

Comparing and Ordering Whole Numbers

To compare two numbers, line up their place values and look at the leftmost digit that is different. That tells you which one is bigger.

| Symbol | Reads as | Example |
|--------|----------------|-----------|
| < | “less than” | 234 < 432 |
| > | “greater than” | 580 > 508 |
| = | “equal to” | 700 = 700 |



Key Concepts

- To compare two whole numbers, line them up by place value (ones under ones, tens under tens, and so on).
- Start at the *left* (the biggest place). Compare digit by digit until you find the first place where they differ.
- The number with the bigger digit in that place is the greater number. If every digit matches, the numbers are equal.
- The symbols open toward the bigger number: < opens to the right (smaller on the left), > opens to the left (bigger on the left). A handy way to remember: think of the symbol as a hungry mouth that always points at the larger number.

Worked Examples

① Compare 462 and 472 using <, >, or =.

👉 Line them up by place value: hundreds are 4 and 4 (a tie), so move on. Tens are 6 and 7 — different! 7 is bigger than 6, so 472 is the larger number. Once you know which one is bigger, the symbol is easy: the opening points at the bigger number, so $462 < 472$.

💡 **Answer:** $462 < 472$

② Order from least to greatest: 809, 890, 798.

👉 Compare the hundreds first. 809 and 890 both have 8 hundreds, but 798 only has 7 hundreds, so 798 is the smallest. Now compare 809 and 890 at the next place: tens are 0 and 9. Nine is bigger, so 890 is the largest. Order from smallest to largest: 798, then 809, then 890.

💡 **Answer:** $798 < 809 < 890$

③ Use <, >, or =: 3,054 ___ 3,540.

👉 The thousands place is 3 in both, so that is a tie. Move to the hundreds: 0 in the first number and 5 in the second. Since 5 is bigger, 3,540 is the larger number. Point the symbol's opening at 3,540.




💡 **Answer:** $3,054 < 3,540$

 **Practice Problems**

Compare using $<$, $>$, or $=$, or order from least to greatest.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1. $356 \square 365$ | _____ | 7. $2,300 \square 2,030$ | _____ |
| 2. $812 \square 812$ | _____ | 8. $8,007 \square 8,070$ | _____ |
| 3. $1,204 \square 1,042$ | _____ | 9. Order: 7,012, 7,102, 7,021 | _____ |
| 4. $6,789 \square 6,798$ | _____ | 10. Order: 3,999, 4,000, 3,909 | _____ |
| 5. Order: 432, 423, 342 | _____ | 11. $500 \square 499$ | _____ |
| 6. Order: 905, 950, 590 | _____ | 12. $1,100 \square 1,010$ | _____ |

Study Tips

-  Always start at the *biggest* place (the leftmost digit). Comparing from the right is a common mistake that leads to wrong answers.
-  Use the “mouth” trick: the symbol $<$ or $>$ opens toward the bigger number. It is the hungry mouth eating the larger meal.
-  Stack the numbers vertically when in doubt — when the place values line up neatly, the comparison becomes obvious.

 **Word Problems**

1. Maya’s school has 1,245 students and the school across town has 1,254 students. Which school has more students?

Answer: _____

2. Order these heights from shortest to tallest: 1,305 ft, 1,530 ft, 1,350 ft.

Answer: _____

Answer Key — with Friendly Explanations**Practice Problems**

1. Hundreds match at 3, tens are 5 vs 6 — 6 wins, so $356 < 365$.
💡 **Answer:** $<$
2. All three digits match: 8, 1, 2 in both numbers. They are equal.
💡 **Answer:** $=$
3. Thousands tie at 1, but hundreds are 2 vs 0. Since $2 > 0$, 1,204 is bigger.
💡 **Answer:** $>$
4. Thousands and hundreds tie. Compare tens: 8 vs 9. 9 wins, so $6,789 < 6,798$.
💡 **Answer:** $<$
5. Hundreds: all 3 or 4. 342 has 3 hundreds (smallest). Of 432 and 423, the tens are 3 vs 2, so 423 comes before 432.
💡 **Answer:** $342 < 423 < 432$
6. Hundreds: 9, 9, 5. So 590 is smallest. Of 905 and 950, the tens are 0 vs 5, so $905 < 950$.
💡 **Answer:** $590 < 905 < 950$
7. Thousands tie at 2, hundreds are 3 vs 0. Since $3 > 0$, $2,300 > 2,030$.
💡 **Answer:** $>$
8. Thousands and hundreds tie at 8, 0. Compare tens: 0 vs 7. 7 wins, so $8,007 < 8,070$.
💡 **Answer:** $<$
9. All three start with 7 in thousands and 0 or 1 in hundreds. 7,012 has 0 hundreds (smallest). 7,021 and 7,102 differ in hundreds (0 vs 1), so $7,021 < 7,102$.
💡 **Answer:** $7,012 < 7,021 < 7,102$
10. 3,999 and 3,909 have 3 thousands; 4,000 has 4 (the largest). Between 3,999 and 3,909, hundreds tie at 9, tens are 9 vs 0, so $3,909 < 3,999$.
💡 **Answer:** $3,909 < 3,999 < 4,000$
11. Hundreds: 5 vs 4. Since $5 > 4$, $500 > 499$.
💡 **Answer:** $>$
12. Thousands tie at 1, hundreds are 1 vs 0. Since $1 > 0$, 1,100 is bigger.
💡 **Answer:** $>$

Word Problems

1. Match thousands (1) and hundreds (2), then compare tens: 4 vs 5. The school with 1,254 has more students.
💡 **Answer:** *the school with 1,254 students*
2. All three share 1,3 in thousands and hundreds. The difference is in the tens place: 0, 5, 3. Shortest to tallest: 1,305, 1,350, 1,530.
💡 **Answer:** $1,305 < 1,350 < 1,530$

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