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Maths Vocabulary List

Words, definitions and activities to develop mathematical vocabulary

Whole School

About Maths Vocabulary

Language is essential to the development of numeracy and mathematical skills at KS1 and KS2. Without a firm grasp on the vocabulary surrounding the subject of mathematics, things can quickly become disjointed and confusing to young minds.

We can expect pupil's use of language to vary in its consistency, but it is worth paying attention to whether they are forming, using and applying the following key features of language development as part of their maths activities.

- Explaining: give a clear and detailed account
- Describing: put observations and experiences into words
- Categorising: classify according to common characteristics
- Linking: Making connections between items or information
- Interpreting: perceive the significance of connections
- Predicting: use available information to estimate outcomes
- Comparing: observe similarities and differences between items and relationships
- Contrasting: observe differences between items or relationships
- Clarifying: make clear their understanding
- Justifying: provide evidence to prove a point
- Elaborating: develop and extend ideas
- Planning: organise ideas, state ways of proceeding
- Raising new questions: pupil ask their own questions and present issues
- Investigating: examine systematically in order to solve a problem
- Evaluating: judge and assess
- Arguing/conceding a case: present opposing/supporting reasons to a statement
- Reasoning: draw conclusions from facts and evidence
- Hypothesising: suggest an explanation for a group of facts
- Reciting: read or chant aloud
- Recounting: share personal experience and findings
- Retelling: share information learned
- Summarising: provide a brief account of the main points

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Maths Vocabulary Games

Here are 10 fun ways to develop KS1 & KS2 maths vocabulary.

1. **Call My Bluff:** This game give the pupils mathematical vocabulary with a choice of definitions. They then decide which choice is correct and use dictionaries to find the correct definition.
2. **Ready, Steady, Look:** Pupils race to find specific words in their dictionaries. This develops skills in the use of dictionaries at the same time as developing their awareness of mathematical vocabulary.
3. **Give us a Clue:** Guess the word from its definition then confirm whether you're right by checking in the dictionary.
4. **Speechless:** Using pencil and paper, but without speaking or writing any words, define a word by drawing examples.
5. **Crosswords:** Design and make crosswords using mathematical vocabulary.
6. **Countdown:** Give anagrams of a word, with its definition, and let the pupils race against the clock to solve the anagram.
7. **Maths Attack:** Develop understanding of particular concepts and specialist vocabulary by asking pupils to develop the definitions and examples given in the dictionary. Produce a fact sheet or poster with as many examples as possible to define the word.
8. **Maths Hangman:** Play the age-old game using only maths vocabulary.
9. **Maths Mastermind:** Challenge pupils to read maths dictionaries to try to find words others might not know. Play a Mastermind-type game with pupils taking turns in the hot seat.
10. **The Yes/No game:** A pupils, or team of pupils, chooses a word and others have to ask questions in an attempt to define the word.

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Make Your Own Maths Dictionary

Pupils are more likely to remember the meanings and terms of mathematical words and phrases if they have constructed the pages for themselves.

Pupils can choose vocabulary which reflects their age and, once made, the dictionary can be accessed and used during maths activities. To make a maths dictionary think carefully about the sort of vocabulary you want pupils to include.

Here's a list of some word suggestions:
acute, addition, angle, area, capacity, centimetres, circle, coordinates, cuboid, cylinders, decimal point, degrees, digit, division, edges, fraction, graphs, hexagon, horizontal, kilograms, length, measure, metre, multiplication, obtuse, octagon, parallel, patterns, perimeter, protractor, rectangle, reflection, rhombus, right-angle, rotation, round, shape, sides, square, subtraction, surfaces, symmetry, time, triangle, vertical, volume, weight, x-axis, y-axis

Further Maths dictionary tips

- Think about variations of words, such as words with the same meaning and words which have more than one meaning (e.g. degrees). You will also need to think about the format and layout of the vocabulary list, and you can discuss possible designs with your class.
- You could make a group vocabulary list with one pupil taking one page. Think about which pupils will make which pages and what terms they are going to include. Once all pupils's efforts have been put together, the finished maths dictionary will make a valuable classroom resource.
- Remember that maths dictionaries only have value in the classroom if pupils are guided to use them well!

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How to Use The Maths Vocabulary List

An essential building block in pupil's understanding of maths is their knowledge of and correct use of the key words and terminology in maths. On the following pages you'll find a list of key words your pupils should be able to understand and explain.

To really embed knowledge of maths terminology however, we recommend you encourage pupils to build their own maths vocabulary list. You can use our list or parts of our list as a prompt to get them started, or hand it out in full and encourage them to add to it.

