

# GNU Math

(This appendix was contributed by Peter Doyle.)

In 1997, the American Mathematical Society published the text ‘Introduction to Probability, second edition’, by Charles M. Grinstead and J. Laurie Snell. We are pleased to announce that this book has now been made freely redistributable under the terms of the GNU General Public License (‘GPL’), as published by the Free Software Foundation:

<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/gpl.html>

The GPL is the original ‘copyleft’ license. Briefly stated, the GPL permits you to do whatever you like with a work, as long as you don’t prevent anyone else from doing what *they* like with it. We’ll say more about the implications of this in a minute.

## Thanks

We owe our ability to distribute this work under the GPL to the far-sightedness of the American Mathematical Society. We are particularly grateful for the help and support of John Ewing, AMS Executive Director and Publisher.

At another level, we owe our ability to distribute this work under the GPL to Richard Stallman: inventor of ‘copyleft’; creator of the GPL; founder of the Free Software Foundation. Copyleft is an ingenious idea. Through the GNU/Linux operating system, and scads of other computer programs, Stallman’s idea has already had a profound impact in the area of computer software. We believe that this idea could transform the creation and distribution of works of other kinds, including textbooks like this one. The distribution of this book under the GPL can be viewed as an experiment to see just where the idea of copyleft may take us.

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From the time of its first publication in 1997, this book has been available for free download from the Chance website. Despite this fact, (or rather, as the publisher suspects, precisely *because* of this fact), the printed book has sold well.

This indicates that there are still those among us who prefer to read a 500-page book in traditional printed form, rather than on-screen or from a sheaf of laser-printed sheets. For the benefit of such troglodytes, we will try to ensure that the book remains available in printed form, and that periodic new printings track changes to the online version we maintain.

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The GPL was conceived as a way of promoting the development and distribution of computer software, but it was framed generally enough to cover other works, like this book. Because the GPL has not yet been widely used for works like this one, we're going to say what we think the implications are. We're doing this in an attempt to be helpful, and to point out what we see as some attractive possibilities. You should understand, however, that strictly speaking, the following comments are just our opinion. Your precise rights and responsibilities are those that are spelled out in the GPL itself. The GPL is eminently readable—particularly the preamble. Read it!

In addition to downloading and printing the book, the GPL allows you to create derived works, which means you could

- Translate the book into Latin
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Of course if you simply want to grab our chapter on Markov chains for your new GPL-licensed applied probability book, that will take you off in a different direction, and our paths will diverge. That's fine. That's one of the kinds of things we're hoping to see.

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What about figures that are drawn by computer, say as the output of a program written in BASIC, or produced using a computer illustration system like xfig or Adobe Illustrator? Does the ‘source code’ that you are required to make available include your BASIC program, or xfig command file, or original Illustrator-format

file? The answer is no. This is good, since we would be hard pressed to collect together the programs that were used to draw figures for this book!

Of course we hope that if you write programs to draw figures for a derived work, you will perfect your programs to the point where you will consider licensing them separately under the GPL. And we hope that if you use a computer illustration program, you will use a system like xfig in preference to some expensive proprietary system; keep track of your figure sources; and make those sources part of your source distribution. (And we hope that you will remember to floss your teeth morning and night, and brush after every meal.)

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July 23, 2002

Professor J. Laurie Snell  
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Dear Laurie:

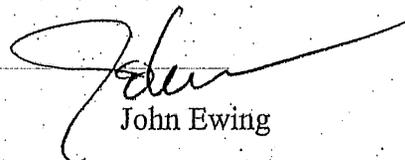
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JE:sr