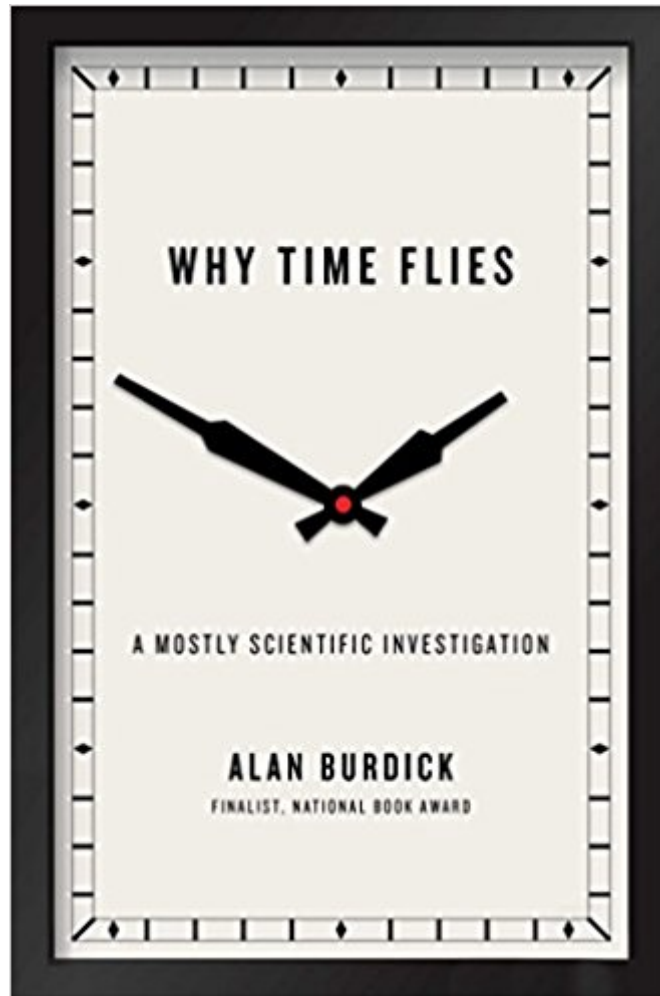




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# Why Time Flies: A Mostly Scientific Investigation



## Synopsis

“[Why Time Flies] captures us. Because it opens up a well of fascinating queries and gives us a glimpse of what has become an ever more deepening mystery for humans: the nature of time.” • The New York Times Book Review “Erudite and informative, a joy with many small treasures.” • Science “Time is the most commonly used noun in the English language; it’s always on our minds and it advances through every living moment. But what is time, exactly? Do children experience it the same way adults do? Why does it seem to slow down when we’re bored and speed by as we get older? How and why does time fly? In this witty and meditative exploration, award-winning author and New Yorker staff writer Alan Burdick takes readers on a personal quest to understand how time gets in us and why we perceive it the way we do. In the company of scientists, he visits the most accurate clock in the world (which exists only on paper); discovers that “now” actually happened a split-second ago; finds a twenty-fifth hour in the day; lives in the Arctic to lose all sense of time; and, for one fleeting moment in a neuroscientist’s lab, even makes time go backward. Why Time Flies is an instant classic, a vivid and intimate examination of the clocks that tick inside us all.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Alan Burdick offers a fascinating and searching account of how we perceive time’s passage. It will change the way you think about the past, and also the present.” (Elizabeth Kolbert, author of *The Sixth Extinction*) “Alan Burdick turns an obsession with the nature of time into a thrilling quest—one that brilliantly illuminates a

subject that haunts us all. Time may fly by— but at least while— reading these pages it is never wasted. (David Grann, author of *The Lost City of Z*) “In his lucid, thoughtful, and beautifully written inquiry about time—what is it, really? Did we invent it, or does it invent us?—Burdick offers nothing less than a new way of reconsidering what it means to be human. (Hanya Yanagihara, author of *A Little Life* and *The People in the Trees*) “Burdick tours— that unsettling passage of existence we call “time—how our brains process it, how infants first grasp it, how our conversations encode it—and returns with a spellbinding, provocative book that will fill you with wonder. (Robert Sapolsky, author of *Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers*) “A marvelous meditation on the subtle mysteries of time. (Olivia Judson, author of *Dr. Tatiana’s Sex Advice to All Creation*) “This book blew my mind. (Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*) “Burdick is like a charming and witty river guide, exploring the tributaries and side-streams along the river of consciousness—the science, the history, the literature, the deep and beautiful paradoxes that make us what we are. Why Time Flies— will enhance your experience of what may be, in the end, the most intimate relationship of your life—your connection with the passage of time. (Jonathan Weiner, author of *Long for this World*) “An insightful meditation on the curious nature of time . . . A highly illuminating intellectual investigation. (Kirkus Reviews) “[Burdick] is one of the finest science writers at work today, with an uncanny ability explain knotty topics, with humanity, and humor.” (Publishers Weekly staff picks, best books of 2016) “Burdick places his readers in the centers of their temporal universes.” (Publishers Weekly) “In his search for temporal meaning, Burdick takes us on a journey around the world. . . . erudite and informative, a joy with many small treasures. (Science)” “Mr. Burdick sets out on (per the subtitle) a “mostly scientific investigation—into how time works . . . There isn’t a single time but many different times that must be imperfectly reconciled, and the ambiguity gives a playful, reflective writer like Mr. Burdick time to shine.” (The Wall Street Journal) “[Why Time Flies] captures us . . . it opens up a well of fascinating queries and gives us a glimpse of what has become an ever more deepening mystery for humans: the nature of time. . . . Burdick is one of those praiseworthy journalists who have an acute sense of what is scientifically relevant, as well as an ability to translate the dry language of laboratory science into something that connects directly to our experience, emotions and daily questions. He presents scientific inquiry for what it really is . . . a vibrant lively adventure of discovery, where what we do not yet know is more interesting than what we know. And few topics touch us as directly as time. . . . The book is a wealth of stories and

