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With LOTS of examples! In Algebra we often have word questions like: On the weekend Sam played 4 more games than Alex did, and together they played 12 games. How many games did Alex play? How do we solve them? The trick is to break the solution into two parts: Turn the English into Algebra. Then use Algebra to solve. Turning English into Algebra To turn the English into Algebra it helps to: Read the whole thing first Do a sketch if possible Assign letters for the values Find or work out formulas You should also write down what is actually being asked for, so you know where you are going and when you have arrived! Also look for key words: When you see Think add, total, sum, increase, more, combined, together, plus, more than + minus, less, difference, fewer, decreased, reduced - multiplied, times, of, product, factor \times divided, quotient, per, out of, ratio, ratio, percent, rate + maximize or minimize geometry formulas Rate, speed distance formulas How long, days, hours, minutes, seconds time Thinking Clearly Some wording can be tricky, making it hard to think "the right way around" such as: \$ Example: Sam has 2 dollars less than Alex. How do we write this as an equation? Let S = dollars Sam has Let A = dollars Alex has Now ... is that: $S - 2 = A$ or should it be: $S = A - 2$ or should it be: $S = 2 - A$ The correct answer is $S = A - 2$ ($S - 2 = A$ is a common mistake, as the question is written "Sam ... 2 less ... Alex") Let D = number of dogs Let C = number of cats Now ... is that: $2D = C$ or should it be: $D = 2C$ Think carefully now! The correct answer is $D = 2C$ ($2D = C$ is a common mistake, as the question is written "twice ... dogs ... cats") Examples Let's start with a really simple example so we see how it's done: Turn the English into Algebra: Sketch: Letters: Use w for width of rectangle: $w = 12m$ Use h for height of rectangle: $h = 5m$ Formula for Area of a Rectangle: $A = w \times h$ We are being asked for the Area. Solve: $A = w \times h = 12 \times 5 = 60 m^2$ The area is 60 square meters. Now let's try the example from the top of the page: Example: Sam and Alex play Tennis. On the weekend Sam played 4 more games than Alex did, and together they played 12 games. How many games did Alex play? Turn the English into Algebra: Letters: Use S for how many games Sam played Use A for how many games Alex played We know that Sam played 4 more games than Alex, so: $S = A + 4$ And we know that together they played 12 games: $S + A = 12$ We are being asked for how many games Alex played: A Solve: Start with: $S + A = 12$ $S = A + 4$, so we can substitute "A + 4" for S : $(A + 4) + A = 12$ Simplify: $2A + 4 = 12$ Subtract 4 from both sides: $2A = 12 - 4$ Simplify: $2A = 8$ Divide both sides by 2: $A = 4$ Which means that Alex played 4 games of tennis. Check: Sam played 4 more games than Alex, so Sam played 8 games. Together they played $8 + 4 = 12$ games. Yes! A slightly harder example: Example: Alex and Sam also build tables. Together they make 10 tables in 12 days. Alex working alone can make 10 in 30 days. How long would it take Sam working alone to make 10 tables? Turn the English into Algebra: Letters: Use a for Alex's work rate Use s for Sam's work rate 12 days of Alex and Sam is 10 tables, so: $12a + 12s = 10$ 30 days of Alex alone is also 10 tables: $30a = 10$ We are being asked how long it would take Sam to make 10 tables. Solve: $30a = 10$, so Alex's rate (tables per day) is: $a = 10/30 = 1/3$ Start with: $12a + 12s = 10$ Put "1/3" for a : $12(1/3) + 12s = 10$ Simplify: $4 + 12s = 10$ Subtract 4 from both sides: $12s = 6$ Divide both sides by 12: $s = 6/12$ Simplify: $s = 1/2$ Which means that Sam's rate is half a table a day (faster than Alex!) So 10 tables would take Sam just 20 days. Should Sam be paid more I wonder? And another "substitution" example: Example: Jenna is training hard to qualify for the National Games. She has a regular weekly routine, training for five hours a day on some days and 3 hours a day on the other days. She trains altogether 27 hours in a seven day week. On how many days does she train for five hours? Letters: The number of "5 hour" days: d The number of "3 hour" days: e We know there are seven days in the week, so: $d + e = 7$ And she trains 27 hours in a week, with d 5 hour days and e 3 hour days: $5d + 3e = 27$ We are being asked for how many days she trains for 5 hours: d Solve: $d + e = 7$ So: $e = 7 - d$ Put that in $5d + 3e = 27$: $5d + 3(7 - d) = 27$ Simplify: $5d + 21 - 3d = 27$ Subtract 21 from both sides: $5d - 3d = 27 - 21 = 6$ Simplify: $2d = 6$ Divide both sides by 2: $d = 3$ The number of "5 hour" days is 3 Check: She trains for 5 hours on 3 days a week, so she must train for 3 hours a day on the other 4 days of the week. 3×5 hours = 15 hours, plus 4×3 hours = 12 hours gives a total of 27 hours Some examples from Geometry: Example: A circle has an area of 12 mm², what is its radius? Letters: Use A for Area: $A = 12$ mm² Use r for radius And the formula for Area is: $A = \pi r^2$ We are being asked for the radius. Solve: We need to rearrange the formula to find the area Start with: $A = \pi r^2$ Swap sides: $\pi r^2 = A$ Divide both sides by π : $r^2 = A / \pi$ Take square root of both sides: $r = \sqrt{A / \pi}$ Now we can use the formula: $r = \sqrt{12 / \pi}$ And we get: $r = 1.954$ (to 3 places) Make a quick sketch: Letters: Use V for Volume Use A for Area Use s for side length of cube Formulas: Volume of a cube: $V = s^3$ Surface area of a cube: $A = 6s^2$ We are being asked for the surface area. Solve: First work out s using the volume formula: Start with: $V = s^3$ Swap sides: $s^3 = V$ Take cube root of both sides: $s = \sqrt[3]{V}$ And we get: $s = \sqrt[3]{125} = 5$ Now we can calculate surface area: Start with: $A = 6s^2$ And we get: $A = 6(5)^2$ $A = 6 \times 25 = 150$ mm² An example about Money: Example: Joel works at the local pizza parlor. When he works overtime he earns 1 1/4 times the normal rate. One week Joel worked for 40 hours at the normal rate of pay and also worked 12 hours overtime. If Joel earned \$660 altogether in that week, what is his normal rate of pay? Letters: Joel's normal rate of pay: $\$N$ per hour Formulas: Joel works for 40 hours at $\$N$ per hour = $\$40N$ When Joel does overtime he earns 1 1/4 times the normal rate = $\$1.25N$ per hour Joel works for 12 hours at $\$1.25N$ per hour = $\$(12 \times 1 1/4N) = \$15N$ And together he earned \$660, so: $\$40N + \$(12 \times 1 1/4N) = \$660$ We are being asked for Joel's normal rate of pay $\$N$. Solve: Start with: $\$40N + \$(12 \times 1 1/4N) = \$660$ Simplify: $\$40N + \$15N = \$660$ Simplify more: $\$55N = \660 Divide both sides by 55: $\$N = \12 So Joel's normal rate of pay is $\$12$ per hour Check Joel's normal rate of pay is $\$12$ per hour, so his overtime rate is $1 1/4 \times \$12$ per hour = $\$15$ per hour. So his normal pay of $40 \times \$12 = \480 , plus his overtime pay of $12 \times \$15 = \180 gives us a total of \$660 More about Money, with these two examples involving Compound Interest This is the compound interest formula: So we will use these letters: Present Value $PV = \$2,000$ Interest Rate (as a decimal): $r = 0.11$ Number of Periods: $n = 3$ Future Value (the value we want): FV We are being asked for the Future Value: FV Solve: Start with: $FV = PV \times (1+r)^n$ Put in what we know: $FV = \$2000 \times (1+0.11)^3$ Calculate: $FV = \$2000 \times 1.367631$ Calculate: $FV = \$2735.26$ (to nearest cent) The compound interest formula: With: Present Value $PV = \$1,000$ Interest Rate (the value we want): r Number of Periods: $n = 9$ Future Value: $FV = \$1,551.33$ We are being asked for the Interest