

# 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. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">9</span>                         | 7. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">-1</span>                          | 13. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;"><math>-\frac{1}{6}</math></span> |
| 2. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">-27</span>                       | 8. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">16</span>                          | 14. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;"><math>\frac{1}{9}</math></span>  |
| 3. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">-16</span>                       | 9. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">-9</span>                          | 15. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">-8</span>                        |
| 4. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">16</span>                        | 10. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;"><math>\frac{1}{100}</math></span> | 16. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">1</span>                         |
| 5. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;"><math>\frac{1}{25}</math></span> | 11. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">1</span>                          | 17. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;"><math>\frac{1}{25}</math></span> |
| 6. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;"><math>-\frac{1}{8}</math></span> | 12. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">-32</span>                        | 18. <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">-16 and 16</span>                |

### 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 SSAT Middle-Level Math Skills

Recommended Effortless Math resources



## SSAT Middle Level Math Comprehensive Prep Bundle

Use the complete SSAT Middle-Level Math resource for review, worked examples, extra practice, and test-style questions after each worksheet.



Scan Me  
Download Instantly

## STUDENT FAVORITE - SSAT Middle-Level Math for Beginners



## SSAT Middle-Level Math for Beginners 2026

Step-by-step lessons, topic practice, and full review support for students who want a calm path through SSAT Middle-Level Math preparation.

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

PDF Edition



Scan Me  
Download Instantly