

Subtracting Unlike Fractions

5th Grade

Same first step as adding — match the denominators, then take away.

Rewrite both fractions over a common denominator, then subtract the numerators.

$$\frac{3}{4} - \frac{1}{6} = \frac{9}{12} - \frac{2}{12} = \frac{7}{12}$$

$$\frac{3}{4} - \frac{1}{6}$$

$$\frac{7}{12}$$

12 is the least common denominator.

$$\frac{5}{6} - \frac{1}{2}$$

$$\frac{1}{3}$$

Rewrite as $\frac{5}{6} - \frac{3}{6} = \frac{2}{6}$, then simplify.

$$2 \frac{1}{4} - \frac{3}{4}$$

$$1 \frac{1}{2}$$

Borrow a whole: $2 \frac{1}{4}$ becomes $1 \frac{5}{4}$.

$$\frac{7}{8} - \frac{1}{3}$$

$$\frac{13}{24}$$

24 is the smallest number both divide into.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

× $2 \frac{1}{4} - \frac{3}{4} = 2 - \frac{1}{2}$

✓ $2 \frac{1}{4} - \frac{3}{4} = 1 \frac{1}{2}$

When the fraction on top is too small, borrow one whole from the whole number first.

Borrowing turns $2 \frac{1}{4}$ into 1 and $\frac{5}{4}$. It is the same trick as borrowing in column subtraction.