

Issue 78

Popular Ideas about Science

To compare your attitude toward science with the views of 2000 American adults tested in 1985 by Jon D. Miller, head of the Public Opinion Laboratory at Northern Illinois University, answer the following questions (true or false).

1. Some numbers are especially lucky for some people. (40)
2. Because of their knowledge, scientific researchers have a power that makes them dangerous. (over 50)
3. The positions of the sun, moon, planets, and stars have at least some influence on human affairs (astrology). (40)
4. It is likely that some of the unidentified flying objects (UFOs) that have been reported are really space vehicles from other civilizations. (43)
5. Space shots have caused changes in our weather. (over 40)
6. Science tends to break down people's ideas of right and wrong. (over 30)

Of the 2000 test takers, the percentage answering "true" is in parentheses after each question. Ideally, the numbers should all be zero (0) since *all the statements are false*. Assuming the sample was a fair cross section of adult Americans, what do these numbers show about attitudes toward science? Compared with them, how well did you do?

In another poll reported in *The American Biology Teacher* (editorial, May 1989) 34 percent of those polled thought psychic powers could be used to read people's thoughts, 29 percent felt we could communicate with the dead, and 22 percent believed in ghosts. The sample being polled consisted of high school life science and biology teachers!