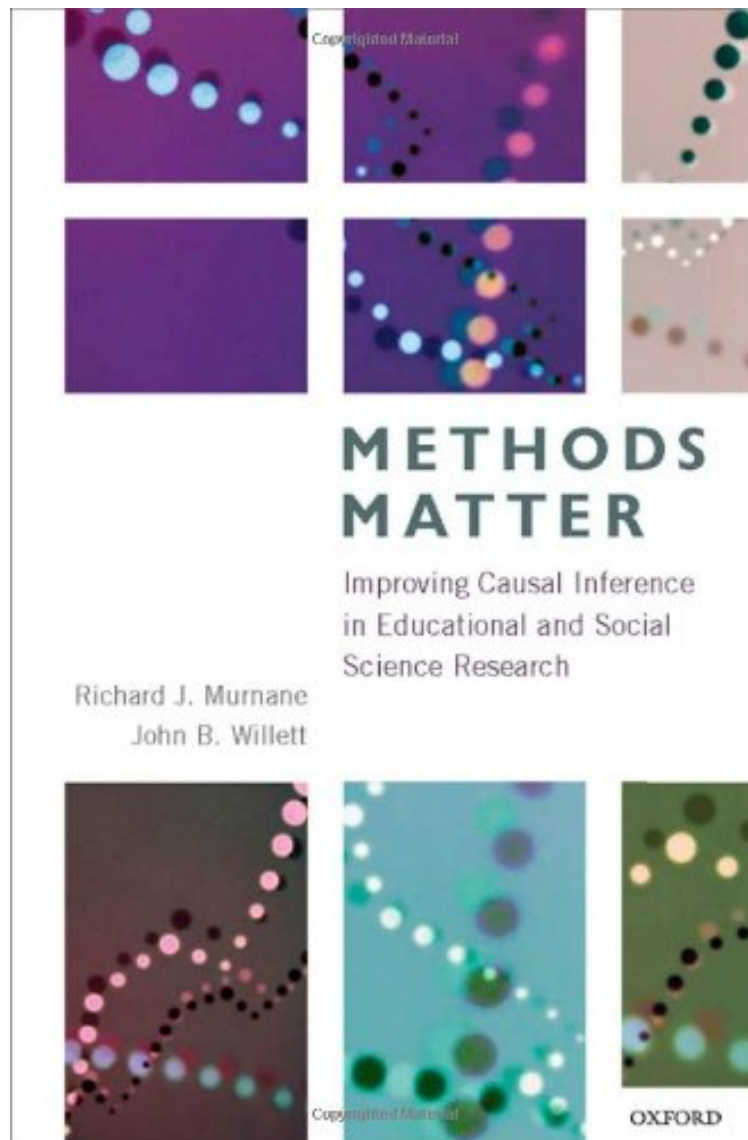


# Methods Matter: Improving Causal Inference in Educational and Social Science Research

*Richard J. Murnane, John B. Willett*  
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**Richard J. Murnane, John B. Willett : Methods Matter: Improving Causal Inference in Educational and Social Science Research** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Methods Matter: Improving Causal Inference in Educational and Social Science Research:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Why didn't someone explain all of this earlier? By Anonymous grad student This book is great. As a graduate student in the social sciences, I have heard about all these methods before and

have taken plenty of statistics and methodology classes but hadn't yet put all the pieces together in my head on causal inference. Murnane and Willett do an awesome job explaining how all the pieces fit together, in an intuitive and non-technical way (likely accessible to those who have taken basic statistics through regression). The examples are well-chosen to illustrate the pros and cons of the methods they discuss. The quality of the writing in this book is really excellent. I really just want to finish it all in one sitting, but I have to stop (I have only read the first five chapters so far) to work on my dissertation and fulfill other commitments. I wish I had read this book long ago (preferably before I started on my dissertation). Take my advice, don't wait on this one. So, Murnane and Willett, if your busy lives don't prevent you from stopping by from time to time to check out the reviews of your book, I want to say THANK YOU for all your work on this and hopefully this will push social scientists towards higher quality research and ultimately better public policies!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. easy to read book with great explanations  
By charleyreally accessible, easy to read book with great explanations. and of course dick murnane is a heavyweight.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I highly recommend it to those wanting to learn more about various ...  
By poppyxcheskatakating this book for a class, and it's a solid book as an introductory to program evaluation. I highly recommend it to those wanting to learn more about various statistical methods. It does not go in depth into the statistical modeling, which was great for me, but others who would like to see more of the proofs might not find this book useful.