Pupils are much more likely to remember the meanings and terms of mathematical words and phrases if they have constructed the pages for themselves. They can choose vocabulary which reflects their age, and once made, the dictionary can be accessed and used frequently during maths activities.

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A

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Acute angle	An angle between 0° and 90° (but not 90°).	
Add	To bring two or more numbers (or items) together to make a new total.	
Addend	Any of the numbers that are added together. addend + addend = sum	
Adjacent	Next to each other.	
Adjust	To change a number.	
Algebra	Uses letters (such as x or y) or other symbols in place of values, and then plays with them using special rules.	
am	The half of the day from midnight to midday. What we call morning.	
Analogue clock	A clock or watch is called "analogue" when it has moving hands and (usually) hours marked from 1 to 12 to show you the time.	
Angle	The number of degrees rotated around a point.	
Angle at a point	The complete angle all the way around a point is 360°.	
Angle at a point on a line	The sum of the angles at a point on a line is 180°.	
Anticlockwise	In the opposite direction from the normal direction of travel of the hands of an analogue clock.	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes
Approximation	Not exact, but close enough to be used.	
Array	Items arranged in rows and/or columns.	
Area	The amount of space inside the boundary of a flat (2-D) object.	
Area model	An area model is a rectangular diagram or model used for multiplication and division problems, in which the factors or the quotient and divisor define the length and width of the rectangle.	
Ascending	The arrangement of numbers from smallest to largest.	
Associative law	Where the product of three or more numbers remains the same regardless of how the numbers are grouped. $(\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}) \times \mathbf{c} = \mathbf{a} \times (\mathbf{b} \times \mathbf{c})$	
Axis	A fixed, reference line from which distances are taken.	

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B

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Balance	When both sides have the same quantity or mass.	
Bar chart	A graph drawn using rectangular bars to show how large each value is. The bars can be horizontal or vertical.	
Bar model	A way to pictorially represent a problem using proportionally sized bars.	
Base (2-D shape)	The base of a 2-D shape (e.g. triangle or parallelogram) is the length of one of the sides.	
Base (3-D shape)	The surface a solid object stands on.	
Base 10	Another name for the number system that uses 10 digits (0 to 9) to represent any number.	
Brackets	Symbols used in pairs to group things together.	

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C

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Capacity	The volume of a material (typically liquid or air) held in a vessel or container.	
Cardinal number	A number that shows quantity but not order.	
Centre	The middle point. e.g. middle point of a line or a circle	
Circle	A 2-D shape made by drawing a curve that is always the same distance from a centre.	
Circumference	The distance once around the circle (its perimeter).	
Clockwise	In the direction in which the hands of an analogue clock travel.	
Commutative law	The law that says you can swap numbers around and still get the same answer when you add or when you multiply.	
Composite number	A number with more than two factors.	
Compound shape	A compound, or composite, shape is made up of two or more basic shapes joined together.	
Cone	A solid 3-D object that has a circular base joined to a point by a curved surface. The point is called a vertex.	
Consecutive	Consecutive numbers follow in order without interruption (e.g. 2,3,4,5).	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes
Congruent	Congruent shapes are the same shape and size (equal).	
Coordinates	A set of values that show an exact position. On graphs it is usually a pair of numbers: the first number shows the distance along (x-axis), and the second number shows the distance up or down (y-axis).	
Cube	A box-shaped solid object that has six identical square faces.	
Cube number	The result of multiplying a number by itself and then itself again. Example: $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$, so 27 is a cube number.	
Cuboid	A 3-D figure with six rectangular faces.	
Curved surface	The curved boundary of a 3-D solid. e.g. the curved surface of a cylinder between the two circular ends.	
Cylinder	A solid object with two identical flat ends that are circular or elliptical and one curved surface.	

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D

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Decimal	A number that has a decimal point followed by digits that show the fractional part.	
Decimal point	A point (small dot) used to separate the whole number part from the fractional part of a number.	
Decrease	Make something smaller (in size or quantity).	
Degree (angles)	A measure for angles. There are 360 degrees in a full turn. The symbol for degrees is °	
Degrees (temperature)	A measure of temperature (how hot or cold it is). The symbol for degrees is °. The two most common scales are Celsius (°C) and Fahrenheit (°F).	
Denominator	The bottom number in a fraction. Shows how many equal parts the whole is divided into.	
Descending	The arrangement of numbers from the largest to smallest.	
Difference	By how much a number is bigger or smaller than another.	
Diagonal line	A straight line that slants in any direction except horizontal or vertical.	
Diameter	The distance from one point on a circle through the centre to another point on the circle.	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes
Digit	Any number from 0 to 9 (inclusive).	
Digital clock	A clock or watch that shows the time using numbers, not hands.	
Dimensions	The measurements of a shape (e.g. length, width, height).	
Divide	To split into equal parts or groups.	
Dividend	In division, the number that is divided	
Divisor	The number we divide by.	
Division	Splitting into equal parts or groups. It is the result of 'fair sharing'.	
Distributive Law	Multiplying a group of numbers is the same as multiplying each number individually and then adding the products together. e.g. $27 \times 3 = (20 \times 3) + (7 \times 3)$	
Double	To multiply by 2. To have 2 of something.	
Duration	The length of time that something lasts.	

