

## Reading a Clock: Teaching O'Clock and Half Past Without Confusion

A gentle guide for parents and carers of children in Year 1 (ages 5 to 6) to help them learn how to tell the time using analogue clocks, focusing on 'o'clock' and 'half past'.

### What is learning to tell the time?

In Year 1, children begin to learn how to tell the time using an analogue clock—the kind with a face and moving hands. According to the National Curriculum (the official map of what children should learn in England), children are expected to learn how to tell the time to the hour (o'clock) and half past the hour. This is a big step because it involves understanding how the two hands move together. It is a foundational skill in maths that helps children understand the concept of time and how to follow a daily routine at school and home.

### Why it can be tricky

Learning to read a clock is complex because it requires two different skills. First, children must recognise the position of the hands. Second, they must understand the number sequence. Confusion often happens if children are taught 'quarter past' or 'quarter to' too early, as this adds more complexity before they are comfortable with the basics. You might notice your child mixing up the long minute hand and the short hour hand, or simply reading the number the hand is pointing to without knowing which hand they are looking at. This is a very common part of the learning process.

### What this means for your child

If your child makes these mistakes, it doesn't mean they are struggling with maths; it usually just means they are still figuring out the 'rules' of the clock face. For example, when it is 'half past', the hour hand is halfway between two numbers, which can be confusing. Some children might say it is 6 o'clock when it is actually half past 6 because they see the hand near the 6. Spotting these patterns helps teachers and parents provide the right kind of gentle support to clear up the confusion.

### Simple ways to help at home

The best way to help is through short, playful moments in your daily routine. Use a real clock or a toy one. Start by only focusing on 'o'clock'. Once they are confident, move on to 'half past'. You could ask, 'Can you show me o'clock on the toy clock?' or 'Look, the big hand is at the top, what time is it?'. Keep it light and stress-free. If your child has SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or is learning English, using a physical clock they can touch and move can be very helpful. Every child learns at their own pace, so feel free to ask your child's teacher for tips tailored to your child.

### Common questions

Parents often ask if they should teach digital time (the numbers on a phone or oven) at the same time. While digital time is useful, the National Curriculum focuses on analogue clocks in Key Stage 1 (the stage for Year 1 and Year 2) to help children visualise the passage of time. Another common question is whether to teach 'quarter past'. It is usually best to wait until your child is completely happy with o'clock and half



past first. If you are unsure where your child is in their learning, your child's teacher will be happy to let you know what they are currently practicing in class.

## Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: Framework for Key Stage 1 maths