Comparing Length in Reception Maths: Longer, Shorter, and the Same Length

Key points

- Children in Reception learn to compare how long two objects are by placing them side by side and lining up one end—no ruler needed.
- The key words to use are 'longer', 'shorter' and 'the same length as', which help children notice differences in length.
- A common starting point: children sometimes think an object placed further ahead must be longer, even if it isn't actually longer—careful alignment helps them see the true difference.
- Everyday objects like pencils, shoes, ribbons and spoons make perfect practice materials that are already in your home.
- Direct comparison like this is how children build the maths foundation they'll need for indirect comparison and measuring with units in Year 1.

Things to try at home

- Line up two objects side by side with one end touching the same starting point, then ask your child which is longer, shorter, or the same length.
- Use things your child sees every day—compare shoe lengths, ribbon lengths, pasta pieces or paintbrushes—to make it playful and natural.
- Use the words 'longer', 'shorter' and 'the same length as' out loud when you're comparing, so your child hears and learns them without any pressure.
- Make up simple comparing games: lay out toy animals, books or sticks and ask 'Can you find something longer than this one?' or 'Which two are the same length?'
- Don't worry about precision—the point is exploring and noticing differences together, not getting the right answer every time.

Find out more

- Ask your child's teacher or headteacher—they can show you exactly what Reception children are learning about comparing lengths.
- The national curriculum for Reception is published on GOV.UK and sets out the maths skills children learn at this stage.
- EYFS and KS1 teaching resources on Education Makes Sense include more ideas for supporting learning through play at home.