

Partitioning Two-Digit Numbers: Why 47 Is Really 40 and 7 in Year 2 Maths

In Year 2, children learn to understand two-digit numbers by splitting them into tens and ones. This is called partitioning. It helps them see that in 47, the 4 represents four tens (40) and the 7 represents seven ones. This understanding is crucial for all the addition and subtraction they do later.

What is partitioning in maths?

Partitioning means splitting a number into smaller parts. In Year 2, children learn to split two-digit numbers (like 47, 32 or 85) into tens and ones. The 4 in 47 doesn't just mean 'four' – it means four groups of ten, or 40. The 7 means seven single ones. So 47 is really $40 + 7$. Teachers call this understanding 'place value' – it's about knowing that the place where a digit sits tells you what it's worth. This is a big step from just counting, because it helps children see the structure of our number system.

What happens in the classroom

Children learn partitioning using things they can see and touch. Teachers use base-10 blocks (long thin blocks representing tens, and small cubes for ones), place value counters (tokens with 10 on one side and 1 on the other), and arrow cards (cards that show 40, 7 and combine to show 47). Year 2 pupils practise splitting lots of different two-digit numbers this way until they can picture it in their heads. They also learn how this skill helps with addition and subtraction – when you add $47 + 23$, it's easier if you can split each number into tens and ones first. By the end of Year 2, most children can partition numbers and use it to solve simple addition and subtraction problems.

What this means for your child

Your child is learning one of the foundations of all maths that comes next. Once they see that numbers have a structure – that 47 is really 40 and 7 – they can tackle addition, subtraction and eventually multiplication and division with more confidence. Some children pick this up quickly; others need more time and practice to make the connection between the symbol (47) and what it actually represents (four tens and seven ones). There's no rush. Children develop at different rates, and exploring this idea playfully over weeks and months is far more helpful than drilling. Your child might be able to partition one day and forget the next – that's completely normal as their brain anchors this new understanding.

How you can help at home

The easiest way is through play and everyday life. Count coins: 'Look, here are four 10p coins – that's 40p – and seven 1p coins. That's 47p altogether.' Lay out small toys or sweets in groups of ten, then extras. Ask: 'How many tens? How many ones? How many altogether?' You could also make your own base-10 blocks using straws bundled in tens, or draw simple tens and ones pictures together. Play shops where prices are two-digit numbers – 'That costs 53p – that's five 10p coins and three 1p coins.' Keep it short and light. Stop if your child gets frustrated. The school is doing the teaching; you're just making it feel normal and useful through games and conversation.

Questions parents often ask

****My child can count to 47 but doesn't understand it's four tens and seven. Should I worry?**** No. Counting and understanding place value are different skills. It's common for children to count fluently before they grasp what the digits mean. Keep exploring without pressure. ****How long will this take?**** Most children are secure with two-digit partitioning by summer in Year 2, but some need a little longer. Every child's brain develops on its own timeline. ****Do I need special equipment?**** No. Coins, toys, drawings or even fingers and groups work just as well as fancy maths blocks. ****Will my child fall behind if they don't get it yet?**** Unlikely. Teachers revisit place value in Year 3 and beyond. Regular, relaxed practice at home helps, but this isn't a race.

Sources

- National Curriculum for England: Mathematics, Key Stage 1 – Department for Education
- Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 – GOV.UK