

Sample Problems

1. Perform each of the indicated operations.

(a) $21 - 2(-5) =$

(b) $\sqrt{60 \div 4 \div 5 + 1} =$

(c) $20 - |32 \div (-2)| =$

(d) $\frac{-3^2 + 30 \div (-2)}{-4} =$

(e) $(9 - 6)^2 =$

(f) $9^2 - 6^2 =$

(g) $16 - \sqrt{2^3 - 2^2} - 5 =$

(h) $\sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-3^5 + (-1)^3}{\left|(-5)^3 - \left|6 + (-5)^3\right|\right|} =$

(i) $\frac{3 + (6^2 - 3^2) + (3^3 - 2^3) - 9}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} =$

(j) $\sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2(3^2 + 3^3) + 2(4(17 - 2^3) - 3^2)} =$

(k) $2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + (6 \cdot 4 - 3(2^4 - 12))) =$

2. Let $a = -4$, $b = 2$, and $x = -3$. Evaluate each of the following expressions.

(a) $a^2 - b^2 =$

(b) $(a - b)^2 =$

(c) $a^b - 2bx + x - |2x| =$

(d) $\frac{-x^2 + (x + 2)^2}{(x - 1)} =$

(e) $\frac{x - 1}{x + 3} =$

3. Consider the equation $x^2 - 10x + x^3 - 4 = 4(x + 5)$. In each case, determine whether the number given is a solution of the equation or not.

(a) $x = 0$

(b) $x = -2$

(c) $x = -3$

Practice Problems

1. Simplify each of the following expressions.

(a) $||-20 - 3(-4)| - 10| =$

(b) $15 - 3(-2) =$

(c) $\left(\left((1-2)^2 - 2\right)^2 - 2\right)^2 - 2 =$

(d) $\sqrt{-7^2 + 15(2)^2 - 18 \div 3 \div 3} =$

(e) $\frac{-6^2 \div 2 \cdot 3 + |2^2 \cdot 12 - 11| + 2(-1)^3 - (-1)^2}{(-2)^2 + (-2)^3} =$

(f) $\sqrt{36} - \sqrt{81} + 2\sqrt{25} =$

2. Evaluate $\frac{8x + x^2 - 33}{x + 11}$ if

(a) $x = 0$

(b) $x = -11$

3. Evaluate $\frac{x-2}{2-x}$ if

(a) $x = 0$

(b) $x = 2$

4. Consider the equation $-x + x^3 + 6 = 3(-x^2 + x + 2)$. In each case, determine whether the number given is a solution of the equation or not.

(a) $x = 0$

(b) $x = 1$

(c) $x = -1$

(d) $x = 2$

(e) $x = -2$

(f) $x = 3$

(g) $x = -3$

(h) $x = 4$

(i) $x = -4$

Sample Problems - Solutions

1. Perform each of the indicated operations.

(a) $21 - 2(-5) =$ **31**

Solution:

$$\begin{aligned} 21 - 2(-5) &= && \text{multiplication first: } 2(-5) = -10 \\ 21 - (-10) &= && \text{to subtract is to add the opposite} \\ 21 + 10 &= && 31 \end{aligned}$$

(b) $\sqrt{60 \div 4 \div 5 + 1} =$ **2**

Solution: The square root sign stretching across other operations is a case of an "invisible parentheses." We will work out everything else and then take the square root of the result. We need to be careful; the two divisions have to be executed left to right.

$$\begin{aligned} \sqrt{60 \div 4 \div 5 + 1} &= && \text{division first, left to right!} \\ \sqrt{15 \div 5 + 1} &= && \text{division} \\ \sqrt{3 + 1} &= && \text{addition} \\ \sqrt{4} &= && \text{square root} \\ &= && 2 \end{aligned}$$

(c) $20 - |32 \div (-2)| =$ **4**

Solution: We start with the absolute value sign since it also functions as parentheses. We work out what's inside and then take the absolute value of the result. This absolute value is what we subtract from 20.

$$\begin{aligned} 20 - |32 \div (-2)| &= && \text{division within absolute value sign} \\ 20 - |-16| &= && \text{absolute value of } -16 \text{ is } 16 \\ 20 - 16 &= && \text{subtraction} \\ &= && 4 \end{aligned}$$

(d) $\frac{-3^2 + 30 \div (-2)}{-4} =$ **6**

Solution: The division bar stretching over an expression is a case of an "invisible parentheses." We completely work out the top and the bottom, and finally divide.

