

**EVALUATING  
ACADEMIC READINESS  
FOR APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING**  
Revised for  
**ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIP**

**MATHEMATICS SKILLS  
ORDER OF OPERATIONS**

**AN ACADEMIC SKILLS MANUAL**  
for  
**The Construction Trades: Mechanical Systems**

This trade group includes the following trades:  
Electrician (Construction, Maintenance & Industrial),  
Network Cabling Specialist,  
Plumber, Refrigeration & Air Conditioning Mechanic,  
Sprinkler & Fire Protection, and Steamfitter,

*Workplace Support Services Branch  
Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities*

*Revised 2011*

In preparing these Academic Skills Manuals we have used passages, diagrams and questions similar to those an apprentice might find in a text, guide or trade manual.

**This trade related material is not intended to instruct you in your trade. It is used only to demonstrate how understanding an academic skill will help you find and use the information you need.**

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# MATHEMATICS SKILLS

## ORDER OF OPERATIONS

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*An academic skill required for the study of the  
Construction Trades: Mechanical Systems*

### **INTRODUCTION**

An electrician might have to find the total resistance in a series-parallel circuit. Resistance is measured in Ohms ( $\Omega$ ) using this formula:

$$R_t = \frac{R_1 \times R_2}{R_1 + R_2}$$

If  $R_1$  is  $6 \Omega$  and  $R_2$  is  $18 \Omega$ , the equation is written:

$$R_t = \frac{6 \Omega \times 18 \Omega}{6 \Omega + 18 \Omega}$$

How do you proceed? Does the order in which you do the addition, subtraction, multiplication or division make any difference?

Let's look at an example of an equation that requires several operations to find the answer:

$$24 - 4 \times 5 + 10 \div 2 =$$

First, we do the operations in the order in which they occur. The operations being done on each line are bold and in brackets.

$$\begin{aligned} & \mathbf{(24 - 4)} \times 5 + 10 \div 2 \\ & = \mathbf{(20 \times 5)} + 10 \div 2 \\ & = \mathbf{(100 + 10)} \div 2 \\ & = \mathbf{(110 \div 2)} \\ & = 55 \end{aligned}$$

Second, we do all multiplication and division first, then addition and subtraction:

$$\begin{aligned} & 24 - \mathbf{(4 \times 5)} + \mathbf{(10 \div 2)} \\ & = \mathbf{(24 - 20 + 5)} \\ & = 9 \end{aligned}$$

Third, let's add and subtract first, then multiply and divide:

$$\begin{aligned} & \mathbf{(24 - 4)} \times \mathbf{(5 + 10)} \div 2 \\ & = \mathbf{(20 \times 15)} \div 2 \\ & = \mathbf{(300 \div 2)} \\ & = 150 \end{aligned}$$

### **Order Matters**

We ended up with three different answers to the same question. The order in which we do the math operations affects the answers. To make sure everyone gets the same answer for the same math question, rules for the **order of operations** were developed.

In this skills manual we will describe these rules of order so you can accurately solve questions like the one above. The topics include:

- ◆ Order of operations for basic calculations,
- ◆ Brackets and exponents
- ◆ Decimal numbers
- ◆ Fractions

### **ORDER OF OPERATIONS FOR BASIC CALCULATIONS**

#### **Multiplication and Division, Addition and Subtraction**

Here are the first two rules for **Order of Operations**:

1. *First, do all multiplication and division in the order in which they appear from left to right.*
2. *Next, do all addition and subtraction in order from left to right.*

According to this rule, the second example above gave the correct answer. Multiplication and division were done first in the order that they appeared; then addition and subtraction were done in the order that they appeared.

This means that every time you have to make a calculation where there are several kinds of operations, you follow this order.

