

Re: When a mathematician makes a mistake...

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- *From:* "BuddhaThu" <softspokenbuddha@xxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 22 May 2006 11:18:34 -0700
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Dear Dopey,

I evaluate visiting mathematics and science lecturers after they submit to preprint archives. There are always mistakes. They have to know and fix it. It is the reason why math people should have a good sense of humor. :-)

I am a mathematician with a math disability. I am not dyslexic. Computers now handle things so that I can do my concept work.

I am highly forgiving of people who honestly acknowledge that I pointed out something important. Some people get ruffled and strike back, but at least they know. They are not real or even honest mathematicians if they strike at good and honest critique.

It is highly unethical not to commit to rectifying scholarly mistakes. If this is found out, then you will lose your math reputation. That is a sensitive issue.

When I point out mistakes, I usually do it via private e-mail. It is up to them to fix it, or answer to it, or rebut it. They then send it back to the organization that is sponsoring the preprint archive or the lecture. Those who will not send back will have private ethical issues.

I find mistakes in every single math paper, and not just trivial ones. There is always a private e-mail on my end. To not get a reaction from me means that there is something wrong with the paper.

I don't make my fellow colleagues feel stupid. It is bad for business. Plus, it will cause politics. To share with colleagues and to ask for reflection is part of the business. A lot of these reflections will mean you have to amend.

Math is really an involving enterprise. It is not Plato. It is not something that is eternal. It is changing. That is my mathematical enterprise. I track the conceptual changes in it.

Sincerely,

Re: When a mathematician makes a mistake...

B.T.

Dopey wrote:

How embarrassing is it if a mathematician submits a paper to a preprint archive and then it is found (either by the author or someone else) that there is a mistake?

(I mean one that is difficult to see even by experts, not something completely ridiculous).

Do people think they were lazy or stupid not to have realised?

That they can't be good mathematicians and are letting everyone down? Or is it quickly forgotten as something fairly respectable and routine?