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{-3^2 + 30 \div (-2)}{-4} &= && \text{exponents} \\ \frac{-9 + 30 \div (-2)}{-4} &= && \text{division upstairs} \\ \frac{-9 + (-15)}{-4} &= && \text{addition upstairs} \\ \frac{-24}{-4} &= && \text{division} \\ &= && 6 \end{aligned}$$

(e) $(9 - 6)^2 = 9$

Solution: We start with the parentheses.

$$\begin{aligned} (9 - 6)^2 &= && \text{subtraction within parentheses} \\ (3)^2 &= && \text{drop parentheses} \\ 3^2 &= && \text{exponents} \\ &= && 9 \end{aligned}$$

(f) $9^2 - 6^2 = 45$

Solution: This and the previous problem is here to remind you that $a^2 - b^2$ and $(a - b)^2$ are different! In this case there is no parentheses, and so we start with the exponents.

$$\begin{aligned} 9^2 - 6^2 &= && \text{exponents} \\ 81 - 36 &= && \text{subtraction} \\ &= && 45 \end{aligned}$$

(g) $16 - \sqrt{2^3 - 2^2} - 5 = 9$

Solution: The square root sign stretching across other operations is a case of an "invisible parentheses." We start there.

$$\begin{aligned} 16 - \sqrt{2^3 - 2^2} - 5 &= && \text{exponents under square root} \\ 16 - \sqrt{8 - 4} - 5 &= && \text{subtraction under square root} \\ 16 - \sqrt{4} - 5 &= && \text{square root} \\ 16 - 2 - 5 &= && \text{subtractions, left to right} \\ 14 - 5 &= && \\ &= && 9 \end{aligned}$$

(h) $\sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-3^5 + (-1)^3}{|(-5)^3 - |6 + (-5)^3||} = -5$

Solution:

$$\begin{aligned} \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-3^5 + (-1)^3}{|(-5)^3 - |6 + (-5)^3||} &= && \text{exponents upstairs} \\ \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-243 + (-1)^3}{|(-5)^3 - |6 + (-5)^3||} &= && \\ \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{|(-5)^3 - |6 + (-5)^3||} &= && \text{addition upstairs} \end{aligned}$$

We now start working downstairs, starting in the innermost parentheses. The absolute value signs are also parentheses! We start with exponents.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{\left|(-5)^3 - \left|6 + (-5)^3\right|\right|} &= \\
 \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{\left|(-5)^3 - |6 + (-125)|\right|} &= \text{addition} \\
 \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{\left|(-5)^3 - |-119|\right|} &= \text{the absolute value of } -119 \text{ is } 119 \\
 \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{\left|(-5)^3 - 119\right|} &= \text{exponents within absolute value sign} \\
 \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{|-125 - 119|} &= \text{subtraction within absolute value sign} \\
 \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{|-244|} &= \text{the absolute value of } -244 \text{ is } 244 \\
 \sqrt{25} \cdot \frac{-244}{244} &= \text{square root} \\
 5 \cdot \frac{-244}{244} &= \text{division} \\
 5 \cdot (-1) &= -5
 \end{aligned}$$

$$(i) \frac{3 + (6^2 - 3^2) + (3^3 - 2^3) - 9}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} = \textcolor{red}{2}$$

