

Don't let word problems scare you

Sometimes, students do well in math—until they have to solve word problems. Then they just freeze up. Relax—word problems are still just math problems. Here's an easy five-step process that can help you solve *any* word problem.

STEP 1 The first thing you need to know is what the problem asks you to solve. Read the whole problem carefully to find it. Here's a tip: This is often the last sentence of the problem.

STEP 2 Write down the information you need to solve the problem. A word problem will give you all the information you need to answer the question. (Of course, it may also include some extra information.)

STEP 3 Develop a strategy for solving the problem. It may involve one step or several. Drawing a diagram can help. Reviewing sample problems from the book may help, too.

STEP 4 Solve the problem. Make sure not to leave out any steps.

STEP 5 Check your work. Did you answer the problem completely? Reread the problem to see if your answer makes sense. Check your calculations to make sure you haven't made a simple error.

Get help as soon as you need it

If you're confused or have fallen behind in math, you may need extra help. Ask your teacher for advice. You might be able to stay after school or use an app to practice your math skills. Or your teacher may suggest school study sessions or tutoring. Sometimes classmates, college students or community volunteers offer tutoring services.



Whatever you do, math is going to be part of your life. So put these tips into practice and watch yourself turn into a “math person.”

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Student
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How To Do Better in Math



Your report card was pretty good this marking period—except for math. “It’s not my fault,” you tell your friends. “I’m just no good in math. Anyway, I’ll never need math once I graduate.”

The truth is, you *can* learn how to do better in math. In today’s world, everyone needs a strong foundation in math.

What about calculators, your phone and your laptop? Don’t they make math outdated? Quite the opposite. These tools are only as accurate as the people operating them. It’s still important to have strong math skills so you know what to do with the numbers. And you need to be able to tell if the answers are correct.

Here are some tips to help you do better in math.

How To Do Better in Math

Think you're 'no good at math'?

Think again! Researchers have learned these three things about math ability:

1. Everyone *can* do math.

Many people believe you have to be born with “natural” math ability to do well in math. But studies show that our brains grow and change as we learn. By making an effort to succeed in math, you can become a “math person.”

2. Positive thinking works.

If you *think* you can do well in math, you usually *will*. You know that an “I can do it!” attitude helps in sports and in many other areas of your life. It works in the math classroom, too.

3. Practice really *does* make perfect.

If you want to get better at pitching a curve ball or playing the trumpet, you practice every day. So why do people think it takes some sort of magic to do well in math? The “secret” isn't a secret—it's practice, practice, practice. And how can you practice? Do your math homework—every day.

Do 'mental math'

Lots of times, it's less important to know the *exact* answer than to know the *approximate* answer. You don't need to know exactly how much your burger and fries will be before you order—but you need to know if the \$10 you have in your pocket will be enough to cover your bill.

Give yourself plenty of chances to do “mental math.” Sometimes, that means using numbers that allow you to do a problem in your head. It's hard to add 18 and 29 quickly, but it's easy to add 20 and 30. So your answer should be about 50.

In the fast food restaurant, your \$3.89 burger would be about \$4 and the \$2.84 fries would be about \$3. That quick estimate would show you that you have about \$3 left for a drink.

Use estimation to check your answers

On a test, you don't always have time to go back and check every answer. But you can estimate to see if any of your answers are *way* off. If you've shown the sum of 17 plus 35 as 205, you'd better go back and do that problem again.

There's more than one right way to get the answer

Although there's usually only one right answer to a math problem, there are sometimes several different ways to find that answer. Once you've solved a problem, ask yourself, “How else could I get this answer?” As you think, you'll actually become better at math.

Use math for a different view of sports

You'll know more about why your favorite team won (or lost) if you keep statistics while watching the game. For example:

- What percentage of passes did the quarterback complete in the first quarter?
- What percentage of three-point shots did your favorite team make?
- Compared to your team, how many more (or fewer) at-bats did the opposing team have?

