

■ ANDREW RUPPEL, Feature Editor, McIntire School of Commerce, University of Virginia

# Information + Insight = Understanding

By Andrew Ruppel, Feature Editor

Conveying new ideas to others is always a challenge; grasping new ideas ourselves is perhaps even more so. Particularly when we are bombarded by information (and non-information) from all quarters over an increasing array of topics. Call it *information overload* or just *noisy data*, we are often severely challenged by the contemporary communications scene. Thus we appreciate any cues, clues, analogies, frameworks, etc. that help us get the message. These aids can be graphical or textual, visual or verbal. They can be the keys that open the door to insight. We often acknowledge their contribution with an upward lift of the head and a relieved exclamation of "Oh, now I see."

The more we understand *how* we understand, the more effective we are likely to be in helping others to do the same. That's important to us as educators and as communicators. Here are some books claiming to address one's skills as an observer and a communicator.



## *How to Use Your Eyes*

By James Elkins

Routledge, 2000,  
258 pages

[www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com)

ELKINS TEACHES AT THE ART INSTITUTE IN CHICAGO, helping artists

to enhance their perception. He has put together 33 'lessons' on how to look at various things. The first 17 are things made by man and the remaining 16 are things made by nature. Do you know how to look at pavement? An x-ray? What about moths' wings or the inside of your eye? Elkins tries to give you the subtle as well as the key points to look for. For example, look for scale differences in landscape images likely to be the result of special effects.

If you enjoy calligraphy or cryptography, then you will appreciate his lessons on written languages: Crete's Linear B, China's characters, Japan's grass script, and of course, ancient Egypt's hieroglyphs. Scribes of the latter were particularly courteous to the reader for they indicated (with a short vertical stroke) when an ideogram is to be treated as depicting the actual object versus representing a related idea. These same scribes used a back slash as super shorthand for saying "what should go here was too tedious to draw." You've

got to love that kind of pragmatism. To complement the cleverness of these ancient scribes, Elkins perhaps should have shown and explicated a transcript tape from a contemporary court stenographer.

In his specialty area, that of paintings, he provides a set of question to help one ascertain the time and place of a painting. It would have been nice to extend this set-of-questions idea in the other topics, even wrapping his lessons up at the end with general guidance on how to be a keener observer. Instead, he tells you about how scallops see us—and that's more complicated than one might think.

Another criticism of Elkins' presentations is that he doesn't overlay his figures with enough leaders and textual callouts. Instead, he merely labels elements with a,b,c, or 1,2,3... and the reader has to "ping-pong" back and forth between his explanatory prose and the illustration, which are not always on facing pages. Perhaps he does this because of his sensitivity to an artist's/photographer's work, not wishing to mar its appearance. Still, he could have thought more about page layout and matters of effective technical illustration. For those anxious for more advice, Elkins provides seven pages of suggestions for further reading and looking.



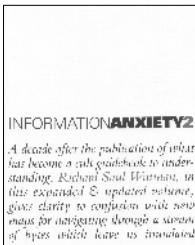
### Andrew Ruppel

is a professor in the QM/MIS area at the University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce. His PhD is from the University of North Carolina. Dr. Ruppel has received faculty fellowships from the

American Society for Engineering Education and the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, and has served with NASA and the International Atomic Energy Agency (with diplomatic rank). He teaches in the areas of statistics and global business.

### Dr. Andrew Ruppel

Monroe Hall  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA 22903  
voice-mail: (804) 924-3867  
fax: (804) 924-7074  
email: [acr2y@virginia.edu](mailto:acr2y@virginia.edu)

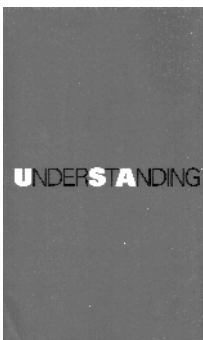


**Information Anxiety 2**  
By Richard Saul Wurman  
Que, 2001, 308 pages.

[www.mcp.com](http://www.mcp.com)

MANY READERS PROBABLY ALREADY KNOW WURMAN as the prolific creator of guidebooks for cities as well as a host of non-geographic topics. He regards himself as the creator of the field of 'information architecture'—not in the sense of computer science, but rather more in the sense of what used to be called library science. That is, an emphasis on classifying, cataloguing, etc. One of his favorite classifying mnemonics is LATCH, which stands for Locational, Alphabetical, Temporal, Categorical, and Hierarchical. Despite his concern for organization, Information Anxiety 2 is "two" disorganized. The Table of Contents consumes 22 pages with no overview. The sequence of chapters is not clear and the prose tends to ramble. Additionally, he distracts the reader on every page with not always relevant quotes in the margins. This book is a revision of an earlier work (1989) bearing the same title (minus the 2) and incorporating the impact of the Internet.

