



Shortcut: How Analogies Reveal Connections, Spark Innovation, and Sell Our Greatest Ideas

John Pollack

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A presidential speechwriter for Bill Clinton explores the hidden power of analogy to fuel thought, connect ideas, spark innovation, and shape outcomes

From the meatpacking plants that inspired Henry Ford's first moving assembly line to the "domino theory" that led America into Vietnam to the "bicycle for the mind" that Steve Jobs envisioned as the Macintosh computer, analogies have played a dynamic role in shaping the world around us—and still do today.

Analogies are far more complex than their SAT stereotype and lie at the very core of human cognition and creativity. Once we become aware of this, we start seeing them everywhere—in ads, apps, political debates, legal arguments, logos, and euphemisms, to name just a few. At their very best, analogies inspire new ways of thinking, enable invention, and motivate people to action. Unfortunately, not every analogy that rings true *is* true. That's why, at their worst, analogies can deceive, manipulate, or mislead us into disaster. The challenge? Spotting the difference before it's too late.

Rich with engaging stories, surprising examples, and a practical method to evaluate the truth or effectiveness of any analogy, *Shortcut* will improve critical thinking, enhance creativity, and offer readers a fresh approach to resolving some of today's most intractable challenges.

Shortcut: How Analogies Reveal Connections, Spark Innovation, and Sell Our Greatest Ideas Details

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Author : John Pollack

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Mario Di Maggio says

I've always loved using analogies (or 'illustrations' in my former religious life); not only when teaching but in everyday life too. So it was a pleasure discovering some of the greatest analogies on record and how many of them triggered world-changing events and innovations. I'm not going to list them here but I particularly loved the modern computer revolution analogies, like Steve Jobs' 'bicycle of the mind' and of course Apple's 'desktop' with 'mouse', 'folders', 'scissors', 'paste', 'trash', etc - a truly world-changing analogy that made computers accessible to the man in the street. I also came across really snappy, clever phrases like 'A pun is two truths in one expression while an analogy is one truth in two expressions'; and 'We shouldn't be teaching students to answer standard questions, but to question standard answers'. This book was a nice diversion from my usual diet of fiction, biographies and highly relevant non-fiction.

Argum says

I received an ARC copy of this book as part of GoodReads First Reads contest.

John Pollack's book pulls back the veil on analogies we don't even realize are analogies and why that matters. He sets out a 5 point system of what makes a good analogy and consistently refers back to this in his examples. Aside from this formal definition, though the book is full of interesting historical and modern examples of analogies and how they work and what they did.

This book will make you rethink some of your casual thoughts and the broader implications of the analogies that come out in everyday language. That framing matters and choice of analogy is framing whether you realize it or not, is a major takeaway from this great book.

Victoria Chin says

Lots of short stories filled of analogies

Gerardo Alonso says

pretty good to get a reminder about how to communicate abstract ideas to the masses. Excellent for engineers, politicians and business people.

The only caveat would be that it is an American book focused on the US. Expect at least three-quarters of the book to provide you the "American way."

Benjamin Espen says

I received this book for free as part of LibraryThing's Early Reviewers program.

This was a fun little book. Pollack is a skilled writer, and since he chose to focus on the use of analogy in persuasion, as a political speechwriter, he also knows the field well.

I could quibble with some of the examples, or the conclusions Pollack reaches from them, but that isn't really as interesting as analogy itself.

Pollack is right, analogy is widely used by almost everyone all the time, not least for decision-making. Stated more simply, analogy is what allows us to learn from experience. Without analogy, you wouldn't be able to apply past experience in novel situations.

Analogy also has a central place in the intellectual life of the West. Aristotle mentioned analogy in passing, but it was really his scholastic followers who developed the concept more fully. Without analogy, Western philosophy would have developed in a very different way.

To analogize is to think, to compare, to weigh, and to judge. Thus, to analogize well is to think well, and to analogize poorly is to think poorly. Understanding analogy is an important intellectual discipline, and this short little book points you to lots of interesting material to help you understand it better.

Charmin says

Highlights

1. The art of analogy is the art of cultivating and communicating ideas, revealing fresh connections and relationships between things that are not only useful and make intuitive sense, but also bear up under honest scrutiny. The perfect analogy makes things as simple as possible but no simpler.
2. Analogies trigger emotions that override those circuits of reason, and sometimes at a subconscious level.
3. Comparisons are the only practical way to sort a flat of incoming data.
4. Most people are unaware of just how much this process influences their decision making.
5. Those who construct the clearest analogies are usually the most successful in reaching the outcomes they seek.
6. One can only describe or explain something new and in an effective way by using concepts with which an audience is already somewhat familiar.
7. Mystification breeds misunderstanding and misjudgment.
8. Innovators are those who spot you spell analogies before others do and figure out how to put them to work.
9. When we think more rigorously about the analogies we encounter or employ, we become more able to challenge conventional wisdom and more creative in our problem-solving.

10. Analogies aren't accidents, they're arguments.

Melissa says

I absolutely LOVE books like this.....review to come.

