THE OWELET

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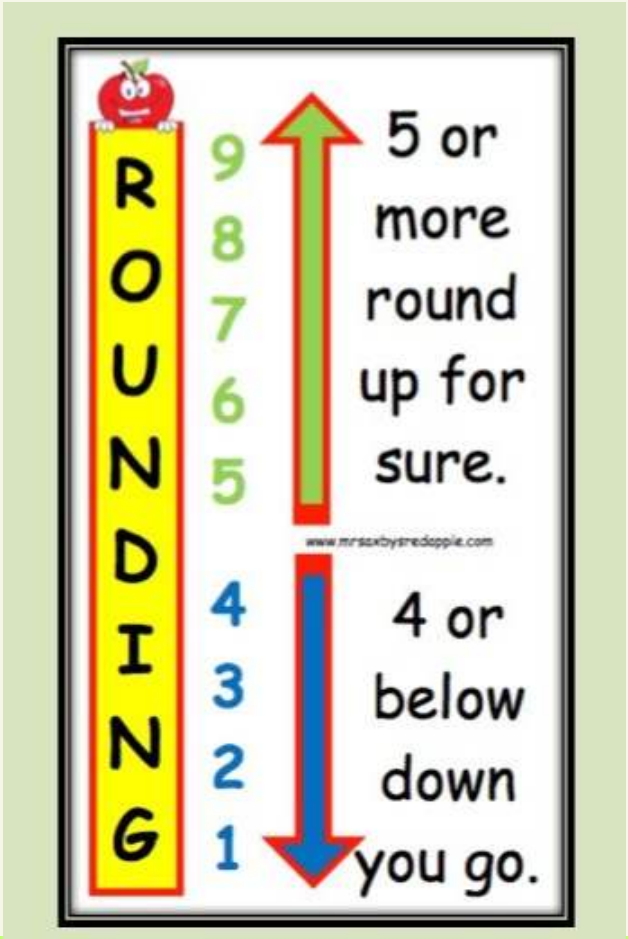

ACCURACY AND ROUNDING IN MATHEMATICS

Why is learning to round numbers important? What does it achieve and how do we make use of this skill in our daily lives? To answer these questions, I have tried to give a brief overview of rounding in the context of the primary and secondary mathematics curriculum.

When students have a good grasp of place value and know how to skip count, rounding is introduced. Thus, rounding is introduced in Grade 3, starting with rounding numbers to the nearest ten and hundred. In Grades four and five, students are expected to round larger numbers to different place values.

Rounding makes the number less accurate, however, it becomes easier to work with afterwords. Carrying out operations with numbers after rounding is easier. Therefore, estimating and rounding go hand in hand. It's often a good idea to estimate the answer to a calculation before proceeding on to work it out accurately or for checking an answer. This is a lifelong skill that is very useful for everyday calculations.

Secondary Mathematics topics such as Financial Maths, Measurement, Trigonometry and Pythagoras theorem often involve rounding. The wording in these problems can be obscure. For example, students must understand that rounding an answer given in dollars to two decimal places also means rounding to the nearest cent.

Around Year 9, 10 or 11, students also encounter another form of rounding which is called significant figure rounding. The advantage of this way of rounding is that very small numbers and very large numbers can be expressed more compactly by combining significant figures with scientific notation. Scientific notation is widely used in different sciences and it is very important to learn this well. Again, scientific notation is also used in calculator displays and students need to be able to recognize and understand this display.

Maths topics are not learnt in isolation and every topic is related to another topic. The aim of learning maths well and efficiently is to learn how topics are interconnected. Learning to round numbers connects many maths areas at different levels and it is important in our daily lives.