



So What Goes Into a Good Number Talk?

Purposes for using a number talk

- Students communicate their thinking about numbers and mathematical relationships
- Students develop flexibility and fluency in their approaches to number and relationship problems
- Teachers listen to and learn about their students' mathematical understandings
- Establishing and reinforcing a classroom culture of active listening and questioning

Procedure for a number talk

1. Pose a problem (verbally and written) and establish a method for students to quietly indicate they have had enough time (not raising hand or calling out). Remind students that the problem is to be done mentally. NO calculators or pencil/paper should be permitted. Note: Most calculation problems should be written horizontally to avoid leading students toward traditional algorithms.
2. Ask for answers. Maintain a neutral attitude while accepting and writing down all different answers. It is not necessary to keep track of how many students have the same answer.
3. Optional: Give students an opportunity to write down their thoughts or practice talking about their thinking (this step can support English language learners and special needs students).
4. Ask for students to explain their thinking to support any of the answers. Script their procedures on the board, chart paper or the overhead, again maintaining a neutral attitude. If you are having trouble scripting, ask the student for more clarification. As a student finishes, ask the class if they have questions for the student, and let that student answer. Give names to the various strategies that come out (e.g. "grouping by ten," "assigning values and calculating," "moving up," "decomposing", "using friendly numbers")