

Effective Word-Problem Solving: Grades 3–5

Sarah R. Powell, Ph.D.

srpowell@austin.utexas.edu @sarahpowellphd

www.sarahpowellphd.com

Three Takeaways About Word Problems

1	
2	
3	

UPS✓

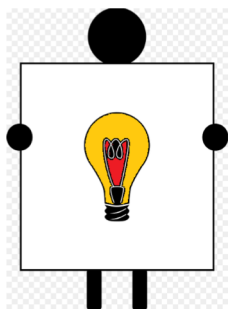


Understand

Read the problem.

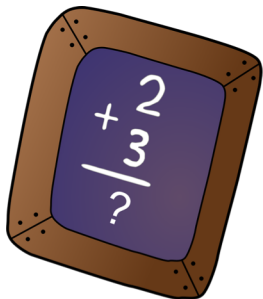
Ask yourself:

- What information do I know?
- What is the question asking me to find?



Plan

Choose a strategy, a tool or an approach.



Solve

Show the math used to solve the problem.



Check

Check your math.

Ask yourself:

- Did I answer the question asked?
- Is my answer reasonable?

Additive Word Problems

Problem type	Definition	Examples			Equation	Graphic organizer
Total		Total unknown	Part unknown			
		Difference unknown	Greater unknown	Lesser unknown		
		End unknown	Start unknown	Change unknown		
Change (increase)						
Change (decrease)						

Additive Word Problems

A.

Megan baked 28 sugar cookies and 24 chocolate chip cookies. Enter the total number of cookies Megan baked in all.

B.

A banana farm received a total of 12 millimeters of rain in March and April. If 11 millimeters of rain fell on the farm in March, how many millimeters of rain fell on the farm in April?

C.

Jana has 107 wooden beads and 68 glass beads. How many more wooden beads than glass beads does Jana have?

D.

Farmer Hank has 6 more cows than horses. He has 4 horses. He also has 9 chickens. How many cows does he have?

Additive Word Problems

E.

A bus had 13 passengers. At the next stop, more passengers got on the bus. Now, there are 28 passengers. How many passengers got on the bus?

F.

Martina had some money. Then, she spent \$42 on a sweater. Now, she has \$13. How much money did she have to start with?

G. The animal park has 12 zebras, 25 monkeys, and some giraffes. If the total number of animals is 50, how many giraffes are there?

H. Mrs. Lanier saved \$617 in January. In February, she spent \$249 of the money she saved. She saved \$291 more in March. How much has Mrs. Lanier saved by the end of March?

Additive Word Problems

TOTAL

DIFFERENCE

CHANGE (INCREASE)

CHANGE (DECREASE)

Multiplicative Word Problems

Problem type	Definition	Examples			Equation	Graphic organizer
Equal Groups		Product unknown	Groups unknown	Number/group unknown		
Comparison		Product unknown				

Multiplicative Word Problems

A.

Ms. Thompson sold 6 cartons of cherries at the Farmers' Market. Each carton holds 25 cherries. How many cherries did she sell?

B.

Jane bought 24 light bulbs. The light bulbs come in packs of 4. How many packs of light bulbs did Jane buy?

C.

Isabella has 2 times as many DVDs as Emma. Emma has 6 DVDs. How many DVDs does Isabella have?

D.

Susan has 3 times as many books as Mary. Mary has 18 books. Which equation can be solved to figure out how many books Susan has?

Multiplicative Word Problems

Equal Groups

Comparison