Educational policy-makers around the world constantly make decisions about how to use scarce resources to improve the education of children. Unfortunately, their decisions are rarely informed by evidence on the consequences of these initiatives in other settings. Nor are decisions typically accompanied by well-formulated plans to evaluate their causal impacts. As a result, knowledge about what works in different situations has been very slow to accumulate. Over the last several decades, advances in research methodology, administrative record keeping, and statistical software have dramatically increased the potential for researchers to conduct compelling evaluations of the causal impacts of educational interventions, and the number of well-designed studies is growing. Written in clear, concise prose, *Methods Matter: Improving Causal Inference in Educational and Social Science Research* offers essential guidance for those who evaluate educational policies. Using numerous examples of high-quality studies that have evaluated the causal impacts of important educational interventions, the authors go beyond the simple presentation of new analytical methods to discuss the controversies surrounding each study, and provide heuristic explanations that are also broadly accessible. Murnane and Willett offer strong methodological insights on causal inference, while also examining the consequences of a wide variety of educational policies implemented in the U.S. and abroad. Representing a unique contribution to the literature surrounding educational research, this landmark text will be invaluable for students and researchers in education and public policy, as well as those interested in social science.

"Policy discussions today routinely demand that proposals be evidence-based -- without really understanding that the reliability and validity of what passes as evidence varies widely. Murnane and Willett have done a remarkable job of helping both producers and consumers to understand what is good evidence and how it can be produced. *Methods Matter* explains lucidly how the causal impact of educational and social interventions can be estimated from quantitative data, using a panoply of innovative empirical approaches." --Eric A. Hanushek, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University "Methods Matter is about research designs and statistical analyses for drawing valid and reliable causal inferences from data about real-world problems. The book's most telling feature is the wide range of education research examples that it uses to illustrate each point made. By presenting powerful research methods in the context of important research questions the authors are able to draw readers quickly and deeply into the material covered. New and experienced researchers from many fields will learn a lot from reading *Methods Matter* and will enjoy doing so."--Howard S. Bloom, Chief Social Scientist, MDRC "Richard J. Murnane and John B. Willett provide a broadly accessible account of causal inference in educational research. They consider basic principles- how to define causal effects, frame causal questions, and design experiments- while also gently introducing important topics that have previously been obscure to non-specialists: randomization by group, natural experiments, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, and propensity scores. Using a wide range of examples, the authors teach their readers to identify and challenge key assumptions underlying claims about what works in education. This book will improve educational research by challenging researchers and policy-makers to think more rigorously about the evidence and assumptions underlying their work." -- Stephen W. Raudenbush, Lewis Sebring Distinguished Service Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago "I strongly recommend *Methods Matter* to anyone who intends to conduct research on the causal impact of education programs and policies. Henceforth, a graduate course in education research methods that doesn't rely on it should be considered suspect. *Methods Matter* should also be essential reading for those who want to be critical consumers of advanced education research. *Methods Matter* very much, and so does this book. It is a very good book that signals a coming of age of the field." --Grover Whitehurst, Director, Brown Center on Education Policy, Brookings Institute "To be useful for development policy, educational research has to shed more light on how resources for education can produce more learning, more knowledge, more skills. In this book,

Professors Richard Murnane and John Willett discuss a range of empirical methods for estimating causal relationships and review their applications in educational research. They translate complex statistical concepts into clear, accessible language and provide the kind of analytical guidance that a graduate student or young researcher might obtain only after years of experience with these methods. This volume is a very readable companion to any statistics textbook or statistical program on evaluation methods." --Elizabeth M. King, Director, Education, The World Bank

About the Author Richard J. Murnane, Juliana W. and William Foss Thompson Professor of Education and Society at Harvard University, is an economist who focuses his research on the relationships between education and the economy, teacher labor markets, the determinants of children's achievement, and strategies for making schools more effective. John B. Willett, Charles William Eliot Professor of Education at Harvard University, is a quantitative methodologist who has devoted his career to improving the research design and data-analytic methods used in education and the social sciences, with a particular emphasis on the design of longitudinal research and the analysis of longitudinal data .