

Negative Exponents and Negative Bases

Name: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____ / 18

Quick Review and Helpful Hints

A negative *exponent* means take the reciprocal: $x^{-n} = \frac{1}{x^n}$. A negative *base* needs care: an *even* exponent gives a positive result, an *odd* exponent gives a negative result. Watch the parentheses: $(-2)^4$ has base -2 , but -2^4 means $-(2^4)$.

▶ **Example:** Evaluate $(-2)^{-3}$. **Work:** First handle the negative exponent: $(-2)^{-3} = \frac{1}{(-2)^3}$. Now $(-2)^3 = -8$ (odd power of a negative base is negative). So the value is $\frac{1}{-8} = -\frac{1}{8}$. **★ Answer:** $-\frac{1}{8}$

Practice Problems

Evaluate each expression. Watch the parentheses carefully.

- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| 1. $(-3)^2$ | _____ | 8. $(-4)^2$ | _____ |
| 2. $(-3)^3$ | _____ | 9. -3^2 | _____ |
| 3. -2^4 | _____ | 10. $(-10)^{-2}$ | _____ |
| 4. $(-2)^4$ | _____ | 11. $(-1)^{10}$ | _____ |
| 5. $(-5)^{-2}$ | _____ | 12. $(-2)^5$ | _____ |
| 6. $(-2)^{-3}$ | _____ | 13. $(-6)^{-1}$ | _____ |
| 7. $(-1)^7$ | _____ | 14. $(-3)^{-2}$ | _____ |

Word Problems

15. A temperature change is modeled by $(-2)^3$ degrees. What is its value? _____
16. In a repeating pattern, a term equals $(-1)^{20}$. What is its value? _____
17. A value in a formula is $(-5)^{-2}$. Write it as a fraction. _____
18. A spreadsheet compares two formulas, -4^2 and $(-4)^2$, for a sign-error check. Find both values and explain why they differ. _____



Answer Keys

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1. 9 | 7. -1 | 13. $-\frac{1}{6}$ |
| 2. -27 | 8. 16 | 14. $\frac{1}{9}$ |
| 3. -16 | 9. -9 | 15. -8 |
| 4. 16 | 10. $\frac{1}{100}$ | 16. 1 |
| 5. $\frac{1}{25}$ | 11. 1 | 17. $\frac{1}{25}$ |
| 6. $-\frac{1}{8}$ | 12. -32 | 18. -16 and 16 |

Step-by-Step Explanations

1. Start by naming the process: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An even power makes a negative base positive: $(-3)^2 = (-3)(-3) = 9$. So the final answer is 9.

2. A good way to think about this is: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An odd power keeps the result negative: $(-3)^3 = -27$. So the final answer is -27.

3. Step by step: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is No parentheses, so the power touches only the 2: $-2^4 = -(16) = -16$. So the final answer is -16.

4. Take it one move at a time: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is The parentheses include the sign, and an even power is positive: $(-2)^4 = 16$. Notice how this differs from -2^4 ! So the final answer is 16.

5. Start by naming the process: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is Flip for the negative exponent, then square (even power stays positive): $(-5)^{-2} = \frac{1}{(-5)^2} = \frac{1}{25}$. So the final answer is $\frac{1}{25}$.

6. A good way to think about this is: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is Flip, then cube (odd power stays negative): $(-2)^{-3} = \frac{1}{(-2)^3} = \frac{1}{-8} = -\frac{1}{8}$. So the final answer is $-\frac{1}{8}$.

7. Step by step: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An odd power of -1 stays -1. So the final answer is -1.

8. Take it one move at a time: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An even power of a negative base is positive, so $(-4)^2 = 16$. So the final answer is 16.

9. Start by naming the process: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is Without parentheses this means $-(3^2) = -9$ - the sign is not squared. So the final answer is -9.

10. A good way to think about this is: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is Flip and square: $(-10)^{-2} = \frac{1}{(-10)^2} = \frac{1}{100}$. So the final answer is $\frac{1}{100}$.

11. Step by step: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An even power of -1 is 1. So the final answer is 1.

12. Take it one move at a time: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An odd power of a negative base is negative: $(-2)^5 = -32$. So the final answer is -32.

13. Start by naming the process: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is The reciprocal of -6 is $-\frac{1}{6}$, so $(-6)^{-1} = -\frac{1}{6}$. So the final answer is $-\frac{1}{6}$.

14. A good way to think about this is: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is Flip and square (even power, positive): $(-3)^{-2} = \frac{1}{(-3)^2} = \frac{1}{9}$. So the final answer is $\frac{1}{9}$.

15. Step by step: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An odd power of a negative base is negative, so $(-2)^3 = -8$ degrees. So the final answer is -8.

16. Take it one move at a time: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is An even power of -1 is 1, so this pattern term equals 1. So the final answer is 1.

17. Start by naming the process: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is Flip, then square: $(-5)^{-2} = \frac{1}{(-5)^2} = \frac{1}{25}$. So the final answer is $\frac{1}{25}$.

18. A good way to think about this is: Read what the problem is asking, choose the matching rule, write the setup, and then simplify one step at a time. The setup/work is Without parentheses, $-4^2 = -(16) = -16$; with them, $(-4)^2 = 16$. The parentheses decide whether the sign is squared. So the final answer is -16 and 16.



Keep Building MTEL Elementary Mathematics (68) Skills

Recommended Effortless Math resources



MTEL Elementary Mathematics (68) Practice Workbook 2026



Scan Me
Download Instantly

STUDENT FAVORITE - MTEL Elementary Mathematics (68) for Beginners



MTEL Elementary Mathematics (68) for Beginners 2026

Step-by-step lessons, topic practice, and full review support for students who want a calm path through MTEL Elementary Mathematics (68) preparation.

A strong companion for self-study, tutoring, homework, and targeted review.

PDF Edition



Scan Me
Download Instantly