Ten More or Ten Less: Jumping Along a Number Line in Year 2 Maths

Year 2 pupils learn to add or subtract 10 from any two-digit number by spotting that only the tens digit changes. So 34 + 10 becomes 44, and 34 – 10 becomes 24. It's a quick mental trick that builds on place value understanding and helps children work with numbers more flexibly. This guide explains why schools teach it this way, what you might see your child doing, and how playful practice at home can help.

What it is

Ten more or ten less is a mental maths strategy – a shortcut for working with numbers quickly in your head. Instead of counting up or down one by one, children learn to jump in tens along a number line or use blocks to see that when you add 10 or subtract 10 from a two-digit number, only the digit in the tens column changes. The ones digit (the units) stays the same. For example, 34 + 10 = 44 (the 4 ones stays the same; the 3 tens becomes 4 tens). This is part of the Year 2 National Curriculum and builds directly on place value – how numbers are made up of tens and ones. It's a core skill your child will use in assessments during Year 2 and beyond.

What happens

Teachers usually introduce this with visual tools so children can see it happening. They might use a number line where children jump forward or backward in ten-sized hops – one jump from 34 lands on 44. Base-10 blocks (often called Dienes or tens and ones equipment) show the same idea: add a ten stick to get another ten stick in the tens column. A hundred square – a grid of numbers 1 to 100 – can also demonstrate the pattern: moving up or down a column (jumping by 10) keeps the ones digit the same. Children practise spotting the pattern so that after a while, they can say "34 + 10" and immediately know it's 44 without using the equipment. Teachers repeat this with different starting numbers.

What it means for your child

Mastering this skill means your child is developing mental flexibility with numbers. Instead of always counting in ones (which is slow and error-prone for larger numbers), they can now think in tens – much faster and more efficient. It's a sign they understand place value: that 34 is not just 34 ones, but 3 tens and 4 ones. This deeper understanding is the foundation for more complex maths later, like mental addition and subtraction strategies, working with larger numbers, and eventually understanding tens and hundreds in Year 3 and beyond. Children who grasp this early often feel more confident with maths because they see patterns rather than needing to count everything from scratch.

How you can help at home

Keep it short, playful and everyday. Use small objects (coins, pasta shapes, building blocks) to make tens: count ten into a pile and call it a ten, then ask "if we add another ten, how many do we have?" or "if we take away one ten pile, what's left?" Play with a dice: roll it to get a starting number, then say "add ten" and ask your child for the answer. Walking up or down stairs works too: count ten steps, then ten more, and talk about the pattern. Number-line jumping games (physically jumping, or drawing lines on paper) feel like play, not practice. The goal is showing them that this is a pattern, not something to memorise. If they struggle, go back to counting in tens on their fingers or blocks – they'll get there.

Questions parents often ask

"Why don't they just count up in ones?" Because counting in ones is fine for numbers up to 10 or so, but slows down and becomes unreliable for bigger numbers. Learning to count in tens now sets them up for efficient mental maths. "My child is still counting on their fingers – is that wrong?" No. Fingers are a tool that helps them think through the pattern. As they practise, they'll need them less and less. "What if my child doesn't get it yet?" That's completely normal. Some children click to this quickly; others need more time and repetition. Keep it low-key and playful. If you're concerned, chat with the teacher about what your child needs. "Does my child need to memorise this?" Not as rigid memorisation, but recognising the pattern until it becomes automatic through practice and familiarity with place value.

Sources

- Department for Education (2014). Mathematics programmes of study: Key Stage 1.
- GOV.UK. Department for Education guidance on the National Curriculum for England.