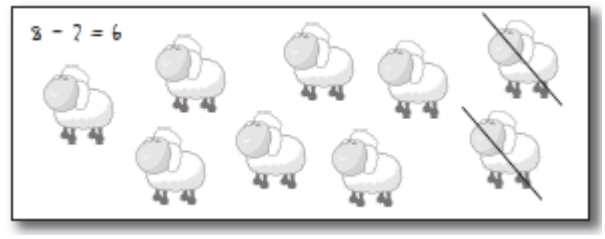
Subtraction

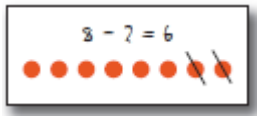
Subtraction can be described in three ways:
- taking away
- counting back
- finding the **difference** (counting on)

It is important that children understand the relationship between these three different interpretations of subtraction.

TAKING AWAY

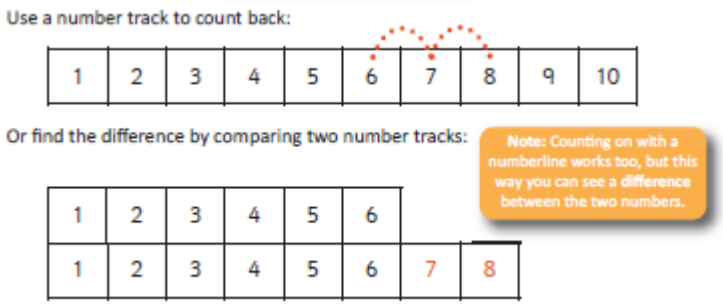
Stage 1 (Foundation Stage - Year 1)
Real objects, pictures and symbols come first.





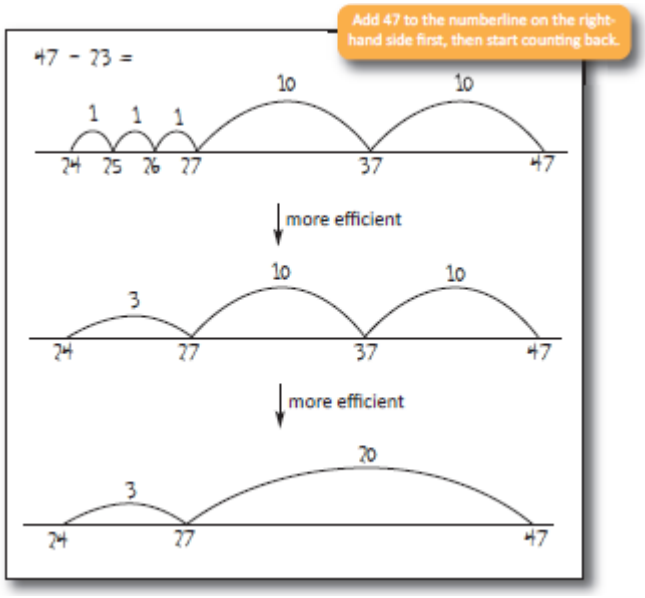
COUNTING BACK

Using numberlines to count back in ones

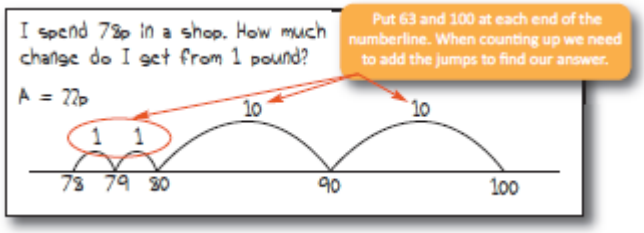


Stage 2

Using an empty numberline we count backwards from the right. As with addition, the challenge is choosing efficient jumps backwards.