Solution: The division bar stretching over an expression is a case of an "invisible parentheses" around the top and the bottom expressions. We completely work out the top and the bottom, and finally divide. We start within the three parentheses:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \frac{3 + (6^2 - 3^2) + (3^3 - 2^3) - 9}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} &= \text{first parentheses on the top} \\
 \frac{3 + (36 - 9) + (27 - 8) - 9}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} &= \frac{3 + 27 + 19 - 9}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} = \frac{30 + 19 - 9}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} \\
 &= \frac{49 - 9}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} = \frac{40}{4^2 + (5 - 3)^2} \\
 &= \frac{40}{4^2 + 2^2} = \frac{40}{16 + 4} = \frac{40}{20} = 2
 \end{aligned}$$

(j) $\sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2(3^2 + 3^3) + 2(4(17 - 2^3) - 3^2)} = \textcolor{red}{3}$

Solution: The square root sign stretching across other operations is a case of an "invisible parentheses." We will work out everything else and then take the square root of the result. We start with the innermost parentheses.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2(3^2 + 3^3) + 2(4(17 - 2^3) - 3^2)} &= \text{exponent in first parentheses from left} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2(9 + 3^3) + 2(4(17 - 2^3) - 3^2)} &= \text{exponent in first parentheses from left} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2(9 + 27) + 2(4(17 - 2^3) - 3^2)} &= \text{addition in first parentheses from left} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2 \cdot 36 + 2(4(17 - 2^3) - 3^2)} &= \text{exponent in innermost parentheses} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2 \cdot 36 + 2(4(17 - 8) - 3^2)} &= \text{subtraction in innermost parentheses} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2 \cdot 36 + 2(4 \cdot 9 - 3^2)} &= \text{exponent in parentheses} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2 \cdot 36 + 2(4 \cdot 9 - 9)} &= \text{multiplication in parentheses} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2 \cdot 36 + 2(36 - 9)} &= \text{subtraction in parentheses} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{3^6} - 2 \cdot 36 + 2 \cdot 27} &= \text{exponent within square root sign} \\
 \sqrt{\sqrt{729} - 2 \cdot 36 + 2 \cdot 27} &= \text{square root} \\
 \sqrt{27 - 2 \cdot 36 + 2 \cdot 27} &= \text{multiplications, left to right} \\
 \sqrt{27 - 72 + 54} &= \text{subtraction} \\
 \sqrt{-45 + 54} &= \text{addition} \\
 \sqrt{9} &= \text{square root} \\
 &= 3
 \end{aligned}$$

(k) $2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + (6 \cdot 4 - 3(2^4 - 12))) = \textcolor{red}{4}$

Solution: We start with the innermost parentheses. Remember, every step we write down is a new, easier problem we have to solve now.

$$\begin{aligned}
 2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + (6 \cdot 4 - 3(2^4 - 12))) &= \text{exponents in innermost parentheses} \\
 2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + (6 \cdot 4 - 3(16 - 12))) &= \text{subtraction in innermost parentheses} \\
 2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + (6 \cdot 4 - 3(4))) &= \text{drop parentheses} \\
 2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + (6 \cdot 4 - 3 \cdot 4)) &= \text{multiplication in innermost parentheses, left to right} \\
 2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + (24 - 12)) &= \text{subtraction in innermost parentheses} \\
 2 \cdot 3^2 - (6 - 4 + 12) &= \text{addition and subtraction in parentheses, left to right} \\
 2 \cdot 3^2 - (2 + 12) &= \\
 2 \cdot 3^2 - 14 &= \text{exponent} \\
 2 \cdot 9 - 14 &= \text{multiplication} \\
 18 - 14 &= 4
 \end{aligned}$$

2. Let $a = -4$, $b = 2$, and $x = -3$. Evaluate each of the following expressions.

(a) $a^2 - b^2 = 12$

Solution: First we re-write the expression with one change, we write little pairs of parentheses instead of the letters.

