

Quarter Past, Quarter To: Reading the Clock Beyond O'Clock and Half Past in Year 2

A gentle guide to helping your Year 2 child move beyond 'o'clock' and 'half past' to understand 'quarter past' and 'quarter to' on an analogue clock.

What is quarter past and quarter to?

In Year 2, children move on from the basics of time to learn about quarters. An analogue clock (a clock with hands and numbers) can be seen as a circle split into four equal parts. When the big minute hand has travelled a quarter of the way around the clock, we call it 'quarter past'. When it has travelled three-quarters of the way and is almost back at the top, we call it 'quarter to'. This helps children understand that time is a measurement of how far the hand has moved around the face.

What happens in the classroom?

Your child will learn to identify where the minute hand sits for these times. A common challenge in the National Curriculum (the official guide for what is taught in English schools) is understanding the hour hand. When the clock says 'quarter to 4', the hour hand is already very close to the 4, which can be confusing. Teachers often use visual tricks, such as splitting the clock into coloured quarters, to show the minute hand's journey. This helps children see why we switch from saying 'past' to saying 'to' once the hand passes the bottom of the clock.

What this means for your child

Learning to read a clock takes time and patience. It is very common for children to feel a bit tripped up when the minute hand moves into the 'to' side of the clock. They might accidentally name the next hour too early or get confused by the terminology. Please be reassured that this is a normal part of learning maths in Key Stage 1 (the stage of education for children aged 5 to 7). Every child progresses at their own pace, and some may need more visual aids or practice than others.

Simple ways to help at home

You don't need any special equipment to help your child. Try making time-telling a playful part of your day. While waiting for the kettle to boil or a timer to go off, you could ask, 'Is it quarter past or quarter to?' if you have a clock with hands nearby. You can also draw a big circle on a piece of paper and colour the 'past' side green and the 'to' side red to help them visualise the split. Keep it short and light; a few minutes of playful chatting is often more helpful than a long lesson.

Common questions

Many parents ask why their child struggles with 'quarter to' specifically. This is usually because the hour hand is pointing so close to the next number that the child thinks it has already reached that hour. If your child is finding this tricky, or if they have SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and need different tools, the best thing to do is chat with your child's teacher. They can tell you exactly which methods they are using in class so you can use the same language at home.



Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: Framework for Key Stage 1
- GOV.UK, National Curriculum