PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL LITERACY

Showing Mathematical Work

Difficulty level: Easy

Practical and Financial Literacy

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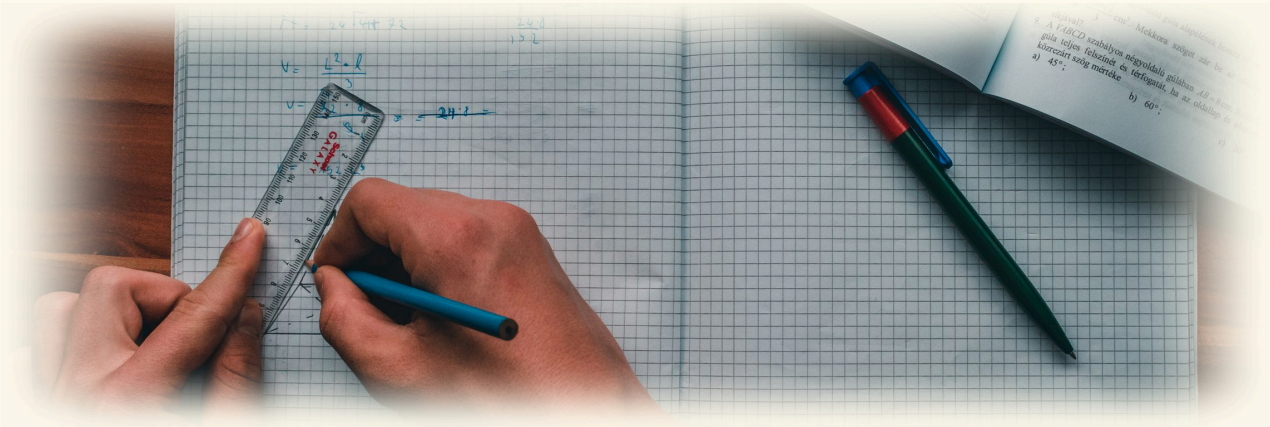
Overview of the concept

This is how you lay out a maths problem so a teacher can follow your thinking and give you credit for the right steps, even if the final answer slips. A student who shows each line of working can earn marks for a correct method even when a small slip changes the final number. A student who writes only the answer gets nothing when that answer is wrong, because the teacher cannot see where it went off track. Knowing how to show your work tells you how to make your thinking visible, so a mistake is easy to find and fix.



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Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q How should you show your work for 47 + 36, instead of just writing the answer?

SOLUTION

Weak: 'Answer: 83.'

Strong: '47 + 36: 7 + 6 = 13, write 3, carry 1;

4 + 3 + 1 = 8. Answer: 83.'

Write the problem, then one line per step, in order.

Show carries, substitutions, and intermediate results, not just the final number.

End with the answer clearly labelled, so it is easy to find.

EXAMPLE 2

Q How should you lay out the solution to x + 5 = 12, step by step?

SOLUTION

The example

Solve: x + 5 = 12.

Step 1: x = 12 - 5. Step 2: x = 7.

Check: 7 + 5 = 12. Answer: x = 7.

How to think it through

Write each step on its own line, keeping equals signs aligned.

Show the operation that moves a term: subtract 5 from both sides.

Finish with a check line and the answer.

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Practice questions

1 Show your working for 64 + 28, one line per step, with the carry shown. What is the answer?

- **A** 82
- **B** 92
- **C** 90
- **D** 102

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2 Show your working for 58 + 27. Which line shows the carry correctly?

- **A** 8 + 7 = 15, write 5, carry 1
- **B** 8 + 7 = 15, write 1, carry 5
- **C** 5 + 2 = 7, write 7
- **D** 58 + 27 = 75

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3 A student writes only 'Answer: 84' for 36 + 48. What is missing from their working?

- **A** The steps, the carry, and the labelled answer
- **B** Nothing, the answer is right
- **C** A check step only
- **D** The question number

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4 You get the right answer with no working. What might you lose?

- **A** Partial credit if the answer had been wrong, and the chance to spot slips
- **B** Nothing at all
- **C** The question mark
- **D** Your pencil

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5 Solve x + 9 = 17, showing each step on its own line, then a check. What is x?

- **A** 6
- **B** 8
- **C** 9
- **D** 26

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6 Solve x + 8 = 20. What is the check line?

- **A** 12 + 8 = 20
- **B** 20 - 8 = 12
- **C** 12 - 8 = 4
- **D** 20 + 8 = 28

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7 Solve x - 3 = 9, showing each step on its own line, then a check. What is x?

- **A** 6
- **B** 9
- **C** 12
- **D** 15

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8 What is the first line of working for x + 5 = 12?

- **A** x = 12 - 5
- **B** x = 12 + 5
- **C** x = 5 - 12
- **D** x = 12 × 5

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9 **A student shows every step but gets the final answer wrong. What can the teacher still do?**

- **A** Give marks for the correct steps
- **B** Give no marks at all
- **C** Mark the whole question wrong without reading it
- **D** Ask the student to start again

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10 **Should you show a check step?**

- **A** Yes, it proves the answer
- **B** No, it wastes time

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ANSWER KEY

1. 92

2. 8 + 7 = 15, write 5, carry 1

3. The steps, the carry, and the labelled answer

4. Partial credit if the answer had been wrong, and the chance to spot slips

5. 8

6. 12 + 8 = 20

7. 12

8. x = 12 - 5

9. Give marks for the correct steps

10. Yes, it proves the answer

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