

Spot What Comes Next: Repeating Patterns in Reception Maths

A gentle introduction to repeating patterns for children in Reception, explaining how spotting and making patterns helps build early maths skills through play.

What are repeating patterns?

In Reception (the first year of primary school for children aged 4 to 5), children begin learning about patterns. A repeating pattern is something that happens over and over again in the same order. For example, if you lay out a red block, then a blue block, then a red block, then a blue block, you have made a pattern. The part that repeats—the red and blue blocks—is called the 'unit'. Patterns aren't just about colours; they can be sounds, like 'clap, stamp, clap, stamp', or shapes and movements. It is a key part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which is the official framework that sets the standards for learning, development, and care for children from birth to five.

What happens in the classroom?

Your child will explore patterns through play and hands-on activities. They might use colourful beads, buttons, or natural objects like leaves and stones to build their own sequences. The teacher will encourage them to copy a pattern someone else has made, continue a pattern that has already started, or spot a mistake in one. They might also use their bodies to make patterns, such as jumping and clapping in a rhythm. Because every school is different, the specific activities your child does will vary. You can ask your child's teacher or key worker about the fun pattern games they are playing in class.

Why is this important?

Spotting patterns is more than just a fun game; it is an early form of logical reasoning. When a child figures out what comes next in a sequence, they are learning how to make predictions and identify rules. This way of thinking is a building block for later maths. For example, understanding patterns now helps children when they move on to more complex work in later years, such as skip-counting (counting in twos or fives) and multiplication. It helps them feel confident with how numbers and shapes behave, creating a strong foundation for their future learning.

Fun ways to play at home

You don't need any special equipment to practice patterns; you can find them everywhere in your home. Try making a 'snack pattern' with pieces of fruit, like apple, banana, apple, banana. While walking to school, look for patterns in the environment, such as the stripes on a crossing or the colours of houses. You can also make sound patterns together, like 'tap your knees, clap your hands', and see if your child can join in and keep the rhythm going. Keep these moments short, playful, and stress-free, as children learn best when they are having fun.

Common questions

Parents often wonder if their child needs to be able to draw patterns. At this age, the focus is on 'doing' and 'seeing' rather than writing. Using physical objects or movements is much more helpful for their development. You might also wonder if your child is 'behind' if they struggle to spot a pattern. Every child

develops at their own pace, and children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language may approach patterns in different ways. The goal is simply to explore and enjoy the process of discovery together.

Sources

- Department for Education, Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- GOV.UK, National curriculum in England: early years foundation stage