

Classification

What is it?

Classification is fundamental to learning about the real world. It can be done with or without numbers, yet classification skills are a prerequisite to any meaningful number work. Before children can count, they must know *what* to count, and classification helps to identify what is to be counted. Classification not only helps children make some sense of things around them, but also helps them become flexible thinkers. Classifying objects in different ways fosters the development of thinking skills. When classification takes place, decisions need to be made about how things will be sorted. If there is disagreement, children will need to defend their ideas and explain their thinking. Language such as **more**, **few**, **many**, **most** and **none** will help the children to describe their collections. If children are confused about what to count, they are probably struggling with classification. This needs to be clear before counting can be meaningful. Classification is a very important step in developing number sense and early counting skills.

What it leads to

Classification underpins all aspects of mathematical learning, because it:

- provides a starting point for a full understanding of the number system
- helps early counting, e.g. identifying what needs to be counted and why
- helps to compare and organise meaningfully
- enables children to use the properties of number with increased accuracy in a progressively complex number system

Vocabulary



What does it look like in EYFS?

When **engaging in the world** around them, children's natural curiosity invites classification. Using their **senses**, they will begin to explore and identify familiar characteristics through a broad range of opportunities. It is important that young children repeat these experiences many times. Having done this, they will be able to **make connections** between their experiences, to classify in a variety of ways even when the resources remain the same. An example is objects on a nature table grouped for different reasons, e.g. colour, texture or characteristics. Through **making choices**, children will begin to **reason and explain their thinking** when classifying across broad and varied experiences, e.g. objects, noises or emotions. By paying **attention** to detail, children will begin to use language appropriately to justify the choices they have made.