MATHEMATICS · GRADES 4-6

Subtracting decimals

Difficulty level: Intermediate

Mathematics: Grades 4-6

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Overview of the concept

This is how you work out change from a payment, or how much longer one measurement is than another, like comparing two prices at the store or two heights on a growth chart. Money and measurements are usually written as decimals, so subtracting them is an everyday job. Lining the decimal points up keeps dollars with dollars and cents with cents, so the answer comes out in the right place. That is how you check your change, compare prices, or see how much something has grown.



Rule

Subtracting decimals: line up the decimal points, one under the other, and subtract column by column from the right, bringing the decimal point straight down into the answer.

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Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q Work out 5.42 - 2.31.

SOLUTION

This is a subtracting-decimals question, so start with the one rule to remember: line the decimal points up, and subtract column by column, starting from the right.

Hundredths: 2 minus 1 is 1. Tenths: 4 minus 3 is 1. Ones: 5 minus 2 is 3.

So the answer is 3.11.

EXAMPLE 2

Q A jug holds 9.6 L of water. Noah pours out 3.85 L. How much water is left in the jug?

SOLUTION

This is a word problem about subtracting decimals, so write it as a sum: 9.6 - 3.85. The trap is that 9.6 has one decimal place and 3.85 has two, so write 9.6 as 9.60 first.

Now subtract: hundredths, 0 minus 5 will not go, so borrow 1 tenth, and 10 minus 5 is 5. Tenths: 5 minus 8 will not go, so borrow 1 from the ones, and 15 minus 8 is 7. Ones: 8 minus 3 is 5.

So there are 5.75 L left in the jug.

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Practice questions

1 A ribbon is 8.75 m long. Ana cuts off 4.50 m. How long is the ribbon now?

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2 A jug holds 10.2 litres. Sam pours out 3.456 litres. How many litres are left?

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3 Tom has $10.00 and spends $4.75. How much money does he have left?

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4 The temperature falls from 12.6 degrees to 8.45 degrees. How far does it fall?

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5 A tank holds 20.0 litres. After 15.55 litres are used, how many litres are left?

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6 Maya has 7.25 kg of flour. She uses 1.5 kg. How many kilograms does she have left?

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7 **Ben needs 6.4 m of ribbon. He has 2.35 m. How much more does he need?**

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8 **A kite costs $15.50 and a ball costs $9.95. How much more does the kite cost than the ball?**

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9 **What number must be added to 50.91 - 10.146 to make 100?**

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10 A board is 2.45 m long. Noah saws off 0.8 m. How long is the board now?

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ANSWER KEY

1. 4.25

2. 6.744

3. 5.25

4. 4.15

5. 4.45

6. 5.75

7. 4.05

8. 5.55

9. 59.236

10. 1.65

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