surprising facts, each page raising our curiosity and unveiling a novel aspect of our relation with temporality. (The New York Times Book Review) "An intellectual adventure that renders a hefty topic accessible to the general public. And what topic is more hefty than time itself • how we perceive it, how we study it, and how we live with it? . . . Burdick draws on bright minds from philosophy, religion, neurobiology, psychology and other fields both ancient and cutting-edge. . . . we are thankful to have Burdick's life and insights as a guide. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)"Burdick tackles [time] with wit and wonder, mapping a nuanced exploration through mathematics, sciences, philosophy and observations of his own young sons. . . . The book teems with entertaining trivia and stories. . . . Burdick's compelling research consistently conveys curiosity and awe for the notion of time and its passage. Why Time Flies is not a quick read; it demands contemplation. But, naturally, it's time well spent." (Shelf Awareness)

Alan Burdick is a staff writer and former senior editor at The New Yorker and a frequent contributor to Elements, the magazine's science-and-tech blog. His writing has also appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Harper's, GQ, Discover, Best American Science and Nature Writing, and elsewhere. His first book, Out of Eden: An Odyssey of Ecological Invasion, was a National Book Award finalist and won the Overseas Press Club Award for environmental reporting.

Time seems to stand still --- we are "locked" in a perpetual now, and (sadly) can't go back or forward in time the way we do in space. I wish we could; we could skip the bad parts of life and relive the good ones ad nauseum; certain places in time could be home to us. On the other hand, it seems to fly, at least in the sense that it is unstoppable. Burdick does an amazing job grappling with these fundamental experiences, and trying to understand how --- if at all --- the brain makes it possible. I loved his New Yorker piece on this topic, and the book --- beautifully written --- has led to several fascinating conversations and beautiful memories and (I take it) impossible fantasies. A lovely, warm, almost poetic read. PS bought it on , delivered next day, very well made book, a pleasure to hold and read.

A very pleasant excursion into the subjective experience of time passage and all the latest and historical scientific thinking on the experience. The emphasis is on the personal experience of time in the life we live and thankfully sidesteps the roiling physics battles of relativity and quantum

mechanics. The issues of whether time is an illusion, or if it exists all at once or in deferent dimensions are thankfully not in Burdick's book. He shows us that there are some scientists who actually try to understand how we experience time in the real world we live in. As for a philosophical aspect, Augustine's insights on time are spotlighted,( without any references to Augustine's view that infants are damned from birth I am pleased to say), and there is a lot of William James's ideas too. He melds many ideas about subjective time together very well. Sometimes the data from the studies he relates can get a bit overwhelming, but Burdick's writing skill is such that he gets you back on track. He does a very good job of weaving his young sons' experiences with time into the narrative and indeed the book's ending is very well done. There you go, in about 10 or 20 beats, you have read my review and I recommend this excellent book.

Alan Burdick is a writer, and by that definition, a thinker. He may or may not be a scientist although he claims that this book is *not* a scientific inquiry. As inquiries go, Burdick has picked an awfully complex subject. As science goes, there is still no grand scientific verdict on what time is all about. No answer appears in this book either. So what is the point of reading it? This book is rich in the form of questions posed. The questions are the little fires that Burdick lights for us and make us think long and hard about them as they had made him think, as he tells us, in his solitude under the stars. Does time pass us by as we so often think, or do we pass time by? In that same vein, Burdick asks whether it is the clock that count the numbers printed on it *or* we do? He is reminded that Aristotle had said that *if* there cannot be anyone to count, there cannot be anything that can be counted. This is part of the kind of questions that seemingly have no answers (Does a falling tree make a sound if there is no one to hear it?) His ruminations on time and clocks bring him to consider the circadian clock. He considers not just what this clock does for us as individuals but also how the circadian clock synchronises our activities with that of others that share this world with us, after all, other humans, at least, have their own circadian clocks, and even molds grow to their own circadian rhythm. Burdick gets up to date with a modern term, *real time*. We talk about it and use this phrase all the time but what does it mean? What is real time? Burdick discusses the idea of real time in the context of neuroscience and how our brain processes the arrival times of different bits of data and how it then reintegrates the so that we get a *unified experience*. From the myriad stories and observations that he tells, we come to appreciate Burdick the man, a child of time trying to keep a distance in order to observe, and yet remain joyfully attached.

Alan Burdick takes what most of us take for granted, the passage of time, and teases out what really happens inside our heads to construct our personal realities. He explains, most of the time, very complex topics in a manner that makes them understandable, if still mind boggling, to most readers. A fascinating and enjoyable read that can serve as a basis of some great discussions over a bottle of wine.

One of the most interesting books I've ever read, filled with never-before-realized insight and information. Right up there with "Thinking Fast and Slow" as a profound and readable scientific and social document. You will be amazed!

This covers time from many perspectives: biological 24-hours days from one-cell creatures to humans. How do we know duration.? How do we experience time? How do we learn time? Tiny babies prefer to watch a picture of a person whose mouth corresponds to the rhythm of the speech sounds it hears.

Great book

This book is fact-filled and educational... scientifically - Yet at the same time, it is an unfolding story. An amazing compilation of contemplation about what it is, to be alive... and why time flies toward when you won't be. Alan doesn't have an answer for what's on the other side, but he helps one be less afraid of it - and to live in the now.

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