

Why 'Teen' Numbers Are Tricky: Spotting 13 and 30 by Ear

Key points

- Thirteen and thirty (or fourteen and forty) sound very alike, so even children who count confidently can still muddle them when listening or speaking.
- The difference is in the ending: 'teen' numbers (13-19) end in a 'teen' sound, while the tens (20, 30, 40...) end in a 'ty' sound.
- This is a common, everyday mix-up in Year 1 (five and six year olds) and Year 2, not a sign that a child is behind.
- Learning to listen out for the ending helps a child match a spoken number word to the right digits, such as writing '13' instead of '30'.
- Spotting which one is meant often comes with a bit of a 'trick' or check, such as thinking about whether the number is closer to ten or further along, rather than guessing from the sound alone.
- How this is taught can vary between schools and classes, so it's worth asking your child's teacher how they're introducing it.

Things to try at home

- Say a number out loud (like 'thirteen' or 'thirty') and ask your child to point to it on a number line, number of buttons, or hundred square, if you have one.
- Play a listening game in the car or at the shops: call out a number and ask whether it's a 'teen' one or a 'ty' one.
- Spot numbers together on buses, house doors, or price tags, and have a go at saying them out loud together.
- Try a silly 'which did I say?' game, deliberately saying two similar numbers (like fourteen and forty) and asking your child to tell you which one you meant.
- Keep it short and light, maybe a couple of minutes while doing something else, rather than a sit-down task.

Find out more

- GOV.UK: National curriculum in England - mathematics programmes of study (for the official Key Stage 1 maths requirements)
- Your child's class teacher, who can tell you how number names are being taught in their specific class and whether this is something they're currently covering
- Your child's school website or parent handbook, which may list the maths topics covered this term