Wurman seems to be a kind of Tom Peters for the graphical design community, using cute phrases like "prosumer" and "Glocalization." He makes forays beyond design into technology and entertainment organized into annual conferences (see [www.TED.com](http://www.TED.com)). He likes to drum up projects for his designer friends. One such project resulted in the next title.



**Understanding USA**  
By Richard Saul Wurman  
TED Conferences, 1999, 324 pages.

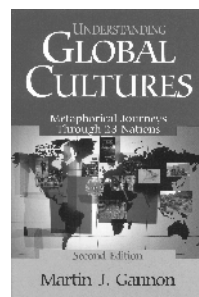
[www.understandingusa.com](http://www.understandingusa.com)

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN a useful prelude volume going into the 2000 Census turned

out to be an overly glossy, gee-whiz set of 16 different designers' attempts at presenting the data that one used to see in the *US Statistical Abstract* in plain-vanilla tables and

occasional two-dimensional charts. Astonishingly, this odd-sized volume lacks a table of contents, an index, and page numbers—a fact that compiler Wurman brags about, saying that he dropped them to meet the publication deadline. Just about all the displays span two pages and so their appearance is marred by the tight fold of the book's gutter. Chart junk, to use Edward Tufte's phrase, abounds. Still, there are some stellar displays. One of my favorites is a 3-D density map of the US population. In addition to the usual charts and pictograms, there are more exotic graphical devices such as radial grids and bizarre wire-frame models, called *datascapes* by their creators. I've included one for your inspection (see below).

Each section is opened by a different artistic image of a US flag. The section's displays are then tabbed with questions, for example, "What are the costs of raising a child?" But no overall alphabetical list of these questions is provided. This leads to a kind of information-groping on the part of the reader. Aside from thumbing through the volume, what would one do with it? Since lack of an index makes locating needed statistics very difficult, one could go the website instead: [www.understandingusa.com](http://www.understandingusa.com). The content is not copyrighted and Wurman encourages spreading the material. You will, however, probably understand more about the USA after reading Chapter 13 in the following book than in perusing Wurman's *Understanding USA*.



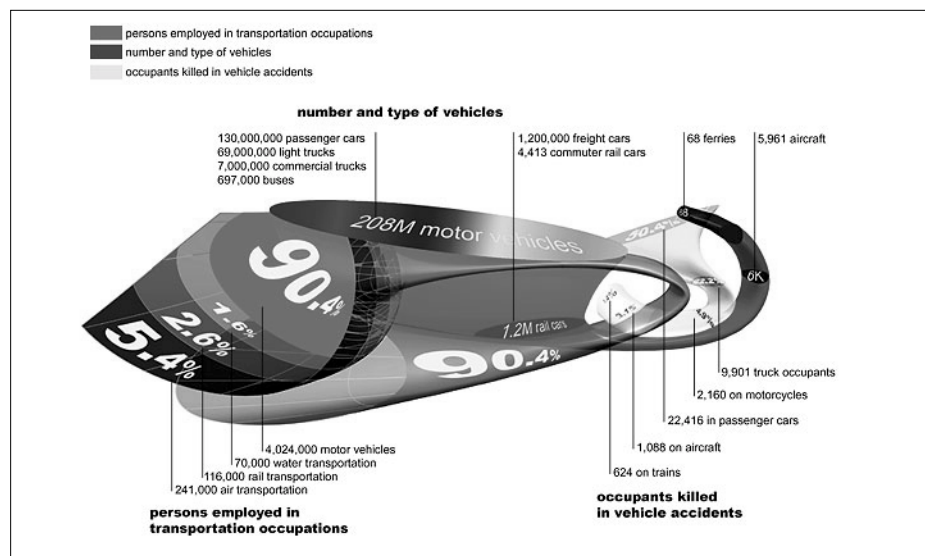
**Understanding Global Cultures (2nd ed.)**

By Martin J. Gannon  
Sage, 2001, 466 pages.

