Difficulty with Decimals? Self-Help Guide!

Subtracting Decimals

Subtraction requires "like terms" which means that tenths must be subtracted from tenths and hundredths from hundredths. In other words, it is necessary to line up the decimal points which will line up the digits with the same place value. Add zeros as place holders if needed.

Example #6: 139.28 − 6.15

Line up decimal points:

$$\begin{array}{r} 139.28 \\ -\ \ 6.15 \\ \hline 133.13 \end{array}$$

Example #7: 5 − 2.46

Line up decimal points:

$$\begin{array}{r} 5. \\ -\ 2.46 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

In a whole number, the decimal point (although not originally shown) is to the right of the last digit.

Add zeros, if necessary:

$$\begin{array}{r} 5.00 \\ -\ 2.46 \\ \hline 2.54 \end{array}$$

It is possible to verify this process by considering money (in dollars) which is represented as decimals to the hundredths place. To subtract money amounts, there is no doubt that the decimal points would have to line up so that cents are subtracted from cents and dollars from dollars.

Example #8: $25 − $6.75

Line up decimal points:

$$\begin{array}{r} \$25. \\ -\ \$\ 6.75 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

In a whole number, the decimal point (although not originally shown) is to the right of the last digit.

Add zeros, if necessary:

$$\begin{array}{r} \$25.00 \\ -\ \$\ 6.75 \\ \hline \$18.25 \end{array}$$

To subtract repeating decimals, convert the repeating decimals to fractions (see Example 2 in Understanding Decimals Guide).

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