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E

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Edge	A line segment where two faces meet.	
Enlarge	To make bigger	
Equal	Exactly the same amount or value.	
Equation	A statement of equality between two expressions (e.g. $3 \times 4 = 6 + 6$).	
Equivalence	The state of being equal. Having the same amount or value.	
Equivalent fraction	Fractions with the same value as another, e.g: $\frac{4}{8}$, $\frac{5}{10}$, $\frac{8}{16}$ are all equivalent fractions and all are equal to $\frac{1}{2}$.	
Equilateral triangle	A triangle that has equal length sides and equal internal angles (always 60°)	
Estimate	To find a value that is close enough to the right answer	
Even	Any whole number that can be divided exactly by 2. The last digit is 0, 2, 4, 6 or 8 (but not 0 on its own).	
Exchange	Changing a number for another of equal value. Exchanging is used in subtraction and division.	
Expanded form	Writing a number to show the value of each digit. e.g. 234 = 200 + 30 + 4.	
Expression	Numbers, symbols and operators (such as + and ×) grouped together that show the value of something.	

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F

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Face	One of the flat surfaces of a solid shape. Example: a cube has six faces; each face being a square.	
Factor	Numbers we can multiply together to get another number.	
Factor pair	A set of two numbers that, when multiplied together, produce a specific product.	
Factor tree	A special diagram where we find the factors of a number, then the factors of those numbers, etc, until we can't factor any more. The ends are all the prime factors of the original number.	
Formal written methods	Setting out working in columnar form. e.g. short multiplication or long division.	
Formula	A rule or fact written with mathematical symbols. e.g. area of a rectangle = base × height can be written as $\mathbf{A = b \times h}$	
Fraction	The representation of a quantity as parts of a whole.	
Function machine	Used to apply operations in a given order to a value known as the input.	

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G

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Gattegno chart	A tool to help children appreciate the patterns in the counting structure. e.g.	
Grouping	The number of groups of a given size is found. The number of equal groups of a given size. e.g. 24 can be divided into 6 equal groups of 4.	

100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9
0.01	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09

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H

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Half	One of two equal parts, written as $\frac{1}{2}$	
Halve	To divide by 2. To divide into two equal parts.	
Halfway point	The point that is exactly midway between two other points.	
Height	The distance from top to bottom. Or at right angles from any base to the furthest corner.	
Heptagon	A polygon with seven sides and seven vertices.	
Hexagon	A polygon with six sides and six vertices.	
Highest common factor	The greatest number that is a factor of all your chosen numbers.	
Horizontal	Going side-to-side, like the horizon.	
Hour	A unit of time. One twenty-fourth of a day. 1 hour = 60 minutes	
Hour hand	The short hand on a clock that shows the hours. It goes once around the clock every 12 hours (half a day).	
Hundredth	One part in a hundred equal parts.	

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I

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Improper fraction	A fraction whose numerator is equal to or greater than its denominator.	
Increase	Make something bigger (in size or quantity).	
Indices	The index of a number says how many times to use the number in a multiplication. e.g. 2^3 means $2 \times 2 \times 2$.	
Inequalities	Compares two values, showing if one is, for example less than (<), greater than (>), or equal to (=) another value.	
Integer	A negative or positive whole number.	
Interval	What is between two values or points.	
Inverse	Opposite in effect. The reverse of an operation. E.g. The inverse or opposite of addition is subtraction.	
Irregular	An irregular shape has at least one side different to the other sides, or angle different to the other angles.	
Isosceles triangle	A triangle in which two sides have the same length and consequently two angles are equal.	

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K

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Kite	A quadrilateral with two pairs of equal, adjacent sides whose diagonals consequently intersect at right angles.	

L

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Length	Distance. How far from end to end or from one point to another.	
Like fractions	Fractions with the same denominator.	
Line of symmetry	Another name for reflection symmetry. One half is the reflection of the other half.	
Lowest common multiple	The smallest number that is a multiple of two or more numbers.	

