

Writing Teen Numbers: Helping Your Year 1 Child Spot the 'Switch'

Key points

- In Year 1 maths, children learn to write numerals 11 to 19, but often write '31' for thirteen because they hear the 'three' first.
- This happens because spoken English says the smaller number first (like 'thir-teen'), but written digits place the 'one' (the ten) first.
- Teachers use visual aids, such as number lines and place value charts, to show that the '1' in teen numbers represents a whole group of ten.
- Reversing digits is a normal part of learning and does not mean your child cannot count; it is simply a mix-up between sound and symbol.
- The goal is for children to recognise that 'teen' numbers always start with a 1, followed by the digit for the extra ones.

Things to try at home

- Play 'Spot the Switch': Write down numbers like 13, 31, 16, and 61, and ask your child to circle the ones that look like teen numbers.
- Use a 'Teen Number' card: Write 11-19 on a card and keep it visible during homework to help them check their work before finishing.
- Say it and write it: When writing a number, say the word slowly (e.g., 'four-teen') and ask your child to write the '1' first because it means one ten.

Find out more

- Ask your child's Year 1 teacher for their specific classroom resources or number lines used in maths lessons.
- Visit the GOV.UK website for the National Curriculum programme of study for Year 1 mathematics.
- Check the Education Makes Sense website for additional KS1 maths worksheets and teaching guides.