

Counting in 2s, 5s and 10s: Spotting the Skip-Counting Pattern

Counting in 2s, 5s and 10s might sound like a chant children just memorise, but it's actually the beginning of multiplication and smart counting. This guide explains what skip-counting is, why your Year 2 child is learning it, and how you can spot and build real understanding at home using everyday things like socks, fingers and toes.

What skip-counting actually is

Skip-counting means counting in equal jumps instead of one at a time - for example 2, 4, 6, 8 or 5, 10, 15, 20. Rather than a chant to learn by heart, it's a way of seeing a pattern: each new number is always the same amount more than the last. In Year 2 (the second year of primary school, for children aged 6 to 7), the National Curriculum for England asks children to count in steps of 2, 3 and 5 from zero, and in tens from any number, going forwards and backwards. Skip-counting is one of the first times children notice that numbers repeat in predictable ways, and that noticing is the real goal - not just reciting the sequence quickly. If your child's school approaches this slightly differently, their teacher can tell you more about how it's taught in that particular classroom.

What this looks like in the classroom

Teachers often use a number line or a hundred square (a grid showing the numbers 1 to 100 in rows of ten) to make the pattern visible rather than just heard. Children might colour in every second, fifth or tenth number and notice the shapes these make - straight columns for 5s and 10s, a zigzag for 2s. They may also compare sequences: counting in 2s and counting in 5s both land on 10, 20 and 30, so some numbers belong to more than one pattern. This kind of noticing helps children understand grouping - sorting things into equal sets - which is the foundation of multiplication (repeated groups of the same size) later on. Lessons usually involve real objects too, like counters or cubes arranged in twos, fives or tens, so the pattern is something children can touch and move, not just say aloud.

What it means for your child

When a child can skip-count confidently, it shows they understand that numbers can be grouped and counted more efficiently than one by one - a skill they'll rely on heavily when they start learning multiplication tables and division. A useful check isn't just whether your child can say the sequence quickly, but whether they can start from a different point (like 14, 16, 18...) or explain what's happening ("I'm adding two each time"). Being able to only recite the sequence from the very beginning, without starting elsewhere or explaining the jump, can be a sign the pattern hasn't quite clicked yet - and that's completely normal at this stage, just something worth gently exploring together. Every child, including those with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) or those still learning English, will build this understanding at their own pace, and that's absolutely fine.

How you can help at home

The best support is playful and short, woven into things you're already doing. Pairing socks from the laundry is a natural way to count in 2s. Counting fingers in 5s, or fingers and toes together in 10s, makes the pattern physical and easy to picture. You could count stairs in 2s as you go up together, or count out pairs of shoes by the front door. When out and about, spot numbers on a bus or house that fit the pattern,

or ask "what comes next?" rather than always starting from zero. There's no need for worksheets or drilling - a couple of minutes here and there, kept light and low-pressure, is far more effective than a formal practice session, and it keeps maths feeling like something enjoyable rather than a test.

Questions parents often ask

Should my child know all three patterns (2s, 5s, 10s) by now? Children build these up gradually across Year 2, and pace varies - if you're unsure where your child should be, their teacher is the best person to ask, since expectations and timing can differ between schools. Is it bad if they can only count from zero? Not at all, but it's a helpful next step to practise starting from the middle of a sequence once the basics feel comfortable. Does this relate to times tables? Yes - skip-counting in 2s, 5s and 10s is an early, gentle introduction to the multiplication facts children will learn more formally in later years. What if my child finds this tricky? That's completely normal; keep it playful, use real objects, and mention any concerns to the class teacher, who can suggest approaches suited to your child specifically.

Sources

- Department for Education, 'National curriculum in England: mathematics programmes of study' (GOV.UK)
- Department for Education, 'Mathematics programmes of study: key stages 1 and 2 – National Curriculum in England' (GOV.UK) – Year 2 programme of study