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M

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Mean	The average of a set of numbers. The sum of the values in a set of data divided by the total number of items in that set.	
Metric unit	Unit of measurement in the metric system. Metric units include metre, centimetre, millimetre, kilometre, gram, kilogram, litre and millilitre.	
Minuend	The first number in a subtraction calculation. e.g. in 34 – 9, 34 is the minuend.	
Minus	Subtract. Take away. Decrease by. Also means in a negative direction.	
Minute	A unit of time equal to 60 seconds. There are 60 minutes in an hour.	
Minute hand	The long hand on a clock that points to the minutes.	
Mixed Number	Value made from whole numbers and fractions	
Multiplicand	The number that gets multiplied.	
Multiple	The result of multiplying a number by another number.	
Multiplier	The number that you are multiplying by.	
Multiply	The basic idea of multiplying is repeated addition.	

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N

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Negative number	A number less than zero.	
Net	A pattern that you can cut and fold to make a model of a solid shape.	
$\mathbf{n}^{th}$ term	An expression that gives the value of each term in a sequence when the position number is substituted in.	
Numeral	A symbol or name that stands for a number. e.g. 3, 49 and twelve	
Numerator	The top number in a fraction. Shows how many parts we have.	

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O

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Obtuse angle	An angle between 90° and 180°	
Octagon	A polygon with eight sides and eight angles.	
Odd	Any whole number that cannot be divided exactly by 2. The last digit is 1, 3, 5, 7 or 9.	
Operation	A rule for combining numbers in a set to produce another number also in the set. e.g. addition, subtraction, multiplication and division	
Opposite	Being in a position on the other side; facing.	
Order of operation	The order in which different mathematical operations are applied in a calculation. BIDMAS (Brackets, Indices, Division/ Multiplication, Addition/ Subtraction) or BODMAS (Brackets, Orders, Division/ Multiplication, Addition/ Subtraction) can be used to remember the correct sequence.	
Ordinal number	Describes a position in a number sequence.	

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P

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Parallel lines	Lines on a plane that never meet. They are always the same distance apart.	
Parallelogram	A quadrilateral whose opposite sides are parallel and are equal in length.	
Partial Product	Any of the multiplication results we get leading up to an overall multiplication result.	
Partition	To split a number into component parts.	
Part-whole model	A simple pictorial representation of a problem that shows the relationships between numbers.	
Pentagon	A five-sided polygon (a flat shape with straight sides).	
Percent	Parts per hundred.	
Percentage	The number of parts per 100.	
Perimeter	The distance around a 2-D shape.	
Perpendicular height	A line drawn directly from the base to the other side of a 2-D shape at a right angle to the base of the shape.	
Perpendicular lines	Lines that are at right angles (90°) to each other.	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes
Pictogram	A way of showing data using images. Each image stands for a certain number of things.	
Pie chart	A special chart that uses "pie slices" (sectors) to show relative sizes of data.	
Place holder	Zero is used as a place holder to write a numeral properly.	
Place value	Indicates the position of a numeral	
Place value chart	A table that is used to find the value of each digit in a number based on its position.	
Polygon	A closed 2-D shape made of straight lines.	
Positive number	A number greater than zero.	
Power of ten	Multiplying ten by itself a certain number of times.	
Prime numbers	A whole number greater than 1 that has exactly two factors, itself and 1.	
Product	The answer when two or more values are multiplied together.	
Proper fraction	A fraction where the numerator is less than the denominator.	
Prism	A solid object with two identical ends and flat sides. The shape of the ends give the prism a name .e.g Triangular prism.	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes
Pyramid	A solid object where the sides are triangles which meet at the top (the apex). The base is a polygon (a flat shape with straight sides).	
pm	The half of the day from midday to midnight. What we call afternoon and evening. It comes from the Latin "Post Meridiem" for "after midday".	

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Q

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Quadrants	Any of the 4 areas made when a plane is divided by an x- and y-axis. They are usually numbered I, II, III, and IV.	
Quadrilateral	A flat shape with four straight sides.	
Quarter	One of four equal parts, written as $\frac{1}{4}$	
Quantity value	The value of each partitioned part in a number. e.g. 28 = 20 + 8	
Quotient	The answer after we divide one number by another. dividend ÷ divisor = quotient. e.g. in 18 ÷ 2 = 9, 9 is the quotient.	