#### **Example:**

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| $24 - 4 \times 5 + 10 \div 2 = ?$ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work from left to right through the question</li><li>• Multiply the numbers on each side of any multiplication sign and divide the numbers on each side of the division signs.</li></ul> |
| $24 - 20 + 5 = ?$                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rewrite the question, putting the multiplication and division answers in the question where they occur.</li><li>• Leave all addition and subtraction signs in their place.</li></ul>     |
| $4 + 5 = 9$                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add and subtract the numbers until you have a final answer.</li></ul>  |

**Caution!** *Be careful to read each question from beginning to end before you start making calculations. Then do the questions one step at a time. Write each step as you do it. Pay careful attention to the signs as you copy them. If you write down a subtraction sign instead of an addition sign, or a division sign instead of a multiplication sign, the error will make your answer incorrect. Be sure you are accurate.*

The correct order of operation is a basic math skill you will use all the time.

**Example:** You charge \$45.00 an hour for labour. You have completed a job that took 1 1/2 hours. You used 150 feet of copper cable that costs \$1.89 per foot and assorted connectors that cost \$30.99.

First, write the calculation. Work from left to right through the question.

$$45 \times 1\frac{1}{2} + 150 \times \$1.89 + \$30.99$$

$$= \$67.50 + \$283.50 + \$30.99$$

$$= \$381.99$$

- You need to calculate the cost of your labour (**\$45.00 multiplied by 1½ hours**) plus the materials costs: (**150 ft multiplied by \$1.89**) plus another \$30.99 for connectors.
- Multiply first. Multiply the numbers on each side of any multiplication sign and divide the numbers on each side of the division signs.
- Rewrite the question, putting the multiplication and division answers in the question where they occur.
- Leave all addition and subtraction signs in their place.
- 
- Add and subtract the numbers until you have a final answer.

You use an understanding of the first two rules of order of operations several times to calculate this bill.

Let's look at some questions that require you to use the rules for order of operations. The operations of multiplication and division are highlighted with bold print to show they are done first.

**Example:**

$$\begin{aligned} & 56 \div 7 - 6 + 5 \times 4 \div 2 \\ & = 8 - 6 + 20 \div 2 \\ & = 8 - 6 + 10 = 12 \end{aligned}$$

**Example:**

$$\begin{aligned} & 9 + (36 \div 6) - (5 \times 3) \\ & = 9 + 6 - 15 \\ & = 0 \end{aligned}$$

## **BRACKETS AND EXPONENTS**

The above rules for order of operations cover the basic situations. However, you might have to solve other questions that include brackets and exponents. We will look at the rules for order of operations concerning these elements.

### **Working with Brackets**

Brackets, or parentheses, can be written as ( ), [ ] or { }. They are used to set off certain numbers, or to indicate multiplication.

In the second of the two examples above, brackets were used to indicate which operations were being done on each line. In this case, the brackets were simply removed as you completed each step in order to continue. However, questions with brackets are often more complicated.

### Brackets affect the order of operations

Numbers grouped inside brackets in an equation affect the order of operations. When a question includes numbers inside brackets, use the following steps:

- ◆ **All operations inside the brackets are done first.**
  - This means do everything in the brackets – *even before you do any multiplication or division which may be outside of the brackets.*
  - Inside the brackets, follow the first rule for Order of Operations. First do multiplication and division in the order they appear, then do addition and subtraction.
- ◆ **Brackets can mean multiplication**
  - Any number directly in front of another number in brackets indicates that the two numbers are to be multiplied. *The brackets are considered a multiplication sign.*

#### Example:

$$5(21) \quad \text{means 5 multiplied by 21}$$
$$5(21) = 105$$

Sometimes there are several numbers and operations to be done inside brackets, and there is also a number in front of the bracket. You need to multiply by the number outside the brackets, **but** only after all the operations inside the brackets have been done, leaving a single number.

#### Example: Simplify $8(6 + 12 \div 4 - 1)$ .

First, do all operations in the brackets, *in order*.. Then multiply by the number beside the brackets.

