

Tally Marks Explained: Why We Count in Fives

Key points

- A tally mark is a simple way to count things as they happen, with one mark added for each item.
- In Year 2 (children aged 6 to 7), tally marks are usually grouped in fives, with the fifth mark drawn across the previous four so each bundle is easy to spot.
- Grouping in fives makes it much quicker to add up a long tally than counting every single mark one by one.
- Tally charts are often the first step before Year 2 children move on to pictograms (charts using pictures) and block graphs (charts using bars) to show the same information.
- Exactly how tally marks are drawn or grouped can vary a little from school to school, so if your child's chart looks different from what you expect, it's worth asking their teacher.
- There's no need for any drilling at home — a little playful practice is all it takes.

Things to try at home

- Keep a simple tally over a few days of something fun, like rainy days, dogs spotted on a walk, or favourite fruits eaten, adding one mark each time and bundling into fives.
- At the end, count the tally together, grouping the fives to find the total.
- Turn a finished tally chart into a quick pictogram by swapping each mark for a small drawing.
- Sort everyday objects, like buttons, pasta or toy cars, into groups and make tally marks as you go.
- Chat about why counting in fives might be quicker than counting one by one, and let your child work out their own answer rather than telling them.

Find out more

- GOV.UK: National Curriculum in England — mathematics programmes of study (Department for Education)
- Your child's class teacher, for how tally charts and data handling are taught in their classroom
- GOV.UK: Early years foundation stage (EYFS) and key stage 1 statutory framework