✦ IDEA · CHEAT CARD · MATHEMATICS

Lindy effect

The observation that for some things, such as books and ideas, the longer they have already lasted, the longer they will probably last.

How it works

1. Something has lasted a known time, and its age is all you know about it.
2. Your moment of looking falls at a random point in the thing's whole life.
3. So there is an even chance that the thing lasts at least as long again.
4. This holds for things that do not wear out, because the fragile ones fail early.

Example

Gott at the Berlin Wall, 1969

- The Berlin Wall was eight years old when J. Richard Gott visited it in 1969.
- Gott gave the Wall a 50% chance of standing another 2.7 to 24 years.

→ The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, 20 years after Gott's visit.

Use it for

- ✓ Choosing between a book read for fifty years and this year's bestseller
- ✓ Choosing a file format or programming language a team will use for years
- ✓ Pausing before you drop an old rule that has been followed for centuries

Watch out

- ✗ The Lindy effect fails for things that wear out, such as people, food and cars.
- ✗ The Lindy effect gives a best guess, not a promise that old things will last.

Remember When age is all you know, guess it will last about as long again.