MATHEMATICS · GRADES 7-9

Subtracting integers

Difficulty level: Intermediate

Mathematics: Grades 7-9

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Overview of the concept

This is how you work out a change that crosses zero, like a temperature dropping below freezing, a bank balance going into overdraft, or a team falling behind in a game. Once the numbers cross zero, the signs start to matter, and a simple takeaway can flip into a negative. Thinking of it as a movement along a line, up or down from zero, keeps the sign straight. That is how you read a weather forecast, a bank statement, or a score when the numbers go below zero.



Rule

Subtracting integers: to subtract a number, add its opposite.

Keep the first number, change subtract to add, and change the sign of the number being subtracted.

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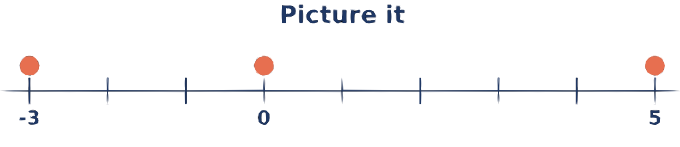
Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q Work out 5 – (–3)



SOLUTION

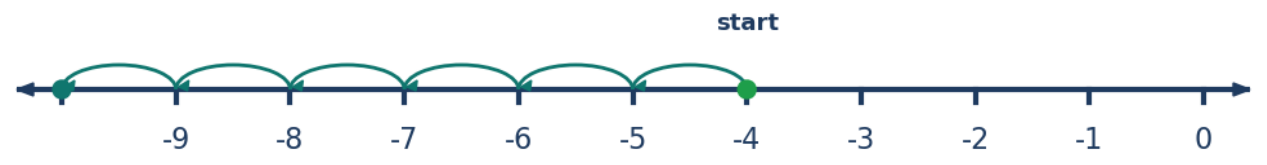
Leave the first number alone, turn subtract into add, and flip the second sign: 5 + 3.

Now add as normal: 5 + 3 = 8.

So 5 – (–3) = 8.

EXAMPLE 2

Q Work out –4 – 6



SOLUTION

Keep, change, change: –4 + (–6).

Same signs, so add the sizes and keep the sign: 4 + 6 = 10, negative.

So –4 – 6 = –10.

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Practice questions

1 You have 7 dollars and a debt of 2 dollars is cancelled. How much do you have now?

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2 The temperature is -3 degrees and falls 5 degrees. What is the new temperature?

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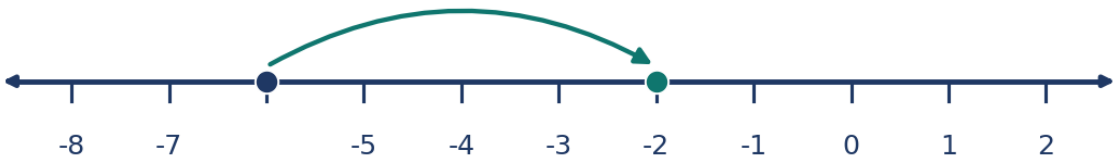
3 The arrow on the number line ends on -2. Count back along the arrow to find where it started.



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4 You have 10 dollars and spend 14 dollars. What is your balance?

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5 You have -1 dollars and a debt of 1 dollar is cancelled. What is your balance?

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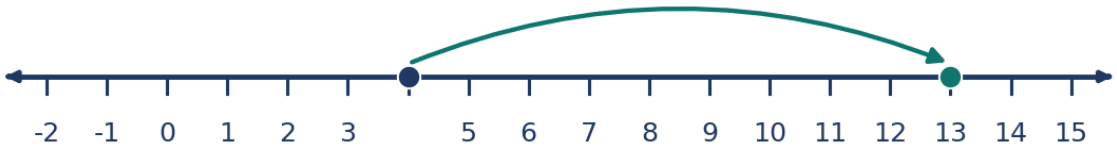
6 The arrow on the number line ends on 13. Count back along the arrow to find where it started.



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7 A submarine is at -12 m and descends 3 m. What is its new depth?

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8 You have 0 dollars and spend 8 dollars. What is your balance?

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9 A thermometer shows the temperature falling from 3 degrees to -5 degrees. By how many degrees did it fall?

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10 **A diver is at -7 m and rises 10 m. What is the new depth?**

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ANSWER KEY

1. 9

2. -8

3. -6

4. -4

5. 0

6. 4

7. -15

8. -8

9. 8

10. 3

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