

An Easy Introduction to the Slide Rule, Asimov, 1965

Isaac Asimov is one of the most prolific writers of all time, having written or edited more than 500 books. While science fiction and popular science were his mainstays, he published in a wide variety of categories, ranging from history, to Shakespeare, to the Bible, to mystery stories. Since his works have been published in nine out of ten major categories of the Dewey Decimal System, it should come as no surprise that we have an Asimov slide rule book.

In his first chapter, Asimov tells us, "...I shall start from the beginning and try to show you how and why it works." And of course he does. But this text is intended neither as a crisp set of instructions on how to use the rule, nor a rigorous discussion of the mathematical basis for its construction. Rather, this book is a relaxed, slow-paced conversation about the 'why' and 'how'. It is important that readers accept the concepts of 'relaxed', 'slow-paced' and 'conversation' or they may become frustrated, thinking the book should be something it is not. This work is intended for people who are or might be interested in the theory and operation of the elementary operations of the slide rule, but most particularly at those who will be satisfied with learning 'about' those subjects and aren't particularly interested in becoming accomplished practitioners. As Asimov himself says, "...reading this book will not make you an expert at handling the slide rule. For that you will need practice and I am not including practice exercises as part of the book."

As can be seen from the Table of Contents, only multiplication, division, powers, roots, and (common) logarithms are included. Operations involving trigonometric functions, non-integer exponentiation, or natural logarithms are not discussed. No specific slide rules or manufacturers are discussed or recommended.

There are no Addenda or Appendices. The Index, slightly less than two pages and about 130 entries, is minimal but adequate for the purposes of the book.

This text is an interesting and entertaining conversation about the 'whys' and 'hows' of the slide rule, not a technical reference. If you want that, go somewhere else.