

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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