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R

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Radius	The distance from the centre to the circumference of a circle.	
Ratio	A ratio shows the relative sizes of two or more values.	
Rectangle	A 4-sided flat shape with straight sides where all interior angles are right angles (90°). Also opposite sides are parallel and of equal length.	
Reflection	An image or shape as it would be seen in a mirror.	
Reflex angle	An angle that is more than 180° but less than 360°	
Regrouping	The process of making groups of tens in calculations. Used in addition and multiplication.	
Remainder	An amount left over after division (happens when the first number does not divide exactly by the other).	
Regular	A regular shape has all sides equal and all angles equal.	
Rhombus	A flat shape with 4 straight sides that are all equal length. Also opposite sides are parallel and opposite angles are equal. It is a type of parallelogram.	
Right angle	A 90° angle	
Right-angled triangle	A triangle that has a right angle (90°)	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes
Roman numerals	Seven letters are used in combination to write numbers: I = 1, V = 5, X = 10, L = 50, C = 100, D = 500, M = 1000	
Rounding	An approximation used to express a number in a more convenient way.	
Rule	A procedure for carrying out a process; in patterns and sequences. A rule describes the pattern, often in words or algebraically, to generate or extend it.	

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S

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Scale factor	For two similar geometric figures, the ratio of corresponding edge lengths.	
Scalene triangle	A triangle with all sides of different lengths. All angles are different, too. No sides are equal and no angles are equal.	
Seconds	A unit of time. There are 60 seconds in 1 minute.	
Sequence	A succession of terms formed according to a rule. There is a definite relation between one term and the next.	
Sharing	Splitting into equal parts or groups.	
Short division	A formal written method of dividing numbers, often used when dividing numbers with up to four-digits by a one-digit number.	
Similar	When one shape can become another after a resize, flip, slide or turn.	
Simplify (fraction)	To simplify (or reduce) a fraction means to make it as simple as possible.	
Skip counting	Counting forwards or backwards by a number other than 1.	
Sphere	A 3-D object shaped like a ball. Every point on the surface is the same distance from the centre.	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes
Square	A flat shape with four equal sides and all interior angles as right angles (90°); it is a quadrilateral and a regular polygon.	
Square number	The number we get after multiplying a whole number by itself. e.g. 4 squared is 4 × 4 = 16	
Straight line	A line that does not curve.	
Subitising	Instantly recognising the number of objects in a small group, without counting.	
Substitute	To put in the place of another; in algebra, substitution means replacing letters with numbers.	
Subtract	To take one number away from another.	
Subtrahend	The second number in a subtraction calculation. The number that is to be subtracted. e.g, in 34 – 9, 9 is the subtrahend.	
Sum	The result of adding two or more numbers. addend + addend = sum	
Symmetrical	When two or more parts are identical, facing each other or around an axis.	
Systematic	Having a pattern or order to the way you work.	

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T

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Tally Chart	A chart that uses marks instead of numbers to represent information, with one vertical mark per unit, and five shown by crossing a fifth line through the first four.	
Temperature	How hot or cold a thing is.	
Tens frame	A two-by-five rectangular frame where counters are placed to illustrate numbers up to ten.	
Tenth	One part in ten equal parts.	
Term	A single number or variable	
Thousandth	One part in a thousand equal parts.	
Total	The result of adding.	
Translation	"Sliding": moving a shape without rotating or flipping it. The shape still looks exactly the same, just in a different place.	
Trapezium	A quadrilateral with exactly one pair of sides parallel.	
Triangle	A polygon with three sides.	
Turn	To rotate about a point, with "one turn" being a full rotation (360°).	

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U

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Unknown	A value that is not yet known.	
Unit fraction	A fraction where the top number (the "numerator") is 1. Example: $\frac{1}{4}$ (one quarter), which has a numerator of 1	
Unit of measurement	A quantity used as a standard of measurement.	
Unlike fractions	Fractions with different denominators	

V

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Value	How much something is worth.	
Vertex (vertices)	The point at which two or more lines intersect.	
Vertical	In an up-down direction or position. Upright.	
Vertically opposite angles	The pair of equal angles between two intersecting straight lines.	
Vinculum	The horizontal line in a fraction separating the numerator from the denominator.	
Volume	The amount of 3-D space something takes up.	

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W

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Week	A time period of 7 days.	
Whole	All of something. Complete.	
Whole number	Any of the numbers (0, 1, 2, 3, ...) There is no fractional or decimal part.	
Width	The distance from side to side.	

X

Concept	Definition	My Notes
x-axis	The line on a graph that runs horizontally (left-right) through zero.	

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Y

Concept	Definition	My Notes
y-axis	The line on a graph that runs vertically (up-down) through zero.	
Year	The period of time it takes Earth to go once around the Sun. There are 365 days in a normal year and 366 days in a leap year.	

Z

Concept	Definition	My Notes
Zero	The whole number between −1 and 1, with the symbol 0. Shows that there is no amount.	

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Concept	Definition	My Notes

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