Atheism is often considered to be a negative, dark, and pessimistic belief that is characterized by a rejection of values and purpose and a fierce opposition to religion. Atheism: A Very Short Introduction sets out to dispel the myths that surround atheism and show how a life without religious belief can be positive, meaningful, and moral. The book presents an intellectual case for atheism that rests as much upon positive arguments for its truth as on negative arguments against religion. It also confronts the failure of officially atheist states in the twentieth century.

The atmosphere is the thin, diffuse fluid that envelops the Earth’s surface. Despite its apparent fragility, the existence of this fluid is vital for human and other life on Earth. The Atmosphere: A Very Short Introduction describes the physical and chemical characteristics of different layers in the atmosphere, and shows how the atmosphere’s interactions with land, ocean, and ice affect these properties. It also looks at how movement in the atmosphere, driven by heat from the Sun, transports heat from lower latitudes to higher latitudes. Finally, it presents an overview of the types of measurements used to understand different parts of the atmosphere, and identifies future challenges in the light of climate change.

Augustine: A Very Short Introduction

Augustine: A Very Short Introduction

Henry Chadwick
Augustine: A Very Short Introduction traces the development of Augustine's thought, discussing his reaction to the thinkers before him, and themes such as freedom, creation, and the trinity. By his writings, the surviving bulk of which exceeds that of any other ancient author, Augustine came to influence not only his contemporaries but also thinkers in the West since his time. He was a key figure in the transition from pagan to specifically Christian philosophy. How did Augustine's thought develop? What were the key influences upon his thought? How important were themes such as free will, time, and ethics to him?

Australia: A Very Short Introduction
Kenneth Morgan

Australia: A Very Short Introduction provides a wide-ranging introduction to modern Australia, examining its history, geography, and culture since the beginning of the white settlement of New South Wales in 1788. Drawing attention to the distinctive features of Australian life, this VSI places contemporary developments in an historical perspective, highlighting the importance of Australia's indigenous culture and making connections between Australia and the wider world. Balancing the successful growth of Australian institutions and democratic traditions, the book considers the struggles that occurred in the making of modern Australia and Australia's political and cultural place in the 21st century.

Autism: A Very Short Introduction
Uta Frith

Autism: A Very Short Introduction asks: What causes autism? Is it a genetic disorder, or due to some unknown environmental hazard? Are we facing an autism epidemic? What are the main symptoms, and how does it relate to Asperger syndrome? It explores the relevance to autism of neuroscience, psychology, brain development, and genetics. Everyone has heard of autism, but the disorder itself is little understood. It has captured the public imagination through films and novels portraying individuals with baffling combinations of disability and extraordinary talent, and yet the reality is more often that it places a heavy burden on sufferers and their families.

Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction
Laura Marcus
Throughout history, individuals have recorded their own lives and experiences. These personal writings provide an understanding of the ways in which lives have been lived, and the most fundamental accounts of what it means to be a self in the world. Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction defines what is meant by ‘autobiography’, and considers its relationship with similar literary forms such as memoirs, journals, letters, and diaries. Analysing the core themes in autobiographical writing, including confession, conversion, testimony, romanticism, and the journeying self, this VSI discusses the autobiographical consciousness (and the roles played by time, memory, and identity), and considers the relationship between psychoanalysis and autobiography. It also explores the themes of self-portraiture, photography, and performance.

The Avant Garde: A Very Short Introduction
David Cottington

The Avant Garde: A Very Short Introduction explores the concept of the ‘avant-garde’ and examines its wider context through the development of western modernity, capitalist culture, and the global impact of both. The avant-garde is perhaps the most important and influential concept in the history of modern culture. What is the relation between the ‘avant-garde’ and ‘avant-garde’ qualities in a work of art, design, architecture, or any other cultural product? What does avant-gardism mean? Now that contemporary art has broken all taboos and is at the centre of a billion-pound art market, is there still an ‘avant-garde’? If so, what is the point of it and who are the artists concerned?

The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction
David Carrasco

The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction employs the disciplines of history, religious studies, and anthropology as it illuminates the complexities of Aztec life. This VSI looks beyond Spanish accounts that have coloured much of the Western narrative to let Aztec voices speak. It also discusses the arrival of the Spaniards, contrasts Aztec mythical traditions about the origins of their city with actual urban life in Mesoamerica, outlines the rise of the Aztec empire, explores Aztec religion, and sheds light on Aztec art. The VSI concludes by looking at how the Aztecs have been portrayed in Western thought, art, film, and literature as well as in Latino culture and arts.
Babylonia: A Very Short Introduction
Trevor Bryce

Babylonia: A Very Short Introduction takes us on a journey of more than 2,000 years across the history and civilization of ancient Babylonia, from the emergence of its chief city, Babylon, as a village on the Euphrates in the 3rd millennium BC through phases of triumph, decline, and resurgence until its royal capital faded into obscurity in the Roman imperial era. Exploring key historical events as well as the day-to-day life of an ancient Babylonian—including the great Hammurabic, Kassite, and Nebuchadnezzar’s Neo-Babylonian empires as well as the periods of Persian and Macedonian rule under Alexander the Great—it provides a comprehensive guide to one of history’s most profound civilizations.

Bacteria: A Very Short Introduction
Sebastian G.B. Amyes

Bacteria form a fundamental branch of life. They are the oldest forms of life as we know it, and they are still the most prolific living organisms. Bacteria: A Very Short Introduction explores the nature of bacteria, their origin and evolution, bacteria in the environment, and bacteria and disease. Bacteria inhabit every part of the Earth's surface, its ocean depths, and even terrains such as boiling hot springs. They are most familiar as agents of disease, but benign bacteria are critical to the recycling of elements and all ecology, as well as to human health. The resistance of bacteria to antibiotics is also considered.

