Adding Unlike Fractions

5th Grade

Unlike denominators have to be matched before anything can be added.

Find a common denominator, rewrite both fractions, then add only the numerators.

1/2 + 1/3 = 3/6 + 2/6 = 5/6

1/2 + 1/3 → **5/6**

6 is the smallest number both 2 and 3 divide into.

2/5 + 1/4 → **13/20**

20 is the least common denominator.

1/6 + 1/3 → **1/2**

3 already divides into 6, so only one fraction changes.

3/4 + 5/6 → **19/12 = 1 7/12**

Answers over 1 are fine — convert at the end.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

× 1/2 + 1/3 = 2/5

✓ 1/2 + 1/3 = 5/6

Adding tops and bottoms separately is not addition. Half plus a third is more than half.

The multiples of the larger denominator are the fastest place to hunt for a common one.