How to Add and Subtract using a Number Line

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A number line is a representation of all real numbers. Real numbers include both positive and negative numbers. In this podcast, we will focus only on the positive part of the number line.

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Number lines are another tool that can be used to demonstrate simple addition and subtraction problems. This visual aid can assist learners in understanding the foundational skills of adding and subtracting. To be successful using a number line, it is necessary to understand that as you go to the right on a number line, the numbers go up and this is how you add. As you go left on the number line, the numbers go down and this is how you subtract.

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Let's apply our learning. We will begin by adding two numbers together. The problem we will solve is $2 + 4$. Our first number in the problem is 2, therefore; we move 2 units from the 0 on the number line. Next, we need to add on 4 units. We start at the 2 and add on 4 more. When I add 2 units to 4 units my total distance is 6, therefore; $2 + 4 = 6$. This method works for adding multiple numbers. The problem we will solve is $2 + 3 + 4 =$. Our first number in the problem is 2, therefore; we move 2 units from the 0 on the number line. Next, we need to add on 3 units. We start at the 2 and add on 3 more. When I add 2 units to 3 units my total units equals 5. Now I need to add 4 more units. When I add 4 more units to 5, my total is 9, therefore; $2 + 3 + 4 = 9$.

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Now, we will examine a subtraction problem using the number line. The problem we will solve is 7– 3. Our first number in the problem is 7, therefore; we move 7 units from the 0 on the number line. Next, I will subtract 3 units. Remember, subtraction means moving to the left on the number line. We start at the 7 and subtract 3 on the number line. This leaves me with 4 units. When I subtract 7 units from 3 units, my total is 4, therefore; $7 - 3 = 4$.

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Below this podcast there is a printable copy of a number line worksheet that can be used to complete additional problems.

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