

Helping Your Child with Addition & Subtraction

Number · Prep to Year 6 · Australian Curriculum Mathematics

Addition and **subtraction** are two of the most important skills in primary school maths. Your child does not just memorise answers — they learn **strategies**: flexible ways to work with numbers mentally. These strategies may look different from the way you were taught, but they build a deeper understanding of how numbers work. This resource explains each strategy so you can support your child at home.

Year level	What your child learns	What this looks like
Prep	Combining and separating groups Your child acts out addition and subtraction with objects. addition — putting groups together (combine) subtraction — taking some away or finding the difference subitise — recognise how many without counting (e.g. see ●●● and know it's 3) part-part-whole — knowing that $5 = 3 + 2$, or $5 = 4 + 1$, etc.	Use objects: 3 apples + 2 apples. "How many altogether?" Take 2 away: 'How many are left?' Hold up fingers: 'Can you show me 5 another way?'
Year 1	Adding and subtracting within 20 Your child adds and subtracts numbers up to 20 using: count on — start at the bigger number and count up (e.g. $8 + 3$: start at 8, count 9, 10, 11) count back — start at the bigger number and count back (e.g. $11 - 3$: start at 11, count 10, 9, 8) doubles — e.g. $6 + 6 = 12$; $7 + 7 = 14$ near doubles — e.g. $6 + 7 = \text{double } 6 + 1 = 13$	Use a number line drawn on paper. Start at 8, count on 5. "Where did you land?" Practice doubles: 'If $5 + 5 = 10$, what is $5 + 6$?'
Year 2	Adding and subtracting two-digit numbers Your child writes and solves number sentences like $34 + 25 = \square$ bridging to 10 — break a number to make a friendly 10: e.g. $8 + 5 = 8 + 2 + 3 = 10 + 3 = 13$ They use part-part-whole diagrams: whole: 47 parts: 40 and 7 They also check: if $34 + 25 = 59$, then $59 - 25 = 34$	"What is $27 + 8$?" Bridge to 10: $27 + 3 = 30$, then $+ 5 = 35$. "Can you check your answer by subtracting?"
Year 3	Place value strategies for larger numbers Your child adds and subtracts 2- and 3-digit numbers. split strategy — split both numbers into hundreds, tens and ones: $247 + 136$: $(200+100) + (40+30) + (7+6)$ $= 300 + 70 + 13 = 383$ jump strategy — start with one number, jump in chunks: $247 + 136$: $247 \rightarrow 347 \rightarrow 377 \rightarrow 383$ compensation — round then adjust: $247 + 136 \approx 247 + 140 - 4 = 383$	"Try adding $364 + 225$ using the split strategy." Break apart: $300+200$, $60+20$, $4+5$. Add each part, then combine. "Which strategy feels easiest?"
Year 4	Efficient strategies and larger numbers Your child chooses the most efficient strategy for each problem — no calculator needed. estimation — round numbers to check if an answer is reasonable e.g. $487 + 312 \approx 500 + 300 = 800$, so answer near 800 They also work with money: $\\$8.45 + \\3.75: use bridging to reach $\\$12.00 + \\0.20 Students choose written or mental strategies depending on the numbers.	Give a 3-digit + 3-digit problem. 'Estimate the answer first.' 'Which strategy will you choose?' 'Is your answer close to the estimate?'

Year 5	Adding and subtracting fractions Your child adds and subtracts fractions with the same or related denominators. same denominator: just add the numerators e.g. $\frac{2}{5} + \frac{1}{5} = \frac{3}{5}$ related denominators: convert first e.g. $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} \rightarrow \frac{2}{4} + \frac{1}{4} = \frac{3}{4}$ They also check reasonableness: $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4}$ must be less than 1 whole ✓	"What is $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{3}$?" (Same denominator — just add tops.) "What is $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4}$?" Hint: change $\frac{1}{2}$ into $\frac{2}{4}$ first. "Is the answer bigger or smaller than 1?"
Year 6	Adding and subtracting decimals Your child adds and subtracts decimals using place value — tenths line up with tenths, hundredths with hundredths. e.g. $3.47 + 1.6$: 3.47 $+ 1.60$ $= 5.07$ They use estimation to check: $3.47 \approx 3.5$, and $1.6 \approx 2$, so answer ≈ 5.5 ✓ They also solve real problems: change from \$20.00, totalling a shopping docket.	Use a supermarket receipt. "Add up these three items." "What change would you get from \$20?" "Estimate first — is your answer reasonable?"

