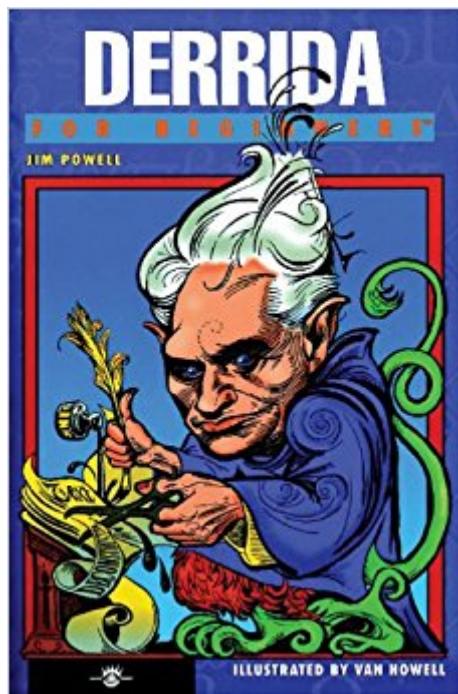


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# Derrida For Beginners



## Synopsis

In 1966, Jacques Derrida gave a lecture at Johns Hopkins University that cast the entire history of Western Philosophy into doubt. The following year, Derrida published three brilliant but mystifying books that convinced the pollsters that he was the most important philosopher of the late 20th Century. Unfortunately, nobody was sure whether the intellectual movement that he spawned — Deconstruction — is advanced philosophy or murdered it. The truth? Derrida is one of those annoying geniuses you can take a class on, read half-a-dozen books by and still have no idea what he's talking about. Derrida's "writing" — confusing doesn't begin to describe it (it's like he's pulling the rug out from under the rug that he pulled out from under philosophy.) But beneath the confusion, like the heartbeat of a bird in your hand, you can feel Derrida's electric genius. It draws you to it; you want to understand it... but it's so confusing. What you need, Ducky, is Derrida For Beginners by James Powell! Jim Powell's *Derrida For Beginners* is the clearest explanation of Derrida and deconstruction presently available in our solar system. Powell guides us through blindingly obscure texts like *Of Grammatology* (Derrida's deconstruction of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Rousseau), "Différance" (his essay on language and life), *Dissemination* (his dismantling of Plato, his rap on Mallarmé), and Derrida's other masterpieces (the mere titles can make strong men tremble in terror — *Glas*, *Signponge/Signsponge*, *The Post Card*, and *Specters of Marx*.) Readers will learn the coolest Derridian buzzwords (e.g., intertextuality, binary oppositions, hymen, sous rature, arche-writing, phallogocentrism), the high-and-low lights of deconstruction's history (including the DeMan controversy), and the various criticisms of Derrida and deconstruction, including Camille Paglia's objection that America, the rock-n-roll nation, isn't formal enough to need deconstruction. The master, however, begs to disagree: "America is Deconstruction." — Jacques Derrida

## Book Information

Series: For Beginners

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: For Beginners (August 21, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1934389110

ISBN-13: 978-1934389119

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 28 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #561,947 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Movements > Deconstruction #361 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Philosophers #1429 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Modern

## Customer Reviews

Jim Powell lives in Santa Barbara, California where he enjoys surfing, writing, playing piano, and painting. His other books include *Mandalas: The Dynamics of Vedic Symbolism*, *Energy and Eros*, *The Tao of Symbolism*, *Eastern Philosophy For Beginners*, *Derrida For Beginners*, and *Postmodernism For Beginners*. Jim has a Master's Degree in Religious Studies with an emphasis on Sanskrit and Indology. His thesis was on Vedic mythology. He also holds a Master's Degree in English Literature and wrote a thesis on Mark Twain's relationship with the Mississippi River..

The idea is great but I don't like the execution. The illustrations are not quite good. Some parts of the content are unnecessarily slow.

Not difficult to understand and with great lessons on the history of deconstructionism as well as derrida's personal history. One more word required lol.

What a difference this simple book made to my understanding of Mr Derrida.....i's not longer a beginner....come join E

I like the idea of explaining a philosophy by images and comments and Derrida was certainly a philosopher for whose concepts the images are adequate means of expression. A helpful introduction to the universe of Derrida,

This book makes a complicated subject reasonable and understandable. Nice job by Jim Powell. For the average student, and the single scholar

This book is concerned with making accessible the often inaccessible Derrida. Derrida's philosophy will help you develop a healthy sensibility and cynicism for 'knowledge' and 'representation.' Do not be fooled by the 'for beginners' title; it is not simply an introduction, it is a hands-on interpretation of several his 'major' works. The book has any value for anyone interested in learning about the world in which we live.

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Outside of the unjustified claim that the 1966 lectures of Jacques Derrida were a "major philosophical coup" that "cast the entire history of philosophy in the West into doubt", and the annoying illustrations, this book does a good job of explaining some of the ideas of Derrida to the curious reader. Derridean philosophy has been viewed as a threat to some in the conservative political movement and in the scientific profession. Given the incredible strides in science and technology since 1966 it is difficult to believe that this kind of philosophy had any effect at all, but it instigated a backlash from some scientists, which continues to this day (but at a level of amplitude considerably smaller than a decade or two ago). Readers who have a background in linguistic philosophy will of course better appreciate the book but it could be approached by anyone who has an interest in Derrida or French philosophy in general. The author's assertion that philosophy in France is better appreciated by the public than other countries is believable, considering the social practices of French society: long lunch times and openness to ideas that are strong perturbations from past ones. The author is clearly at odds with those who assert that deconstruction was a response to the "boredom" of structuralism since he implies that deconstruction was rather an impediment to it. Of course the author would have strayed from his path of delivering an elementary introduction to deconstruction if he would have debated this in depth. The book therefore does its job, but there are places in the book which strain the reader's patience and understanding, especially his discussion of the "hymen" and its "either/or" analogy. Readers do not need to be told that syntax is the "placement" and "grammatical status" of the word in a sentence, and not its "meaning." Another analogy needs to be used here, both by Derrida and the author, instead of just referring to the hymen as representing "shifts" in the syntax, or the "double folding" process in a

sentence. The bottom line though is that research in cognitive neuroscience will settle the question of "how a text means", not philosophical musings. In a decade or two Derrida's work will no doubt be viewed as a philosopher's attempt to explain "textuality", with the real answer coming from the science of the brain. Such scientific explanations may indeed encompass all of the musings and theorizing that has taken place in Western philosophy. Western philosophy will thus be "deconstructed", but not from the Derridean word salad that is delineated in this book: rather from a scientific dissection of what reading and interpreting is all about.

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