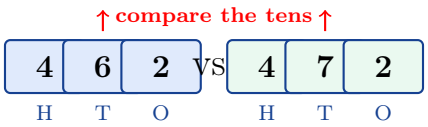
Comparing and Ordering Whole Numbers

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

1. To compare two whole numbers, line them up by place value (ones under ones, tens under tens, and so on).

2. Start at the *left* (the biggest place). Compare digit by digit until you find the first place where they differ.

3. The number with the bigger digit in that place is the greater number. If every digit matches, the numbers are equal.

4. 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 ☐ 365 _____

2. 812 ☐ 812 _____

3. 1,204 ☐ 1,042 _____

4. 6,789 ☐ 6,798 _____

5. Order: 432, 423, 342 _____

6. Order: 905, 950, 590 _____

7. 2,300 ☐ 2,030 _____

8. 8,007 ☐ 8,070 _____

9. Order: 7,012, 7,102, 7,021 _____

10. Order: 3,999, 4,000, 3,909 _____

11. 500 ☐ 499 _____

12. 1,100 ☐ 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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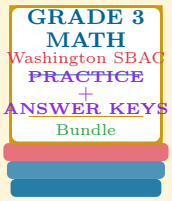

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