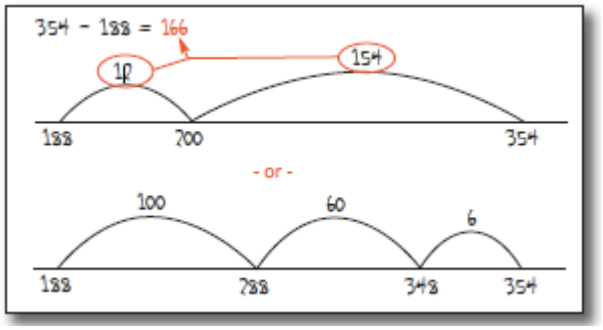


If the numbers involved in the calculation are close together or close to multiples of 10 or 100 etc, it can be easier to count on. In fact many children find counting on more straightforward. A common example is counting on to find change.

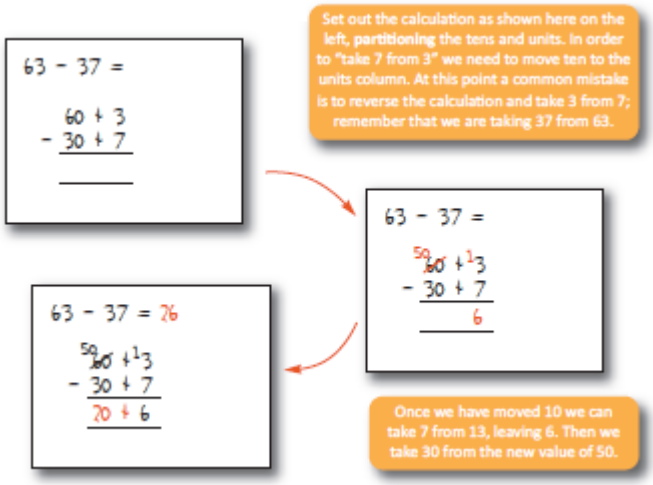


Stage 3 (around Year 3)

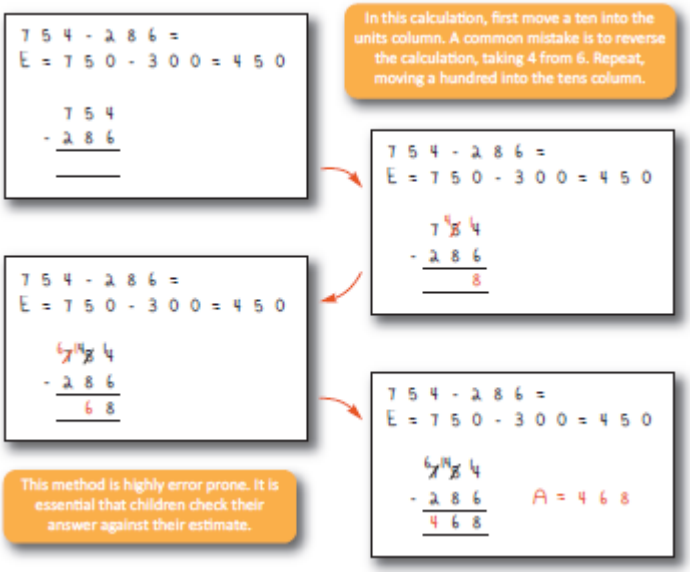
At this stage, children are using numberlines with much greater skill; they choose the best methods and the best jumps for subtraction calculations less than 1000.



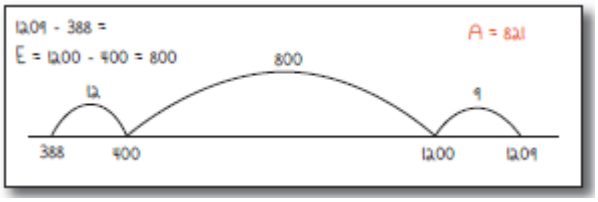
Pencil and paper methods without using a numberline begin with a simple, expanded method which makes explicit the need to move tens into the units column to carry out a subtraction like 63 - 37. As with addition, we must **start at the right** with the **least significant digits**.



Stage 4 (Year 4 - Year 6)
This is the final stage for subtraction. We contract our expanded written method into the standard method: **decomposition**. Again, start on the right.



Numberlines remain easier and more reliable in some cases and children by now should be confident with this process.



As with addition, children should be able to calculate with:
- decimal fractions with different numbers of digits
- different units, eg 5.67kg - 870g