

What is subitising?

Subitising is when you are able to look at a group of objects and realise how many there are without counting. This only works with small groups of numbers, as we can only subitise up to 5 things. It was first introduced by a Swiss psychologist called Piaget.



Types of subitising:

1. Perceptual subitising

This is the ability to recognise the number of objects in front of you without using any mathematical process - it's instinctual.

2. Conceptual subitising

This is where you are able to recognise a number by grouping in into small sets. For example, if you are shown a line of 6 black dots, it's likely that you will automatically group these into 2 groups of 3, and then know that there are 6 in total without actually counting each one.

Why is being able to subitise useful?

Simply, it can make working out maths problems a lot faster. If your brain is already able to recognise certain groups of numbers easily, then you'll have more time to focus on other aspects of the problem.

Subitising helps us to count larger numbers. Eg 7 can be arranged in a 'seven tree' – 4 add 3. This helps with factual fluency as they progress through school.



How can I help my child learn to subitise?

Using board games with dice is a fun way to develop children's subitising ability without them even realising. Remind children they don't need to count if the number is 5 or smaller.

Subitising is all about exposing children to the visual representations of numbers.

A single black dot in a square box.	Two black dots in a square box, arranged vertically.	Three black dots in a square box, arranged in a triangle.	Four black dots in a square box, arranged in a square.	Five black dots in a square box, arranged in a cross shape.
One - I know it is one because I can snap it with one hand.	Two - I know it is two because I can snap them with two hand.	Three - I know it is three because I can move them to make a triangle.	Four - I know it is four because I can move them to make a square.	Five - I know it is five because I can make a square with one more.

The White Rose 1 minute maths app (free) is brilliant for subitising practise!