★ **Three strategies for addition — all give the same answer! (Example: $47 + 36$)**

Split strategy	Jump strategy	Compensation
Split both numbers into tens and ones: $47 = 40 + 7$ $36 = 30 + 6$ Add the tens: $40 + 30 = 70$ Add the ones: $7 + 6 = 13$ Combine: $70 + 13 = 83$ ✓	Start at 47. Jump in tens, then ones: $47 \rightarrow 57 \rightarrow 67 \rightarrow 77$ $(+10) (+10) (+10)$ Then add 6 ones: $77 \rightarrow 83$ $(+6)$ Answer: 83 ✓	Round 36 up to 40 (easier to add): $47 + 40 = 87$ But we added 4 too many, so subtract 4: $87 - 4 = 83$ ✓

Subtraction tip: To solve $83 - 47$, try counting UP from 47 to 83: $47 \rightarrow 50 (+3) \rightarrow 80 (+30) \rightarrow 83 (+3) = 36$. This 'finding the difference' strategy avoids tricky borrowing!

Helping at Home — Addition & Subtraction

Worked examples and questions to ask · Prep to Year 6

How it works — worked examples

Year 2 — Bridging to 10

Calculate $8 + 7$ using bridging to 10

8 needs 2 more to reach 10.
Split 7 into $2 + 5$.
 $8 + 2 = 10$
 $10 + 5 = 15$

Number sentence:
 $8 + 7$
 $= 8 + 2 + 5$
 $= 10 + 5$

Answer:
15

Key idea: Making a 10 first makes adding much easier — 10 + something is simple!

Year 3 — Split strategy for 3-digit addition

Calculate $364 + 253$

		Step
364	Hundreds 300 Tens 60 Ones 4	Split 364 into $300 + 60 + 4$
253	Hundreds 200 Tens 50 Ones 3	Split 253 into $200 + 50 + 3$
Add	$300 + 200 = 500$ $60 + 50 = 110$ $4 + 3 = 7$	Add hundreds, tens, ones separately
=	$500 + 110 + 7 = 617$	Combine all parts → Answer: 617

Year 6 — Subtracting decimals

You buy items costing \$12.75 and \$4.60. You pay with \$20.00.

How much change do you get?

Step 1: Add the two items	$\$12.75$ $+ \$4.60$ $= \$17.35$ (line up decimal points!)
Step 2: Subtract from \$20.00	$\$20.00$ $- \$17.35$ $= \$2.65$
Estimate check	$\$13 + \$5 = \$18$, so change $\approx \$2$. Answer $\$2.65$ ✓

Questions to ask your child

You do not need to know the answer. Ask and let your child explain!

P Prep

- How many altogether? (combine two groups of objects)
- If we take 2 away, how many are left?
- Can you show me 5 in two different ways?

1 Year 1

- Count on from 7 — add 4. Where do you land?
- What is double 6? What about double 6 plus 1?
- If $8 + 4 = 12$, what is $12 - 4$?

2 Year 2

- What is $27 + 8$? Can you bridge to 10?
- Check your addition by subtracting your answer.
- Write a number sentence for: you had 34 stickers, gave away 15. How many left?

3 Year 3

- Use the split strategy to add $246 + 138$.
- Try the jump strategy: 246, then jump by 100, then 30, then 8.
- Which strategy do you prefer? Why?

4 Year 4

- Estimate $487 + 315$ before you calculate. Is your answer close?
- How would you calculate $\$6.95 + \3.80 in your head?
- What strategy works best for these numbers?

5 Year 5

- What is $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{2}$? (Change $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{4}$ first.)
- Is $\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{3}$ more or less than 1 whole?
- Write two fractions that add to make exactly 1.

6 Year 6

- Line up $4.75 + 3.6$ with decimal points together. Add.
- Estimate: is $4.75 + 3.6$ closer to 8 or 9?
- You spend \$14.35. What change from \$20.00?

Things to try at home

Any age: Count objects in two groups, then combine and count the total. Try it with spoons, coins, or buttons.	Year 1–2: Play 'make 10': hold up fingers, ask your child how many more are needed to make 10. Fast and fun!
Year 2–3: Shop with coins. Add up prices in your head. 'How much for the apple and the banana together?'	Year 3: Use the split strategy to add your street number to a friend's street number. Who lives further from zero?
Year 4: Read your electricity or water bill together. Add up amounts. Use estimation to check.	Year 5–6: Cook a recipe together — double or halve the ingredient amounts. Add or subtract fractions/decimals.

Key words to learn together

addition: combining two or more numbers to find a total (also called sum)	subtraction: finding the difference between two numbers, or taking away
subitise: recognise how many objects there are without counting one by one	part-part-whole: showing how a number is made from two parts: e.g. $7 = 4 + 3$
count on: start at the bigger number and count up to add	bridging to 10: break a number apart to make a 10, then add the rest
split strategy: break numbers into hundreds, tens and ones, add each part separately	jump strategy: start at one number and jump forward in tens then ones
compensation: round a number to make it easier, then adjust the answer	estimation: a careful guess at the answer, used to check if your answer is reasonable
number sentence: a maths statement using numbers and symbols: e.g. $34 + 25 = 59$	inverse operations: addition and subtraction undo each other: $8 + 5 = 13$, so $13 - 5 = 8$