
Book Review: *Guidelines for Extrasensory Perception Research*

Caroline Watt

Department of Psychology, University of Edinburgh

A review of *Guidelines for Extrasensory Perception Research*, by J. Milton and R. Wiseman. Hatfield, UK: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1997. Pp. 94. £12.45 pbk. ISBN 0-900458-74-7.

I've always wondered what estate agents mean by "deceptively spacious" — looks big, but tiny once you get inside? So to be perfectly clear, to say this book is "deceptively slim" is to say that it is small in dimensions, but substantial in content. Milton and Wiseman's *Guidelines for Extrasensory Perception Research* is an extremely useful and informative text that leads the reader through the methodological do's and don'ts of conducting ESP research. It is not an exhaustive and incredibly detailed consideration of the issues (nor does it claim to be), but it does an admirable job of flagging these issues succinctly and suggesting where further relevant reading can be found.

The book is the second title in a practical series, complementary to the first title: *Guidelines for Testing Psychic Claimants* (Wiseman & Morris, 1995). Following a foreword by Professor Robert Morris, holder of the Koestler Chair of Parapsychology, the authors begin at the most basic level by explaining what an ESP experiment is and describing the main different types of ESP methods (e.g. forced-choice and free-response studies). Then a series of concise chapters deal in roughly chronological order with the different issues involved in researching ESP: pre-specification of experimental details and statistical tests; methods of randomisation; randomness testing; type of participant (special, selected or unselected); sensory shielding (pre-trial safeguards, safeguards during the trials, post-trial safeguards); free-response judging; recording, checking, scoring and

calculation procedures; and reporting and retaining data. Consideration is also briefly given to experimenter fraud, to consultation with magicians, to the use of appropriate statistics, and to arguments for and against the use of a 'non-ESP' control condition. There is an extensive reference list, but no index.

A wide range of people could benefit from the advice given by Milton and Wiseman: undergraduate students and their supervisors planning an ESP project; those teaching in parapsychology and psychology; parapsychology researchers, whether "young blood" or "founding fathers"; and journal editors, particularly mainstream journals where there is a risk that the editors and referees are not well-acquainted with methodological issues in ESP research. In fact I think the book should be compulsory reading for anyone planning or evaluating ESP research.

The appendix contains an invaluable methodological checklist which essentially summarises the book's main recommendations. The checklist includes information derived from a survey by Milton (1996) of parapsychology experimenters' and critics' judgements as to how important it is to attempt to address the recommendations. This is useful because the full list of recommendations is likely to be quite daunting, not only to the undergraduate student who may be planning a parapsychology project, but even to parapsychologists who may have considerable resources at their disposal. *Guidelines* shows us the heights to which we must aspire, the ideal "wish list" for a

methodologically superb experiment. Even if, in practical terms, we must sometimes reach compromise solutions to methodological problems, *Guidelines* helps us at least to know where and why we fall short.

References

Wiseman, R. & Morris, R.L. (1995). *Guidelines for Testing Psychic Claimants*. Hatfield, UK: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Milton, J. (1996). Establishing methodological guidelines for ESP studies: A questionnaire survey of experimenters' and critics' consensus. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 60, 289-334.

Caroline Watt
Department of Psychology
University of Edinburgh
7 George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9JZ
SCOTLAND, UK