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| $8(6 + 12 \div 4 - 1)$ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First do all operations inside the brackets.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Multiply and divide first: <math>12 \div 4 = 3</math></li><li>▪ <b>Rewrite the question – keep the brackets, and leave all addition and subtraction signs in their place</b></li></ul></li></ul> |
| $8(6+3-1)$             |  |
| $8(8)$                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stay inside the brackets to do all addition and subtraction: <math>6+3-1</math><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Rewrite the question – keep the results inside the brackets..</li></ul></li></ul>   |
| $64$                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiply those results by the number beside the brackets to get rid of the brackets.</li><li>• This result is your final answer.</li></ul>   |

### Parentheses inside brackets

If there are parentheses inside brackets, *always start with the innermost brackets and work your way out*. Let's look at the steps used in this situation:

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**Example:** Simplify  $4\{3 + [7 + (4 - 2)]\}$

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| $4\{3 + [7 + (4 - 2)]\}$ | • First do the innermost grouping: $(4 - 2) = 2$   |
| $4\{3 + [7 + 2]\}$       | • Then do the next grouping: $[7 + 2] = 9$   |
| $4\{3 + 9\}$             | • Do the last grouping: $\{3 + 9\} = 12$ .   |
| $4\{12\} = 48$           | • There is now a single number in brackets.<br>• Multiply the 12 in brackets by the number in front. |

**Example:** Simplify  $4(6 + 3) - (6 - 3)$ .

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| $4(9) - (3)$  | • Do operations in each set of brackets first.  |
| $36 - 3$      | • Only the number inside the first set of brackets needs to be multiplied by the number in front.<br>• Simply remove the brackets from the second number: $4 \times 9 = 36$ |
| $36 - 3 = 33$ | • Finally, subtract.  |

**Example:** Simplify  $9[14 - 3(2 + 1) \div 3]$ .

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| $9[14 - 3(2 + 1) \div 3]$ | • Start with the inside brackets: $2 + 1 = 3$         |
| $= 9[14 - 3(3) \div 3]$   | • Multiply and divide inside the brackets: $3(3) = 9$ |
| $= 9[14 - 9 \div 3]$      | • Then do the next grouping: $9 \div 3 = 3$           |
| $= 9[14 - 3]$             | • Subtract inside the brackets.                       |
| $= 9[11]$                 | • $14 - 3 = 11$                                       |
| $= 99$                    | • Finally, multiply to get the final answer.          |

As you gain confidence, you can combine several steps in the same line, but keep the order of operations straight and be accurate with the operation signs in each step. In the next example, everything in the inner bracket is done in one step, then everything in the outer bracket is done in one step.

**Example:**

$$\begin{aligned} & 15 + 3[4 + 2(45 \div 5 - 6) - 8] \\ & = 15 + 3[4 + 2(3) - 8] \\ & = 15 + 3[2] \\ & = 21 \end{aligned}$$

In the following examples, we have highlighted the operations in each step so you can follow the order. Sometimes more than one step is done in a line.

**Example:**

$$\begin{aligned} & 42 \div 14 + 2(16 - 18 \div 3) - 16 \\ & = 42 \div 14 + 2(16 - 6) - 16 \\ & = 42 \div 14 + 2(10) - 16 \\ & = 3 + 20 - 16 \\ & = 23 - 16 \\ & = 7 \end{aligned}$$

**Example:**

$$\begin{aligned} & 5[189 \div 9 (17 - 7 \times 2) - 1] \div 2 \\ & = 5[189 \div 9(17 - 14) - 1] \div 2 \\ & = 5[189 \div 9(3) - 1] \div 2 \\ & = 5[21(3) - 1] \div 2 \\ & = 5(63 - 1) \div 2 \\ & = 5(62) \div 2 \\ & = 310 \div 2 \\ & = 155 \end{aligned}$$

**Note:** Formulas use letters to represent different quantities whose amounts can vary. If these quantities are to be multiplied the two letters representing the quantities are written right beside each other, instead of using a multiplication sign or putting one number in brackets. A common example is the formula for area of a rectangle, usually written as:  $A = lw$

$A$  stands for area,  $l$  stands for length and  $w$  stands for width. To find the area, multiply the length and width. This is indicated in the formula by writing the letters for length and width beside each other, as  $lw$ .

**Example:** You doing an installation in three rooms in an office building. Before you start, you have to find the area of the floor space in the three rooms. The first room measures 40 feet by 35 feet, the second 20 feet by 25 feet and the third 55 feet by 60 feet.

