

Writing Numbers

by Isaac Asimov



- 1 Nobody knows when numbers were first used. Certainly it was before anyone had thought of writing them down. The first real attempts at writing were made about five thousand years ago in the land now called Iraq. At that time part of Iraq was known as Sumeria. And it was the Sumerians who first made use of writing. Other ancient peoples, the Chinese and the Egyptians, also developed systems of writing. Gradually writing came to be used all over the world.
- 2 When writing was invented, the Sumeri-

ans and the Egyptians had cities, temples, and farm irrigation ditches. Many people had to work together in building all of this. They all had to contribute time and effort. They also had to pay taxes. So it became important to keep tax records. The priests of the temples were in charge of such things. They had to make sure they knew who paid taxes and how much. They could try to remember this information, perhaps, but memory could play tricks, and there might be arguments. It was better to make some

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How Well Did You Read?

Write *T* if a statement is true according to the story. Write *F* if a statement is false.

- 1 Numbers were used long before anyone thought of writing them down.
- 2 People found ways of writing numbers so that they could keep records of taxes and other data.
- 3 Ancient Egyptians showed the number one this way, I, because that symbol looks like a stick.
- 4 The problem with making a single mark for each thing being counted is that with large numbers it is easy to make a mistake in writing or counting all the marks.
- 5 The Egyptians simplified the problem by inventing a special mark that stood for ten.
- 6 Review paragraph 10. In the system described there, TIII stands for thirteen.
- 7 Review paragraph 13. In the system described there, HHTTII stands for two hundred twelve.
- 8 Referring again to paragraph 13, HHHHTIIII stands for four hundred fourteen.
- 9 The English language uses only nine different symbols to write numbers in the billions.

Learn about Words

Vocabulary

- A** You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 long ago (1)
- 2 watering (2)
- 3 sums of money that support government activities (2)
- 4 fixed; lasting (2)
- 5 well known (6)
- 6 order; arrangement (8)
- 7 union; mixture made by combining two or more things (10)
- 8 system; way of doing things (14)

- B** A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning *a*, *b*, or *c*. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 9 **systems** (1)
 - a political organizations
 - b plans, schemes, or methods
 - c groups of interacting electrical components
- 10 **records** (2)
 - a written accounts
 - b thin, flat disks for reproducing music
 - c best performances known

Word Study

C Sentences have patterns. Here are sentences in four different patterns:

1. **N-V:** John ran.
(Noun) (Verb)
2. **N-V-N:** Sarah has shoes.
(Noun) (Verb) (Noun)
3. **N-LV-N:** Susan is a doctor.
(Noun) (Linking Verb) (Noun)
4. **N-LV-Adj:** Melvin is tall.
(Noun) (Linking Verb) (Adjective)

Compare the sentences below with the examples. Decide which pattern is used in each sentence. (Remember that *am*, *are*, *is*, *was*, and *were* are linking verbs.) Write *N-V*, *N-V-N*, *N-LV-N*, or *N-LV-Adj*.

- 11 My brother was a detective.
- 12 The children ate dinner.
- 13 Bernie sang.
- 14 Her hair is curly.
- 15 The boat sank.
- 16 France is a country.
- 17 Dion baked a pie.
- 18 Lynda is clever.

D A noun phrase is a group of related words that indicate persons, places, things, or ideas being discussed in a sentence. Each word group in **heavy type** here is a noun phrase:

- Paul and Mary** gave me a new bike.
A tall girl came to visit.
Sam and I like the way she smiles.

Read each sentence below. Notice the words in **heavy type**. If they are a noun phrase, write *NP*. If they are not, write *No*.

- 19 **Janet and I** went to school.
- 20 The pioneer wagons **travelled west**.
- 21 **We** changed our summer plans.
- 22 **The farm woman** rises at six o'clock.
- 23 **The entire school** was present.
- 24 **The old dog** barked loudly.
- 25 My new saddle is **silver**.
- 26 **My brother and sister** read the book.

E To make sensible sentences, words must be put together in a meaningful order. Read each group of words below. If the words make a sensible sentence in their present order, write *S*. If they make no sense because the order is jumbled, write *J*.

- 27 Sally accepted our present.
- 28 Ant an is small.
- 29 Me bring please clean a plate.
- 30 Steve fell off the ladder.
- 31 I painted the table brown.
- 32 Light there is window in a the.
- 33 The lake is very deep.

Use Your Imagination

Suppose you had to invent a new way of writing numbers. What symbol would you use for the number 1? For the number 10? For the number 100? Show your new symbols to a classmate or a friend.