

Word Problems — Addition and Subtraction

Word problems are stories you turn into a number sentence. The key is to slow down, find the numbers, and figure out whether the story is asking you to combine (add) or compare/take away (subtract).


| Look for these words | Operation |
|---|-----------|
| in all, total, altogether, sum, combined | Add |
| how many left, how many more, fewer, difference | Subtract |

Key Concepts

1. Read the problem carefully. **Underline** the numbers and **circle** the question — those are the parts that matter.
2. Decide whether you are *combining* amounts (addition) or *taking away* / *comparing* amounts (subtraction). The clue words in the table above are great hints.
3. Write a number sentence before you start computing. A clear sentence like “ $326 + 185 = ?$ ” keeps you from getting confused mid-problem.
4. For two-step problems, do one operation at a time. Don’t try to combine the steps in your head — it almost always backfires.


Worked Examples

① A farm has 326 chickens and 185 ducks. How many birds are there in all?

 The phrase “in all” tells you to combine. Write the number sentence: $326 + 185 = ?$. Add column by column: ones $6 + 5 = 11$ (write 1, carry 1); tens $1 + 2 + 8 = 11$ (write 1, carry 1); hundreds $1 + 3 + 1 = 5$. Result: 511 birds.


 **Answer:** 511 birds

② Jake has 450 trading cards. He gives 178 cards away. How many does he have left?

 “Gives away” and “how many left” both point to subtraction. Set up $450 - 178$. Ones: $0 - 8$ won’t work, borrow from tens (which are also 0), so borrow from hundreds first. End up with $10 - 8 = 2$, $4 - 7 \rightarrow$ borrow $\rightarrow 14 - 7 = 7$, then $3 - 1 = 2$. Jake has 272 cards left.

 **Answer:** 272 cards

③ A school needs 600 books. Monday 215 books arrived. Tuesday 189 books arrived. How many more books are still needed?

 Two steps. *Step 1:* add the books that came in. $215 + 189 = 404$. *Step 2:* subtract from the target. $600 - 404 = 196$. The school still needs 196 more books. Notice how breaking the problem into two parts kept it simple.

 **Answer:** 196 more books

Practice Problems

Solve each word problem. Show your number sentence.

1. Sara has 248 beads. She buys _____
175 more. How many in all?
2. A jar has 500 marbles. Tom _____
takes 213. How many are left?
3. A park has 364 oak trees and _____
257 pine trees. Total trees?
4. Mia scored 425. Leo scored _____
389. How many more did Mia score?
5. There are 312 red and 198 _____
blue balloons. Total balloons?
6. A library has 780 books. _____
346 are checked out. How many left?
7. Day 1: 145 tickets. Day 2: 237 _____
tickets. How many in all?
8. Ben picked 460 apples. He _____
ate 28 and gave 135 away. Left?
9. Class A: 124 books. Class B: _____
198 books. How many more in B?
10. A store had 900 toys. Sold _____
345 Mon and 278 Tue. Left?
11. Ava has 256 stickers. She gets _____
148 more. Then gives 100 away. How many left?
12. A bus holds 72 people. 38 got _____
on. How many empty seats?

Study Tips

- 👉 Read the problem twice. The first read tells you the story; the second tells you what to do.
- 👉 For two-step problems, write down your answer to step 1 *before* starting step 2. Trying to keep numbers in your head usually goes wrong.
- 👉 Always re-read the question at the end and check that your answer matches. “How many *more*?” wants a difference; “how many *in all*?” wants a total.

Word Problems











1. A pet store has 218 goldfish and 175 tropical fish. Last week they sold 126 fish. How many fish does the store have now?

Answer: _____



2. There are 540 students at Maple School and 475 students at Cedar School. How many more students does Maple School have?

Answer: _____

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

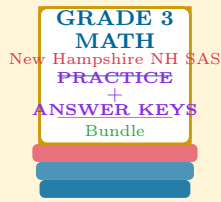
1. "In all" = add. $248 + 175 = 423$ beads.
 **Answer:** 423 beads
2. "Left" = subtract. $500 - 213 = 287$ marbles.
 **Answer:** 287 marbles
3. "Total" = add. $364 + 257 = 621$ trees.
 **Answer:** 621 trees
4. "How many more" = subtract. $425 - 389 = 36$ points.
 **Answer:** 36 more points
5. "Total" = add. $312 + 198 = 510$ balloons.
 **Answer:** 510 balloons
6. "How many left" = subtract. $780 - 346 = 434$ books.
 **Answer:** 434 books
7. "In all" = add. $145 + 237 = 382$ tickets.
 **Answer:** 382 tickets
8. Two steps. He removed $28 + 135 = 163$ apples; then $460 - 163 = 297$ apples left.
 **Answer:** 297 apples
9. "How many more in B" = subtract. $198 - 124 = 74$ books.
 **Answer:** 74 more books in B
10. Two steps. Total sold: $345 + 278 = 623$. Left: $900 - 623 = 277$ toys.
 **Answer:** 277 toys
11. Two steps. After buying: $256 + 148 = 404$. After giving: $404 - 100 = 304$ stickers.
 **Answer:** 304 stickers
12. "Empty seats" = subtract. $72 - 38 = 34$ empty seats.
 **Answer:** 34 empty seats

Word Problems

1. Two-step. Total fish = $218 + 175 = 393$, minus sold: $393 - 126 = 267$.
 **Answer:** 267 fish
2. One-step comparison. $540 - 475 = 65$. Maple has 65 more students.
 **Answer:** 65 more students

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