

MA357, Spring 2012 — Writing Assignment 1

Review of *Prime Obsession*

This assignment is due on **Friday, March 9**. The assignment is to write a review of John Derbyshire's *Prime Obsession*. Please begin reading the book *soon*. In the first week of March, we'll spend some time discussing prime numbers and their distribution, and this will work best if you've already read most of Derbyshire by then.

Your review should describe the content of the book, discuss the quality of the expository writing, and give your reaction to both the mathematics and the history that Derbyshire explains. Since the book has a dual character (focusing on both mathematics and the people who discovered it), so should your review. Don't focus only on the history and anecdotes, nor only on the mathematics.

The fact that this is a "writing assignment" should be taken seriously. You should strive to produce a text that is clear, precise, and fun to read. Grammar counts, as does elegance of expression. Don't go for five-dollar words when 25-cent words are available, nor for highly elaborate sentence structures. Simplicity is harder to achieve than complication, but it should be your aim.

Of course, your review should demonstrate that you have read the book and that you have given some thought to it. You should not assume, just because I assigned the book, that I am not aware of its faults! Be critical, but fair.

Students always ask me "how long does it have to be?" I'll admit that I find the question annoying. The answer is: "long enough for you to say what you have to say, but no longer." Repeating yourself to fill up space does no one any good.

Write something you would enjoy reading!