

Introduction to Reading Math Language

The first and most important thing to do before beginning math homework is to review all your class notes and the chapter and be sure to understand what it is you are doing. In other words, read. Be sure you understand the way your math book and math teacher are using words—remember, math may not be in the same English you use every day.

The best way to review is with a study partner from your class, preferably on the same day that you had the class. Review even if you don't have time to begin the problems at the same time.

Objection: I don't have time to do all that! I have to hand in the problems.

Answer: If you have a good foundation (if you've been doing this all long), it should take as little as ten minutes to review. Then do your problems. You'll be surprised at how much faster the problems go, and how many you get right.

Reward: If you understand what you are doing, then doing the problems should not involve a struggle. If you don't understand what you are doing, you will spend a lot of time trying to understand the problem and struggling to make sense of it. It will take longer than if you reviewed, you may not get the right answers, and you may not know how to do these problems on a test.

Connection: As with anything else, once things are in place, it's easy to put them together. If you are trying to make a bookcase and you don't know how to measure and cut wood, how to hammer in nails or put in screws, you will end up with a mess. If you don't know the difference between a teaspoon and a tablespoon, your cake will fall in. If you know all the pieces, putting them together is easier.

How to do the problems:

One step at a time. Do not look for an answer. Do the first step. Remind yourself what the first step is and why you do it this way. Then do the next step. Then the next. Eventually, an answer falls out at the end. If you do it this way, by the time you get to your third or fourth problem, you're flying. When you get to the quiz, you laugh, because you know this stuff.

REMEMBER: Review first! If you try to do something when you don't understand how to do it, you waste time and you don't learn. If you learn how to do each step properly, you won't forget and you'll have a good foundation to go on.