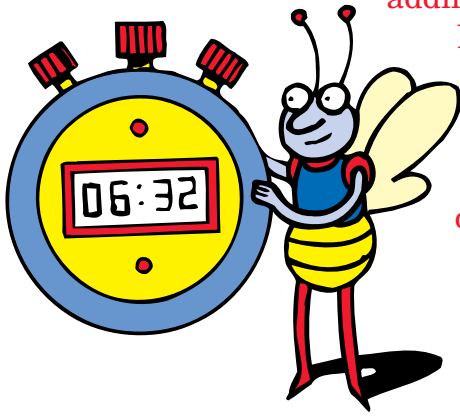


When should we leave?

Materials

- Clock or watch that displays minutes
- Pencil and paper (optional)



“Oh no, it’s almost 12:35! We’ll never get to the soccer field by 1:00!”

Some days it seems that everyone is rushing off somewhere—to school, to work, to appointments. As we plan the day, we need to decide when to leave in order to get places on time—even if we don’t always quite make it. Deciding when to leave requires lots of math: adding and subtracting times, using time sense to estimate how long it takes to go places, and using timetables.

In this activity, as children figure out when to leave, they learn about the role math plays in scheduling the day. Finding when to leave also gives them something to do while they’re waiting around to go!

1. Talk through the trip

Make sure your children know

- the time you need to arrive at your destination.
- the parts of the trip—will you walk directly there? Walk to the bus stop, wait, ride the bus, and then walk the rest of the way?
- how long each part of the trip takes. It’s OK to round times to the nearest 10 or 15 minutes.

“We’re driving Ana to school. It’s a 15-minute ride to Ana’s house, and then it takes about 20 minutes to get to school. We need to be there for the 8:10 bell. When should we leave?”

For ages 5–7

Ask about trips with just one part.

“It takes half an hour to walk to Grandma’s house. We need to be there at 3:00. When should we leave?”

Or, combine parts of the trip, so children have fewer things to keep track of.

“It will take about 35 minutes to get to school. When should we leave?”

2. Figure out when to leave

If your children get stuck, work with them in one of these ways:

Calculate how long the trip is, then subtract the travel time from your intended arrival time. The trip takes 15 + 20, or 35 minutes. Thirty-five minutes before 8:10 is 7:35.

Work backwards, one step at a time. To get to school at 8:10, we need to leave Ana’s house 20 minutes earlier. That’s 7:50. So, we should leave home 15 minutes before then—at 7:35.

Pick a time when you might start, and then adjust. Some children find it easier to work with a specific starting time.

“What if we left at 7:45—when would we get there? ... Should we leave earlier or later than that? ... How much earlier (or later)?”

Keep the focus on the goal. Sometimes when we get bogged down in calculations, we lose sight of what we’re trying to figure out. Remind children of the basic question as needed.

“So you figured out that it will take us about 35 minutes in all. When should we leave so that we get there at 8:10?”

Take off the pressure if it’s getting to be time to go. You can spend a bit of travel time explaining how you figured out when to leave. Next time, ask your children to figure out, “When should we leave?” when the trip is simpler.



When you repeat this activity

Try this with a variety of trips—trips under half an hour, and trips of 2 hours or longer; trips involving several stops, bus changes, or errands; and trips involving different methods of transportation. For more challenge, involve your children in planning ahead for possible traffic or other delays.

“We have to take two buses. Each ride could take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on traffic, and we could wait up to 10 minutes when we change buses. How much time should we allow, in case there’s a lot of traffic and a long wait? What’s the earliest we could get there? If we’re early, will there be enough time to get ice cream on the way?”

Variations

Use timetables (ages 7–11)

Sometimes, figuring out when to leave involves choosing which bus (or train, or ferry) to take. Work with your child to use a timetable to plan your trip.

“We have to be at the doctor’s at 4:00. The bus stops at North Square just around the corner from the doctor’s office. Let’s look at the schedule to find a bus that gets there by 3:50. OK, the 3:02 from the Oak Street stop should get us in by 3:43. What time do we need to leave home to catch the 3:02 bus at Oak Street?”

How long did it take? (ages 7–11)

Find a trip that your children take on a regular basis—perhaps a drive to the grocery store, a bus to the library, or a trip by foot and subway to Grandma’s house. Each time they take this same trip (for at least a few trips), ask them to use a watch or timer to find how long it takes. Provide a notebook or special paper where they can record how long the trip took, along with the date and day of the week, the time of day, the weather, and any circumstances they think affected the length of the trip (such as delays for road construction). They can use these data to help make decisions about when to leave on future trips.

“How much time should we allow for the trip when it’s raining? In rush hour? On Sunday afternoon?”