To find the total area, the formula is:

$$\text{Total area} = (lw)_1 + (lw)_2 + (lw)_3$$

$$A = (40 \times 35) + (20 \times 25) + (55 \times 60)$$

- First fill in the given amounts.
  - Remember that letters written beside each other in the formula ( $lw$ ) indicate multiplication.

$$A = 1400 + 500 + 3300$$

- Using the rules for order of operations, do the calculations inside the brackets first. Then do the addition.

$$A = 5200$$

The total area is 5200 square feet.

Here are some examples for you to fill in the blanks:

1.  $64 \div 8 + 10 \times 3$

=      +     

= 38

(Did you get 8 + 30 in the blanks?)

2.  $4(45 \div 9 - 3) + 8(6 - 3) - 12$

= 4(    ) + 8(    ) - 12

(Did you get 2 and 3 in the blanks?)

=      +      - 12

= 20

### Exponents

An exponent is a short way of indicating how many times a number is to be multiplied by itself. It is written as a small number to the right of and slightly above the number to be multiplied. In the expression  $5^2$ , the exponent  $^2$  tells you to multiply the 5 by itself *two* times, as  $5 \times 5 = 25$ .

You use exponents in some formulas. For example, to calculate the area of a circular patch, you use the formula:

$$\text{Area} = \pi r^2,$$

which contains the exponent  $r^2$ .

If there is an exponent in an equation, the following rule determines what order to use:

**Do the operations inside any brackets first, then multiply any exponents.**

**Example:**  $9 + 7 - 4^2 \div 2$

=  $9 + 7 - 16 \div 2$

There are no brackets so multiply the exponent first:  $4^2 = 4 \times 4 = 16$

=  $9 + 7 - 8$   
= 8

Continue, following order of operations

If there is an exponent just after and outside brackets, do the operations inside the brackets and multiply that answer by the exponent.

**Example:**  
 $8(4 - 1 + 2)^2 + 9$

brackets first

=  $8(5)^2 + 9$

exponent next,  $5^2 = 5 \times 5$

=  $8(25) + 9$

Multiply

=  $200 + 9$

Add

= 209

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## DECIMAL NUMBERS

The rules for order of operations apply whether you are working with whole numbers, decimal numbers or fractions.

### Example:

$$\begin{aligned} & 1.5(5.6 - 2.6) + (5 - 3) - 2.5 \div .5 \\ & = 1.5(3) + (2) - 5 \\ & = 4.5 + 2 - 5 \\ & = 1.5 \end{aligned}$$

## FRACTIONS

Remember that a fraction line indicates division.

### Treat the fraction line like a set of brackets

Do the operations above and below the line *before* you divide the answer above the line by the answer below the line.

### Example:

$$\frac{6(20 \div 5) + 48 \div 8 - 2 \times 5}{16 \div 8 + 2(9) - 10}$$

$$\frac{6(20 \div 5) + 48 \div 8 - 2 \times 5}{168 + 2(9) - 10}$$

Do inside brackets first, then divide and multiply.

$$= \frac{6(4) + 6 - 10}{2 + 18 - 10}$$

$$= \frac{24 + 6 - 10}{20 - 10}$$

Add and subtract.

$$= \frac{20}{10}$$

Now divide

$$= 2$$

The formula from the first page for finding total resistance is actually a fraction. Using the rules we just learned, we can finish solving the problem.

$$R_t = \frac{6 \Omega \times 18 \Omega}{6 \Omega + 18 \Omega}$$

- Multiply the top line.
- Separately add the bottom line.

$$R_t = \frac{108 \Omega}{24 \Omega}$$

- The fraction line indicates division. Finish the question by dividing the bottom number into the top number.

$$R_t = 4.5 \Omega$$

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## **SUMMARY**

You use the rules for order of operations in all your calculations, especially those involving formulas. Here is a summary of the rules for order of operations:

1. **Brackets:** If there are brackets, do all operations inside the brackets first, following the rules below.
  - a. If there are rounded brackets ( ) within square brackets [ ], work out answers for the innermost brackets first.
2. **Exponents:** Multiply out numbers with exponents.
3. **Division and Multiplication:** Do all division and multiplication (remember brackets can mean multiplication) in the order in which they are written from left to right.
4. **Addition and Subtraction:** Do all addition and subtraction next in the order in which they are written from left to right to get a final answer.
5. **If numbers are presented on both sides of a fraction line,** work out a final answer on each side, then divide the top number by the bottom one to get a final answer.