Thank you to the Goodreads First Reads Program and Gotham books for allowing me to read this awesome book!! :)

Joseph Serwach says

Shortcut: How Analogies Reveal Connections, Spark Innovation, and Sell Our Greatest Ideas by former White House speechwriter John Pollack and The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human by Jonathan Gottschall. I recommend both books. Pollack focuses on the most-concise stories of all, analogies, to show how the smallest of momentary stories sparked the thoughts that invented our greatest innovations (including the light bulb, the assembly line and airplane), won and lost court cases, product launches, political campaigns and even confirmation battles for the U.S. Supreme Court. Pollack argues Thomas Edison, who developed the light bulb, the phonograph, the motion picture (and the industries that sprung from them) made so many firsts because of "his ability to to reason from analogy - drawing insights from one field or invention and applying them to another."

Devin Ambron says

"Analogies are like icebergs. While they often operate unnoticed, analogies aren't accidents, they're arguments - arguments that, like icebergs, conceal most of their mass and power beneath the surface." Effective analogies work by framing situations and arguments so subtly that there's no awareness of the frame. They are essential to sharing ideas in stories which our brains are tuned to understand.

Analogies work by the following five criteria:

- * Use the familiar to explain something less familiar.
 - * Highlight similarities and differences.
 - * Identify useful abstractions.
 - * Tell a coherent story.
 - * Resonate emotionally.
-

Bob Wilson says

I loved this book. Fascinating information, well-written, easy to read and useful. Very happy I read this one!

Hal says

A thought provoking book by a former speech writer for President Clinton, John Pollack. The book focuses on and examines the central theme of the powers and pitfalls of using analogy to drive home a point. Pollack uses many examples of recent and distant history where proper usage of powerful analogies propelled ideas, events, and politics.

Pollack also breaks down the essentials in using the principles of utilizing analogies that will make the point you are looking to achieve. And thus the shortcut is implied by cutting through complexity, confusion, and misunderstanding. He also discusses examples where poor analogy can likewise sink objectives and create roadblocks and set backs.

For those looking to persuade, influence, or just be understood this is a worthwhile book to study and add to your your arsenal of effective communication tools.

William Schram says

An interesting book on the importance of analogies in our lives. Analogies help us a great deal to understand new things by connecting it to something we are already familiar with. For instance, in one analogy that really stuck out to me, some person sued the state of Maryland because they took his DNA without a warrant. The prosecution asserted that taking DNA from someone was "like taking a fingerprint" and that is what the trial became centered on. Fingerprinting is a standard booking practice nowadays and has been for years. How is swabbing a person's mouth for their DNA sample any different?

Some other stories that stick out was this one about copyright that happened back in 561 or something.

This monk copied a book without permission, the owner of the book sued and stated that despite the work put into it, he owned the book and any "child-book" of the "parent-book" was his also. So the monk that copied it lost the case, but went to war and killed a lot of people so he could spread the message of that book.

It was pretty cool. It contains a lot of references to books that I heard of and wanted to read, so that is rather encouraging. In any case, 4/5 stars.

Tim says

A surprisingly interesting book that deserves more recognition.

This book may not be especially groundbreaking, but it really makes you think about things that you wouldn't have considered before.

Pollack starts off by saying: "Analogies are like icebergs. While they often operate unnoticed, analogies aren't accidents, they're arguments - arguments that, like icebergs, conceal most of their mass and power beneath the surface."

Analogies structure our thoughts and frame our perceptions. They use the familiar to explain something less familiar.

Sometimes analogies can be very helpful. For example, the assembly line was invented at the Ford company after a worker observed how a meatpacking plant operated.

However, sometimes analogies can be quite harmful. Take the 'Domino Theory', for instance. By imagining countries falling to Communism like dominoes, we were led into terrible and costly wars.

Or think about a criminal who was a victim of the '3 strikes' law. In baseball, if you get three strikes then you are out. In some cities, if you commit three crimes then you will receive life in prison. However, sometimes these crimes involve minor, nonviolent drug offenses.

Overall, analogies are more powerful and influential than most of realize. Therefore, we should recognize when they are being used and try to promote analogies that have positive impacts.

Roger K. says

This is a fast read that tells some interesting stories about the power of analogies. He illustrates how much the use of analogy dominates our thinking. For instance, in the previous sentence, "illustrates" is a visual analogy, while "dominates" is an analogy to social hierarchy.

Pollack also shares some of the science behind how analogies are related to our experiences. He outlines a five-point framework for creating persuasive analogies:

- Use the familiar to explain something less familiar
- Highlight similarities and obscure differences
- Identify useful abstractions
- Tell a coherent story
- Resonate emotionally

The author makes a convincing case that it is critical to manage the analogies being used to comprehend situations. They often serve as a shortcut to thinking, which can be an aid to persuasion or a detriment to countering an argument. Yet the reward for honing this skill is clearer thinking, more successful persuasion, and an increased ability to innovate.

Rachel Blom says

Shortcut is an entertaining, yet informative read about the power of analogies. The author shows how well-chosen analogies can make decisions easier, sell ideas, convince others of viewpoints, etc. He does this by sharing dozens of examples of analogies, mostly good ones and a few ones that didn't work so well.

Technically, 'Shortcut' is not a book on writing of course, as analogies can be used in speaking as much as in writing - as the author demonstrates by analyzing several brilliant speeches that used analogies (I have a dream obviously, but also FDR's fireside chats and Churchill's famous 'this was their finest hour' speech).

I would have loved to see a bit more on how to come up with strong analogies, but other than that it's a great read.