Rate: r Solve: Start with: $FV = PV \times (1+r)^n$ Put in what we know: $\$1,551.33 = \$1000 \times (1+r)^9$ Swap sides: $\$1000 \times (1+r)^9 = \$1,551.33$ Divide both sides by 1000: $(1+r)^9 = \$1,551.33 / \$1,000$ Simplify: $(1+r)^9 = 1.55133$ 9th root: $1+r = 1.55133(1/9)$ Calculate: $1+r = 1.05$ Calculate: $r = 0.05 = 5\%$ So the annual rate of interest is 5% Check: $\$1,000 \times (1.05)^9 = \$1,000 \times 1.55133 = \$1,551.33$ And an example of a Ratio question: Letters: Number of boys now: b Number of girls now: g The current ratio is $4 : 3$ $bg = 43$ Which can be rearranged to $3b = 4g$ At the start of the year there was $(b + 4)$ boys and $(g - 2)$ girls, and the ratio was $2 : 1$ $b + 4g - 2 = 21$ Which can be rearranged to $b + 4 = 2(g - 2)$ We are being asked for how many students there are altogether now: $b + g$ Solve: Start with: $b + 4 = 2(g - 2)$ Simplify: $b + 4 = 2g - 4$ Subtract 4 from both sides: $b = 2g - 8$ Multiply both sides by 3 (so we get $3b$): $3b = 6g - 24$ Remember $3b = 4g$: $4g = 6g - 24$ Subtract $6g$ from both sides: $-2g = -24$ Divide both sides by -2 : $g = 12$ There are 12 girls! And $3b = 4g$, so $b = 4g/3 = 4 \times 12/3 = 16$, so there are 16 boys So there are now 12 girls and 16 boys in the class, making 28 students altogether. Check There are now 16 boys and 12 girls, so the ratio of boys to girls is $16 : 12 = 4 : 3$ At the start of the year there were 20 boys and 10 girls, so the ratio was $20 : 10 = 2 : 1$ And now for some Quadratic Equations: Consecutive means one after the other. And they are even, so they could be 2 and 4, or 4 and 6, etc. We will call the smaller integer n , and so the larger integer must be $n+2$ And we are told the product (what we get after multiplying) is 168, so we know: $n(n + 2) = 168$ We are being asked for the integers Solve: Start with: $n(n + 2) = 168$ Expand: $n^2 + 2n = 168$ Subtract 168 from both sides: $n^2 + 2n - 168 = 0$ That is a Quadratic Equation, and there are many ways to solve it. Using the Quadratic Equation Solver we get -14 and 12 . Check -14 : $-14(-14 + 2) = (-14)(-12) = 168$ YES Check 12 : $12(12 + 2) = 12 \times 14 = 168$ YES So there are two solutions: -14 and -12 is one, 12 and 14 is the other. Note: we could have also tried "guess and check": We could try, say, $n=10$: $10(12) = 120$ NO (too small) Next we could try $n=12$: $12(14) = 168$ YES But unless we remember that multiplying two negatives make a positive we might overlook the other solution of $(-14)(-12)$. And: Let's first make a sketch so we get things right!: Letters: the length of the room: L the width of the room: W the total Area including veranda: A We know: the width of the room is half its length: $W = 1/2L$ the total area is the (room width + 3) times the length: $A = (W+3) \times L = 56$ We are being asked for the length of the room: L Solve: Start with: $(W + 3) \times L = 56$ Substitute $W = 1/2L$: $(1/2L + 3) \times L = 56$ Simplify: $1/2L^2 + 3L = 56$ Multiply all terms by 2: $L^2 + 6L = 112$ Subtract 112 from both sides: $L^2 + 6L - 112 = 0$ This is a quadratic equation, there are many ways to solve it, this time let's use factoring: Start with: $L^2 + 6L - 112 = 0$ Two numbers that multiply to give $ac = -112$, and add to give $b = 6$ are 14 and -8 : $L^2 + 14L - 8L - 112 = 0$ Group: $L(L + 14) - 8(L + 14) = 0$ Group: $(L - 8)(L + 14) = 0$ And so $L = 8$ or -14 There are two solutions to the quadratic equation, but only one of them is possible since the length of the room cannot be negative! So the length of the room is 8 m Check $L = 8$, so $W = 1/2L = 4$ So the area of the rectangle = $(W+3) \times L = 7 \times 8 = 56$ There we are ... I hope these examples will help you get the idea of how to handle word questions. Now how about some practice? Copyright © 2020 MathsFun.com



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