$$a^2 - b^2 = ()^2 - ()^2$$

We now write the values inside the parentheses. From here on this is an order of operations problem.

$$\begin{aligned} a^2 - b^2 &= (-4)^2 - (2)^2 && \text{drop extra parentheses} \\ &= (-4)^2 - 2^2 && \text{exponents} \\ &= 16 - 4 && \text{subtraction} \\ &= 12 \end{aligned}$$

(b) $(a - b)^2 = 36$

Solution: First we re-write the expression with one change, we write little pairs of parentheses instead of the letters.

$$(a - b)^2 = (() - ())^2$$

We now write the values inside the parentheses. From here on this is an order of operations problem.

$$\begin{aligned} (a - b)^2 &= ((-4) - (2))^2 && \text{drop extra parentheses} \\ &= (-4 - 2)^2 && \text{subtraction in parentheses} \\ &= (-6)^2 && \text{exponent} \\ &= 36 \end{aligned}$$

This and the previous problem is here to remind you that $(a - b)^2$ and $a^2 - b^2$ are two different expressions.

(c) $a^b - 2bx + x - |2x| = 19$

Solution: First we re-write the expression with one modification only: we write little pairs of parentheses instead of the letters.

$$a^b - 2bx + x - |2x| = ()^{()} - 2()() + () - |2()|$$

We now write the values inside the parentheses. From here on this is an order of operations problem.

$$a^b - 2bx + x - |2x| =$$

$$\begin{aligned} &= ()^{()} - 2()() + () - |2()| \\ &= (-4)^{(2)} - 2(2)(-3) + (-3) - |2(-3)| && \text{drop extra parentheses} \\ &= (-4)^2 - 2(2)(-3) + (-3) - |2(-3)| && \text{multiplication within absolute value sign} \\ &= (-4)^2 - 2(2)(-3) + (-3) - |-6| && \text{the absolute value of } -6 \text{ is } 6 \\ &= (-4)^2 - 2(2)(-3) + (-3) - 6 && \text{exponent} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&= 16 - 2(2)(-3) + (-3) - 6 && \text{multiplication, left to right} \\
&= 16 - 4(-3) + (-3) - 6 \\
&= 16 - (-12) + (-3) - 6 && \text{additions, subtractions, left to right} \\
&= 16 + 12 + (-3) - 6 \\
&= 28 + (-3) - 6 \\
&= 25 - 6 \\
&= 19
\end{aligned}$$

(d) $\frac{-x^2 + (x+2)^2}{(x-1)} = \textcolor{red}{2}$

Solution: First we re-write the expression with only one modification: we write little pairs of parentheses instead of the letters.

$$\frac{-x^2 + (x+2)^2}{(x-1)} = \frac{-(\)^2 + ((\) + 2)^2}{((\) - 1)}$$

We now write the values inside the parentheses. From here on this is an order of operations problem.

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{-x^2 + (x+2)^2}{(x-1)} &= \frac{-(-3)^2 + ((-3) + 2)^2}{((-3) - 1)} && \text{drop parentheses} \\
&= \frac{-(-3)^2 + (-3 + 2)^2}{(-3 - 1)} && \text{addition in parentheses upstairs} \\
&= \frac{-(-3)^2 + (-1)^2}{(-3 - 1)} && \text{subtraction downstairs in parentheses} \\
&= \frac{-(-3)^2 + (-1)^2}{(-4)} && \text{drop parentheses} \\
&= \frac{-(-3)^2 + (-1)^2}{-4} && \text{exponents upstairs} \\
&= \frac{-9 + 1}{-4} && \text{addition} \\
&= \frac{-8}{-4} && \text{division} \\
&= 2
\end{aligned}$$

(e) $\frac{x-1}{x+3} = \textcolor{red}{\text{undefined}}$

Solution: First we re-write the expression with only one modification: we write little pairs of parentheses instead of the letters.

$$\frac{x-1}{x+3} = \frac{(\) - 1}{(\) + 3}$$

We write the values inside the parentheses and evaluate the expression.

$$\frac{x-1}{x+3} = \frac{(-3) - 1}{(-3) + 3} = \frac{-4}{0} = \text{undefined}$$

3. Consider the equation $x^2 - 10x + x^3 - 4 = 4(x + 5)$. In each case, determine whether the number given is a solution of the equation or not.

