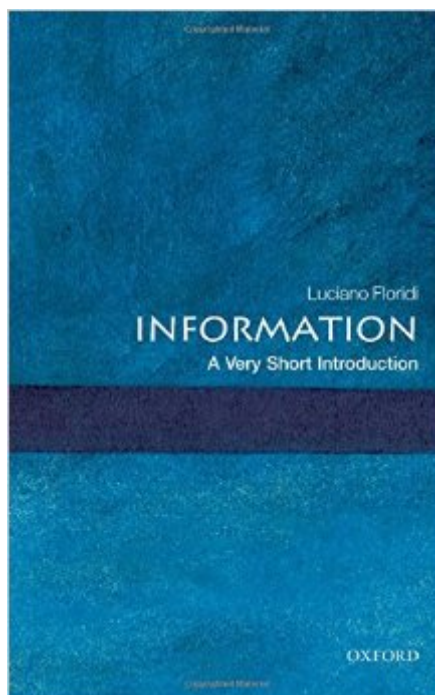


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# Information: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

We live in a society that is awash with information, but few of us really understand what information is. In this Very Short Introduction, one of the world's leading authorities on the philosophy of information and on information ethics, Luciano Floridi, offers an illuminating exploration of information as it relates to both philosophy and science. He discusses the roots of the concept of information in mathematics and science, and considers the role of information in several fields, including biology. Floridi also discusses concepts such as "Infoglut" (too much information to process) and the emergence of an information society, and he addresses the nature of information as a communication process and its place as a physical phenomenon. Perhaps more important, he explores information's meaning and value, and ends by considering the broader social and ethical issues relating to information, including problems surrounding accessibility, privacy, ownership, copyright, and open source. This book helps us understand the true meaning of the concept and how it can be used to understand our world.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

## Book Information

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Leaving aside the possibility of minds, souls, and the like, people used to think that the ultimate "stuff" of the universe is matter. Then thermodynamics matured during the 19th century, culminating

with Einstein's theoretical demonstration that matter can be converted to energy, thus rendering energy apparently even more fundamental than matter. Now, as a result of multiple streams of developments during the 20th century, we live in an age when information is increasingly being viewed as the true ultimate stuff. This is at once both immensely stimulating and perplexing: stimulating because the concept of information has far greater interdisciplinary unifying power than any concept which came before, but perplexing because the concept of information is very abstract and thus elusively slippery. In this book, Luciano Floridi clearly makes an earnest effort to navigate the difficult terrain presented by the manifold concept of information, and I think he does commendably well. The flow of the book makes sense. He sets the stage by describing how information-saturated our lives have become, to the point where we can be described as "inforgs" living in an "infosphere." He then looks at the concept of information by progressing through increasingly wider contexts: information as data, the mathematical theory of communication of data, semantic aspects of information, physical information (laws of thermodynamics, Maxwell's demon, etc.

This great little book is a quickly readable survey of information science, with an emphasis on philosophy and ethics rather than problem solving or business. Two other extremes (not counting the dozen wonderful Dover titles on information theory for under \$5 which are certainly worthwhile) include: 1. Luenberger: Information Science David's book is about \$90 US and our databases show it to be the most used IS textbook, even though it is a 2006 edition. In about 450 pages, it covers the practical applications as well as theory of the entire field of information science, from Shannon to smart phones and economics, minus the "wow how cool is IS" as well as the "we're drowning in info and can't get up" spins. 2. Seife: Decoding the Universe: How the New Science of Information Is Explaining Everything in the Cosmos, from Our Brains to Black Holes Also from 2006, available used for a penny on some third party offers, 296 pages. Very Short Intro (VSI- Floridi) fits nicely between the two. Seife is a wonderful page-turner and a must have if you're into information and math. His "zero" book (Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea was a best seller, and also is about 50c used-- an awesome survey of math.

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