Banking: A Very Short Introduction
John Goddard and John O. S. Wilson

Banks are of central importance for economic growth, the allocation of capital, competitiveness, and financial stability. Propelled by technological advances in financial analysis and financial deregulation, the banking industry’s investment played a key role in enhancing national economic growth in the early 21st century. Banking: A Very Short Introduction explores the world of banking, describing the role of central banks in national and global economies, and analysing the increasing supervision and regulation imposed on the banking industry in light of the recent global financial crisis. Looking to the future, it considers proposals for reform of the banking industry, and the prospects of a resolution of the closely-related banking and sovereign debt crises.
Roland Barthes: A Very Short Introduction elucidates the varied theoretical contributions of Roland Barthes, whose lifelong fascination was with the way people make their world intelligible. It describes the many projects, which Barthes explored and which helped to change the way we think about a range of cultural phenomena — from literature, fashion, wrestling, and advertising to notions of the self, of history, and of nature. To some, he is the structuralist who outlined a ‘science of literature’, and the most prominent promoter of semiology; to others he stands not for science but pleasure, espousing a theory of literature which gives the reader a creative role.

The Beats: A Very Short Introduction
David Sterritt

The Beats: A Very Short Introduction offers an overview of the social, cultural, and aesthetic sensibilities of the Beats, bringing out the similarities that connected them, and also the many differences. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Beat Generation writers revolutionized American literature with their iconoclastic approach to language and their angry assault on the conformity and conservatism of postwar society. They and their followers took aim at the hypocrisy and taboos of their time. Members of the Beat Generation hoped to inspire others to purify their lives and souls, yet they urged the remaking of consciousness on a profoundly inward-looking basis. The idea was to revolutionize society by revolutionizing thought, not the other way around.

Beauty: A Very Short Introduction
Roger Scruton

Beauty: A Very Short Introduction explores the concept of beauty, asking what makes an object — either in art, in nature, or the human form — beautiful. It strongly refutes the notion that judgements of beauty are purely subjective and relative, and that we can learn little from art criticism and study. Arguing that our experience of beauty is rationally founded, and that beauty is a real and universal value, this VSI shows how our sense of beauty has an indispensable part to play in the way we shape our world.
Behavioural Economics: A Very Short Introduction
Michelle Baddeley

Behavioural Economics: A Very Short Introduction introduces the field of behavioural economics, analysing the motivations behind economic decisions and showing the relevance of behavioural economics to our own lives and everyday economic and financial problems. It explores the reasons why we make irrational decisions; how we decide quickly; why we make mistakes in risky situations; our tendency to procrastination and short-termism; and how we are affected by social influences, personality, mood, and emotions. The implications of understanding the rationale for our own financial behaviour are huge. Behavioural economics could help policy-makers to understand the people behind their policies, enabling them to design more effective policies, while also improving their marketing.

Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction
John Sutherland

Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction shows that bestseller lists monitor one of the strongest pulses in modern literature and are therefore worthy of serious study. It lifts the lid on the bestseller industry, examines what makes a book into a bestseller, and asks what separates bestsellers from canonical fiction. Exploring the relationship between bestsellers and the fashions, ideologies, and cultural concerns of the day, this VSI includes short case-studies and lively summaries of bestsellers through the years, including both classic and contemporary novels, alongside some surprising titles and long-forgotten names.

The Bible: A Very Short Introduction
John Riches

The Bible: A Very Short Introduction looks at the importance accorded to the Bible by different communities and cultures. Why has the Bible generated such a variety of uses and interpretations? How was it written? What is the canon and what role does Biblical criticism play? This VSI explores all these issues as well as examining why the Bible has been such an influence on Western culture and why it continues to exert an enormous influence over many people's lives. It also considers how the Bible has been appropriated by high and popular culture and its use for political ends.

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Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction

Eric H Cline


Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction examines the origins of biblical archaeology as a discipline and the major controversies that first prompted explorers to go in search of objects and sites that would “prove” the Bible. The most well-known biblical archaeologists are discussed, such as Kathleen Kenyon and Yigael Yadin. The sites that are essential sources of knowledge are described, along with some of the most important discoveries that have been made, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Also examined are the archaeological finds that shed further light on the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and the issue of potential frauds and forgeries.

Big Data: A Very Short Introduction

Dawn E. Holmes


Since long before computers were even thought of, data has been collected and organized by diverse cultures across the world. Once access to the Internet became a reality for large swathes of the world’s population, the amount of data generated each day became huge, and continues to grow exponentially. It includes all our uploaded documents, videos, and photos; all our social media traffic; our online shopping; even the GPS data from our cars. Big Data: A Very Short Introduction explains how big data works and is changing the world around us, the effect it has on our everyday lives and in the business world, and it considers the attendant security risks.

Biography: A Very Short Introduction

Hermione Lee


Biography: A Very Short Introduction looks at the origins and development of biographical writing. Why do certain people and historical events arouse so much interest? How can biographies be compared with history and works of fiction? Does a biography need to be true? Is it acceptable to omit or conceal things? Does the biographer need to personally know the subject? Must a biographer be subjective? This VSI considers the cultural and historical background of different types of biographies, looking at the factors that affect biographers and whether there are different strategies, ethics, and principles required for writing about one person compared to another.