(a) $x = 0$ $-4 \neq 20$ **no**

Solution: We simply evaluate both sides of the equation when $x = 0$.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{LHS} &= (0)^2 - 10(0) + (0)^3 - 4 \\ &= 0^2 - 10 \cdot 0 + 0^3 - 4 \\ &= 0 - 10 \cdot 0 + 0 - 4 = 0 - 0 + 0 - 4 = -4\end{aligned}$$

$$\text{RHS} = 4((0) + 5) = 4(0 + 5) = 4 \cdot 5 = 20$$

Since $-4 \neq 20$, $x = 0$ is not a solution of this equation.

(b) $x = -2$ $12 = 12$ **yes**

Solution: We simply evaluate both sides of the equation when $x = -2$.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{LHS} &= (-2)^2 - 10(-2) + (-2)^3 - 4 \\ &= 4 - 10(-2) + (-8) - 4 \\ &= 4 - (-20) + (-8) - 4 \\ &= 24 + (-8) - 4 \\ &= 16 - 4 \\ &= 12\end{aligned}$$

$$\text{RHS} = 4((-2) + 5) = 4 \cdot 3 = 12$$

Since $12 = 12$, $x = -2$ is a solution of this equation.

(c) $x = -3$ $8 = 8$ **yes**

Solution: We simply evaluate both sides of the equation when $x = -3$.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{LHS} &= (-3)^2 - 10(-3) + (-3)^3 - 4 \\ &= 9 - 10(-3) + (-27) - 4 \\ &= 9 - (-30) + (-27) - 4 \\ &= 39 + (-27) - 4 \\ &= 12 - 4 \\ &= 8\end{aligned}$$

$$\text{RHS} = 4((-3) + 5) = 4(-3 + 5) = 4 \cdot 2 = 8$$

Since $8 = 8$, $x = -3$ is a solution of this equation.

Practice Problems - Answers

1. Simplify each of the following expressions.

(a) $||-20 - 3(-4)| - 10| = 2$

(b) $15 - 3(-2) = 21$

(c) $\left(\left((1-2)^2 - 2\right)^2 - 2\right) - 2 = -1$

(d) $\sqrt{-7^2 + 15(2)^2 - 18 \div 3 \div 3} = 3$

(e) $\frac{-6^2 \div 2 \cdot 3 + |2^2 \cdot 12 - 11| + 2(-1)^3 - (-1)^2}{(-2)^2 + (-2)^3} = 5$

(f) $\sqrt{36} - \sqrt{81} + 2\sqrt{25} = 7$

2. Evaluate $\frac{8x + x^2 - 33}{x + 11}$ if

(a) $x = 0$ -3

(b) $x = -11$ undefined

3. Evaluate $\frac{x-2}{2-x}$ if

(a) $x = 0$ -1

(b) $x = 2$ undefined

4. Consider the equation $-x + x^3 + 6 = 3(-x^2 + x + 2)$. In each case, determine whether the number given is a solution of the equation or not.

(a) $x = 0$ $6 = 6$ yes

(b) $x = 1$ $6 = 6$ yes

(c) $x = -1$ $6 \neq 0$ no

(d) $x = 2$ $12 \neq 0$ no

(e) $x = -2$ $0 \neq -12$ no

(f) $x = 3$ $30 \neq -12$ no

(g) $x = -3$ $-18 \neq -30$ no

(h) $x = 4$ $66 \neq -30$ no

(i) $x = -4$ $-54 = -54$ yes