

# Babylonian numbers

*In this activity we explore the number system of the ancient Babylonians.*

The ancient Babylonians used cuneiform characters to write their numbers.

**Exercise 1** *What are the 2 basic ancient Babylonian numerical symbols and what do they mean?*

**Exploration 2** *Discuss the limitations of the Babylonian system. Then debate whether these so-called limitations were actually limitations at all.*

**Exploration 3** *Is the Babylonian system more of a place-value system or a concatenation system?*

**Problem 4** *Fill out the following table, simplifying any calculations.*

<i>Hindu – Arabic</i>	<i>Cuneiform</i>	<i>Hindu – Arabic</i>	<i>Cuneiform</i>	<i>Hindu – Arabic</i>	<i>Cuneiform</i>
$5 \times 1$		$5 \times 2$		$5 \times 3$	
$5 \times 4$		$5 \times 5$		$5 \times 6$	
$5 \times 7$		$5 \times 8$		$5 \times 9$	
$5 \times 10$		$5 \times 20$		$5 \times 30$	
$5 \times 40$		$5 \times 50$		$\frac{1}{5}$	
$\frac{1}{4}$		$\frac{1}{9}$		$\frac{1}{10}$	
$\frac{5}{6}$		$\frac{1}{20}$		$\frac{1}{100}$	

**Problem 5** *Use your table to make the following calculations. You should work in base sixty, though you may use Hindu-Arabic numerals.*

(a)  $34 \times 5$

(b)  $1,47 \div 5$

(c)  $150 \div 4$

Learning outcomes:  
Author(s):

(d)  $8, 6, 15 \div 6, 40$

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