

# [Freakonomics essay](https://assignbuster.com/freakonomics-essay/)

Published in 2005, “ Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything” is non-fiction book that is written by renowned University of Chicago economist named Steven Levitt and co-author Stephen Dubner. Through wry insight and furnished story telling, these authors have used this literary piece to show that economics is not what many people think it is, but the study of incentives, for instance, how people get what they need or want when other people need or want the same thing. Throughout the essays that form this book, the economist and journalist demonstrates how data can divulge fascinating truth about the world and how it operates, rather than applying the fundamental principles of economics as many economic books did.

By discussing a myriad of ostensibly unrelated subjects that range from drug dealers to sumo wrestlers to baby names, the authors reveal how this world, despite numerous complications, a myriad of obfuscations and downright deceit is not unknowable, and if the right questions are asked is intriguing than many people think. Using data together with their knowledge on various subjects, the authors have brought out four basic ideas: first, they have ascertained that incentives form the foundation of modern life (Holt, 2005). Second, they have revealed that conventional wisdom may be wrong at times. Third, they have shown that dramatic events often have subtle or distant causes and lastly, they have revealed that many experts use information within their jurisdiction to serve their own interests rather than the interest of the general public.

The introduction begins with the authors demonstrating the impacts of incentives to people’s behaviors. As the authors explain, economic, moral and social incentives are aimed at directing individuals into doing good deeds rather than bad deeds. Furthermore, they hold that most economists tend to manipulate incentives, which results to numerous unintended repercussions. Citing the 1990 expert’s prediction of an increase in crime, the authors hold that the incentive of allowing women to have abortions in Roe Vs. Wade was the reason behind the plunge in criminal activities rather than expert’s assertion that robust economy, improved policing strategies and gun control laws.

In the second chapter, the reader is introduced to the term information asymmetry. As the two authors describe, this term refers to the instance when a person willfully uses information o his or her advantage, but at the expense of others. Using the Ku Klux Klan as an example, the authors show how information asymmetry can be harmful to any society and to those who practice it. The authors reveal that this outfit had so many secrets in all its operations. Nonetheless, the outfit’s information asymmetry led to its collapse in 1940 after a man named Kennedy Stetson revealed most of its secrets.

In the third chapter, the authors enlighten the reader about conventional wisdom. The authors hold that conventional wisdom is simply false because most experts often make lies or skew data to serve their own interests. Using Mitch Snyder’s tesimony to congress that over 3 million Americans were homeless, Dubner and Levitt shows how this congressman was lying to serve his own agenda. It is apparent that Snyder’s statistics was a bit high.

In the fourth chapter, the Levitt and Dubner introduce the reader to a very intriguing subject of legalizing abortion. Using available data and the 1973 case of Roe v. Wade, the two authors assert that plunging crime rates in the United States in the year 1990 resulted from the court’s decision to legalize abortion. According to them, babies that would have been born in the 1970s would most likely have ended up being criminals since their criminal careers would have peaked in the year 1990. Comparing this scenario with what happened in Romania in 1960, he two authors are able to prove that legalizing abortion is strongly related to plunging crime rates in America as compared to the rise of criminal activities in the communist Romania.

In the fifth chapter, Levitt and Dubner claim that research disapproves the belief held by most parents that what they do to their children determines whether they will succeed or fail. This chapter commences with a discourse on the recent surge of experts in parental matters who present conflicting opinions about good parenting. This book explains that despite the contradictory opinions of these experts, they all seem to be confident that their assertions are true because none wishes to doubt their own theories. Since fear is a driving force for many parents, Freakonomics shows how most experts thrive on parent’s fear of what might happen if they fail to heed the expert’s advice. As a result of this fear, Levitt and Dubner contend that much of the parents’ conventional wisdom flaws.

In the sixth chapter, the authors conduct a comprehensive research on names and, specifically, whether the name given to a person has any effect on his or her life. Moreover, they investigate why parents give their children certain names in the first place. Freakonomics discusses in details, how whites and blacks name their children differently, and whether naming your child a distinctively black or white-surrounding name affects its life outcome.

Since its publication in 2005, the book has received immense criticism and support from economists and academicians. For instance, the book’s critics claim that the book talks much about criminology and sociology instead of economics. They hold that Levitt and Dubner’s arguments are not connected to economics in any way. Others have label Freakonomics as being “ academic imperialism” and other economists such as Arnold King are of the opinion that this book is a good representation of amateur sociology.

In my opinion, this book has its strong side as well as weak side. On the stronger side, Freakonomics is not only an intellectual romp, but also an entertaining literary work. From the onset, it is apparent that Levitt and Dubner are very good at asking questions and providing answers to a variety of questions. It can be seen that Levitt is exceptional at using various tools that he has mastered in hhis long career as an economist to answer some of the questions posed in the novel in interesting ways. Levitt’s answers to questions like “ what do sumo wrestlers and school teachers have in common” are provocative, tightly reasoned and often interesting. This attribute is what makes Freakonomics worth reading.

On the weaker side, there is a big problem with the hype of this book. Starting with the title, the authors use similar tools as many economists use in their work. Their conclusions do not stand out because they are not unique. True to their word, the authors have not provided any unifying theme throughout the chapters of this book. Any avid reader would tell you that this attribute is not good for acclaimed authors like Levitt and Dubner. Despite the fact that their ideas are fascinatingly phrased, they seem to be intended for a general audience rather than an academic audience. Contrary to what is asserted in the book’s jacket, I consider Levitt to be a renowned economist rather than a “ rogue economist.” Generally, the book is entertaining and eye-catching up to page 179. From this point on, the authors seem more interested in filling the pages rather providing the reader with content. The prose and analyses strip along lightly to a point where the authors discuss American first names.

Although the books contents’ are thoughtful and interesting vital arguments have either been quickly blown off or ignored altogether. For instance, the author’s claim that the plunging crime rates in America was caused by the outcome of Roe v. Wade. Although the authors make a good case out of this, they only analyze national issues. A more comprehensive analysis would also compare crime rates in other states and establish causes for any disparities (Holt, 2005. Note that crime rates in both Chicago and New York should benefit from legalizing abortion. Nevertheless, the two cities employ divergent policing strategies and therefore have different crime rates. It is apparent that the authors do not explain or address the issues of local differences. Additionally, there is a tendency of offering one right answer to every question instead of providing comprehensive analysis of complex questions. The problem here is not related with the analysis of the authors, but with the limited nature of their analysis of complex subjects.

In conclusion, Freakonomics is an interesting and fascinating book. The essays are a great read despite several problems. Readers of this literary work would be armed with enough stories and riddles that can last many cocktail parties because it redefines the way people live in the modern world. With this book, the authors have given the reader a new way of perceiving the world. At about 200 pages, Freakonomics is a quick read. Despite its weak points, Levitt and Dubner have created something that is both educational and entertaining not only for economist, but for every avid reader. The decision as to whether you want to get a copy or not lie on you. The last thing you should do is to rely on my personal criticism or my word for it as the basis acquiring a copy.