[www.sagepub.com](http://www.sagepub.com)

TWENTY-THREE NATIONS/CULTURES are covered in this highly readable

volume, which Professor Gannon bills as a set of metaphorical journeys. That is to say, he takes some central and well-recognized feature of a culture and builds around it a comprehensible treatment of that culture, with a tilt toward the business aspects. For example, for Japan the unifying metaphor is the garden; for Turkey, it's the coffeehouse; for Korea, it's *kimchi*. Superimposed on 20 of the cultures, is a grouping of them into five categories: authority-ranking cultures, equality-matching cultures, market-pricing cultures, cleft-national cultures, and torn-national cultures. Some explanation of the last two is in order. By cleft cultures or nations, Gannon means those in which geography, language, and/or ideology have created significant divisions in what otherwise would be a consistent cultural fabric. Malaysia and Belgium are two examples here. An example of a torn culture, according to Gannon, is Russia—which is trying to incorporate capitalism into a formerly command-directed society while at the same time having some of its historical trappings toppled.



Example of a "Datascape" from Understanding USA.

Some of Gannon's metaphors are musical—the symphony for Germany and the opera for Italy. Some are choreographic in nature—the ballet in Russia and the samba in Brazil. Even the differing bull-fights of Spain and Portugal could be considered as choreographical metaphors. For the U.S., Gannon says the appropriate metaphor is football—which some people would say is choreographed also. Pundit George Will says that football “combines the two worst elements of American life: violence and committee meetings.”

Given all the messages that one might read about American society through the

explication of a football *event* (as opposed to just the game), it is surprising that Gannon did not use soccer as cultural metaphor for say, Brazil or the European Union. The restriction against the use of the hands seems astonishing in a sport that demands a high degree of athleticism. And why such a vast playing field that has players spending most of their time running around as the clock continues to run and the spectators run over each other in their exuberance? Surely, there must be cultural insights that can be gleaned from these aspects. To be fair, Gannon does discuss soccer's role in several countries and baseball's role in Japan. Of course, one could

comment at length about the various sports of the world and how they mirror metaphorically one or more features of the cultures in which they predominate. Gannon's tests for a good cultural metaphor were consensus (though he does not provide evidence) and whether there existed a more comprehensive choice (again, he does not provide evidence).

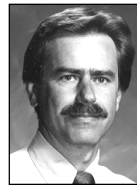
This is one of those books that can be read by skipping around among the chapters, but, as always, it is wise to first read the introductory chapter that outlines the approach and defines the author's terms. ■

## NAMES IN THE NEWS

**CAROL LATTA, Feature Editor, Home Office, Georgia State University**

**S. Thomas Foster, Jr.** announces the publication of his new book, *Managing Quality: An Integrative Approach*, published by Prentice Hall. He has spent the last year as a visiting associate professor in the MSIS Department at the Smeal College, Pennsylvania State University. He was also promoted to the rank of professor at Boise State University and named to “Who's Who in America.” Recently he launched an academic quality, management-related website called [www.freequality.org](http://www.freequality.org).

**Ken and Julie Kendall**, School of Business-Camden, Rutgers University, celebrated their 25th anniversary on June 11, 2001.



**Mike Parent**, Utah State University, was recently notified of his appointment to chair the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Certification Committee.

In his new role with the NCAA, Parent and other committee members will set policy and regulations governing pre-season-exempted contests, certain all-star games and all post-season bowl games in football. Committee members represent each Division 1A conference. A member of the Utah State faculty for 29 years, Mike specializes in market research and strategy. His involvement with the NCAA issues dates back to 1986 when he chaired the university's Strategic Planning Committee for Intercollegiate Athletics. ■

## Future DSI Annual & Regional Annual Meetings

### NATIONAL ANNUAL MEETINGS

*November 17-20, 2001*

The San Francisco Marriott, San Francisco, California

*November 23-26, 2002*

The San Diego Marriott Hotel and Marina, San Diego, California

*November 22-25, 2003*

The Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C.

*November 20-23, 2004*

The Boston Marriott Copley Place Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts

### 6TH INTERNATIONAL MEETING

*July 8-11, 2001*

ITESM Chihuahua

(Monterrey's Institute of Technology and Higher Education, Chihuahua Campus), Chihuahua, Mexico

### REGIONAL ANNUAL MEETINGS

#### Asia Pacific

*July 18-21, 2001*

Orchard Hotel Singapore, Singapore

#### Midwest

*April 25-27, 2002*

The Hilton Milwaukee City Center Milwaukee, Wisconsin

#### Northeast

*March 20-22, 2002*

Caribe Hilton Hotel and Casino San Juan, Puerto Rico

#### Southeast

*February 20-22, 2002*

The Westin Hilton Head Resort Hilton Head, South Carolina

#### Southwest

*March 6-9, 2002*

Adam's Mark Hotel, St. Louis, Missouri

*March 5-8, 2003*

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Houston, Texas

#### Western

*April 2-6, 2002*

The MGM Grand Las Vegas, Nevada