MATHEMATICS · GRADES 4-6

Writing simple expressions

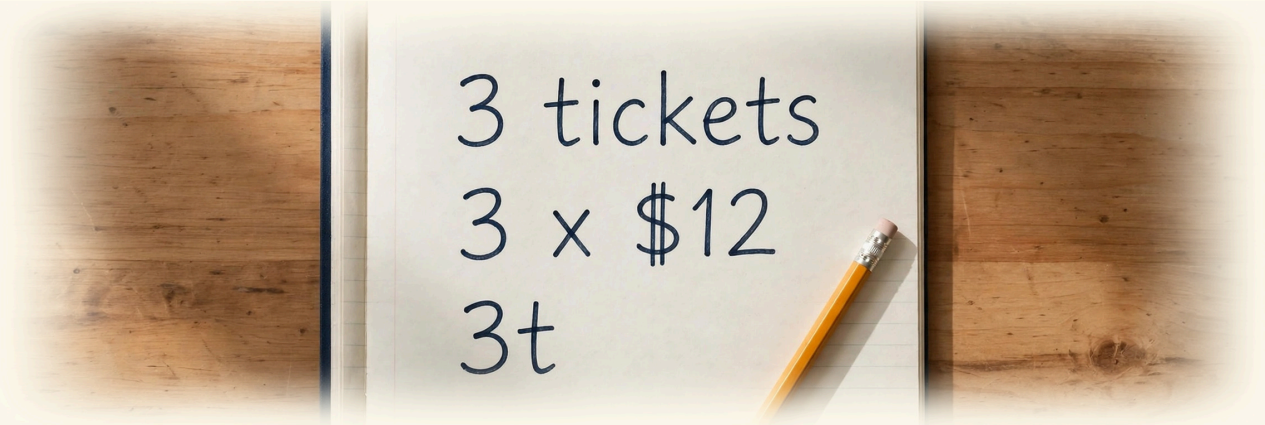
Difficulty level: Intermediate

Mathematics: Grades 4-6

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Overview of the concept

This is how you turn words into maths symbols, like writing down the cost of three tickets before you work out the total, which is how a story problem first gets written down. Before you can calculate anything, the story has to become maths, with letters and numbers standing for the things in the story. Writing the expression is that first translation, and it captures the problem exactly as the words describe it. Once it is written down, the calculation can follow, but the expression is what makes the problem solvable.



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Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q Write an expression for "add 8 and 12, then multiply by 3", and work it out.

SOLUTION

This is a writing expressions question, so the one rule to remember is: the words "then" mark the order, and the first part has to be held together in brackets before the second operation acts on it. Without the brackets the multiply would only hit the last number.

"Add 8 and 12" is (8 + 12), then "multiply by 3" gives (8 + 12) × 3.

Work it out: 8 + 12 = 20, and 20 × 3 = 60

EXAMPLE 2

Q Write an expression for "subtract 4 from 10, then divide by 3", and work it out.

SOLUTION

This is the same question type with a division after the subtraction: the subtraction is one step that has to finish first, so it goes in brackets.

"Subtract 4 from 10" is (10 – 4), then "divide by 3" gives (10 – 4) ÷ 3.

Work it out: 10 – 4 = 6, and 6 ÷ 3 = 2

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Practice questions

1 How would you write 'multiply 4 by the sum of 9 and 5' as an expression?

- **A** 4 × 9 + 5
- **B** 4 × (9 + 5)
- **C** (4 + 9) × 5
- **D** 4 + 9 × 5

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2 Give an expression for 'divide 100 by 5, then add 13'.

- **A** 100 ÷ (5 + 13)
- **B** 100 ÷ 5 + 13
- **C** 100 ÷ 5 × 13
- **D** 100 − 5 + 13

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3 Write 'double the difference of 18 and 11' as an expression.

- **A** $2 \times 18 - 11$
- **B** $2 + (18 - 11)$
- **C** $18 - 11 \times 2$
- **D** $2 \times (18 - 11)$

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4 Write the expression $(15 - 7) \times 4$ in words.

- **A** Subtract 7 from 15, then multiply by 4
- **B** Multiply 15 by 4, then subtract 7
- **C** Subtract 4 from 15, then multiply by 7
- **D** Add 7 to 15, then multiply by 4

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5 Write the expression $36 \div (2 + 4)$ in words.

- **A** Divide 36 by 2, then add 4
- **B** Divide 36 by the difference of 2 and 4
- **C** Divide 36 by the sum of 2 and 4
- **D** Multiply 36 by the sum of 2 and 4

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6 Give an expression for 'multiply 6 by 7, then subtract the product of 3 and 4'.

- **A** $6 \times 7 + 3 \times 4$
- **B** $6 \times 7 - 3 \times 4$
- **C** $6 \times (7 - 3) \times 4$
- **D** $3 \times 4 - 6 \times 7$

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7 Sam earns $12 per hour. He works 8 hours on Saturday and 5 hours on Sunday. Give an expression for his total earnings for the weekend.

- **A** 12 × 8 + 5
- **B** 12 × (8 + 5)
- **C** 12 + (8 + 5)
- **D** 12 × 8 × 5

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8 Use x for the number. Write 'seven more than twice a number' as an expression.

- **A** 2x + 7
- **B** 7x + 2
- **C** 2(x + 7)
- **D** 2x – 7

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9 A ticket costs $12. If you buy n tickets, how much will it cost? Write an expression using n.

- A 12n
- B n + 12
- C 12 ÷ n
- D n ÷ 12

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10 Sarah has $50. She buys m markers at $2 each. Write an expression for how much money she has left.

- A 2m − 50
- B 50 + 2m
- C 50 ÷ 2m
- D 50 − 2m

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ANSWER KEY

1. $4 \times (9 + 5)$

2. $100 \div 5 + 13$

3. $2 \times (18 - 11)$

4. Subtract 7 from 15, then multiply by 4

5. Divide 36 by the sum of 2 and 4

6. $6 \times 7 - 3 \times 4$

7. $12 \times (8 + 5)$

8. $2x + 7$

9. $12n$

10. $50 - 2m$

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