**And remember,** in each step, be accurate with the operations signs.

### **Bedmas**

Some people use the word **bedmas** to remember correct order. The letters in **bedmas** list the first letters of the operations in the order in which they should be done.

<b>b</b>	<b>brackets</b>
<b>e</b>	<b>exponents</b>
<b>d</b>	<b>division</b>
<b>m</b>	<b>multiplication</b>
<b>a</b>	<b>addition</b>
<b>s</b>	<b>subtraction</b>

**Note:** Division is listed before multiplication in bedmas, but do these operations in the order in which they appear from left to right. Addition is listed before subtraction, but do these operations in the order in which they appear.

## RULES FOR ORDER OF OPERATIONS

### BEDMAS

1. **Brackets:** Do all operations in parentheses first, starting with the innermost group, using the rules for the order of operations below.
2. **Exponents:** Multiply any exponents.
3. **Division and Multiplication:** Do all multiplication and division next in the order in which they appear from left to right, remembering that a number in front of a number inside brackets indicates the two numbers are to be multiplied.
4. **Addition and Subtraction:** Do all addition and subtraction in the order in which they appear from left to right.
5. **Pay attention to the signs.**

Find the value of each of the following. Answers are on the last page.

1.  $64 \div 8 + 5 \times 4 =$

2.  $6 + 4 \times 7 - 15 =$

3.  $9 \times 6 - 24 + 40 \div 8 + 3 \times 2 =$

4.  $36 \div 6 + 3(5 \times 5) =$

5.  $7(42 \div 6) + 18 - 2(14 - 9) =$

6.  $\$5.59 + \$4.60(3 - 6 \div 3 + 2) - \$9.99 =$

7.  $7.2 \div 8 + 3.6(6.6 - 1.1) + 1.2 =$

8.  $\frac{3(25 \div 5) + 2 \times 9 - 12 \div 4}{6 \times 3 - 49 \div 7 + 2(2)} =$

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**ANSWER PAGE**

1.  $64 \div 8 + 5 \times 4$   
 $= 8 + 20$   
 $= 28$

2.  $6 + 4 \times 7 - 15$   
 $= 6 + 28 - 15$   
 $= 19$

3.  $9 \times 6 - 24 + 40 \div 8 + 3 \times 2$   
 $= 54 - 24 + 5 + 6$   
 $= 41$

4.  $36 \div 6 + 3(5 \times 5)$   
 $= 6 + 3(25)$   
 $= 6 + 75$   
 $= 81$

5.  $7(42 \div 6) + 18 - 2(14 - 9)$   
 $= 7(7) + 18 - 2(5)$   
 $= 49 + 18 - 10$   
 $= 57$

6.  $5.59 + \$4.60(3 - 6 \div 3 + 2) - \$9.99$   
 $= \$5.59 + \$4.60(3 - 2 + 2) - \$9.99$   
 $= \$5.59 + \$4.60(3) - \$9.99$   
 $= \$5.59 + \$13.80 - \$9.99$   
 $= \$9.40$

7.  $7.2 \div 8 + 3.6(6.6 - 1.1) + 1.2$   
 $= 7.2 \div 8 + 3.6(5.5) + 1.2$   
 $= .9 + 19.8 + 1.2$   
 $= 21.9$

8.  $\frac{3(25 \div 5) + 2 \times 9 - 12 \div 4}{6 \times 3 - 49 \div 7 + 2(2)}$   
 $= \frac{3(5) + 18 - 3}{18 - 7 + 4}$   
 $= \frac{30}{15}$   
 $= 2$