Finding the Change: How Year 2 Pupils Work Out What's Left from £1

Year 2 pupils learn to work out change from £1 using a practical strategy: counting up from the cost of an item to reach £1, rather than counting backwards. This mirrors real-world shopping and builds on the subtraction skills pupils already know. It's a valuable life skill, especially as fewer families handle coins day-to-day.

What it is

Change from a pound is the money left over when you spend some of your £1 and need to know how much remains. In Year 2, pupils learn this through a counting-up strategy: if a toy costs 30p, they count on from 30p to reach £1 (the target), which tells them they have 70p change. This 'counting up to the next multiple of 10' is often easier for children than counting backwards, because it mirrors how real shopkeepers count money and because counting up feels more natural when you already know small intervals like 5p and 10p.

What happens in lessons

In lessons, pupils work with real UK coins or large visual coins to practise. The teacher might set up a toy shop or café scenario: 'This book costs 45p. Count up to £1 to find the change.' Pupils count: 45p → 50p (that's 5p) → 60p (that's 10p more) → £1 (that's 40p more). So the change is 5p + 10p + 40p = 55p. Children explore different starting prices and repeat this strategy many times until it becomes automatic. Some pupils find it helpful to touch or move coins as they count, while others visualise it; both approaches are valid.

What it means for your child

This skill helps your child understand how money works in real life and builds their confidence with numbers. It also strengthens their mental maths and their understanding of subtraction (which they know as 'taking away' or 'finding the difference'). Learning this through counting up rather than counting backwards often feels less overwhelming, and it's a strategy your child will use far beyond Year 2. It also makes them more independent when buying small items or understanding purchases—a life skill that matters.

How you can help at home

The simplest help is to chat casually about money when you're out. If you're paying for something, you might notice aloud: 'The apple was 35p; let's count up to £1 together.' Let your child lead; there's no pressure to be fast or perfect. At home, you could play a pretend shop together using pocket money or toy coins: one of you is the shopkeeper, the other the customer. Ask questions like 'If this costs 20p, what's the change?' Let your child count on using coins, fingers, or their voice. The goal is for money and numbers to feel familiar and fun. Real-world practice is the best teacher.

Questions parents often ask

Does my child need to know all the coins? By Year 2, pupils learn 1p, 2p, 5p, 10p, 20p and 50p coins, plus £1 and £2 coins. They don't need to memorise them perfectly; familiarity comes through use. **What

if my child finds this hard?** Counting up takes time for some children; keeping coins or a number line nearby helps. If your child is struggling, mention it to their teacher—they may need more time or a different approach. **Why counting up instead of just subtracting?** Counting up builds on your child's existing strengths and feels more intuitive. It's also how real shopkeepers often think. Once confident, children naturally use whatever method makes sense to them.

Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: Mathematics Programmes of Study (Key Stage 1)
- GOV.UK, Primary education: Key Stage 1 curriculum and assessment