



Letter to the editors

Dear Editors

Dr Warnaar takes issue with my book “The Mathematics Companion” as reviewed in the March edition of the *Gazette*. “Dangerous...ridiculous...bizarre... arguably one of the worst mathematics books ever written”, writes Dr Warnaar. In considering the examples given in his review, we can perhaps immediately acknowledge that the book contains several unfortunate typographical errors, some clumsy expressions, and some genuine errors.

But, the real issue at hand is something more subtle than the obvious deficiencies of the book. Take for example Dr Warnaar’s objection to my writing $\ln(x) + C$ instead of $\ln|x| + C$. Yes, Dr Warnaar is perfectly correct in pointing out that my expression is incomplete and likely to lead to confusion and herein lies the dilemma for the teaching mathematics to non-mathematics majors. It is perfectly understandable that a mathematician like Dr Warnaar would grimace at $\ln(x)$, but in my experience, writing $\ln|x|$ leads to considerable confusion and apprehension when it comes to a science or en-

gineering student facing this material, possibly for the first or second time in their studies. The student’s focus is directed towards the unfamiliar $||$ symbols and their implications to the detriment of the understanding of the \ln term. Professional mathematicians of the *Gazette* may disagree entirely, but as the author of the book, and in the light of my years of experience as both a student and a teacher, I chose to put the focus on the expression rather than the boundary conditions — by not stating the boundary conditions at all.

“The Mathematics Companion” is not a compendium of mathematics — it is designed to offer the essential elements of what I believe a science or engineering student needs to know to get some understanding of the subject. Details such as the range of validity of functions and the like, are to my mind, not so important for intended readership. Like it or loathe it, the book is designed to be a companion to more complete mathematics texts that the student will no doubt possess.

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