

INTRODUCTION TO RATIONAL EXPRESSIONS

EXAMPLE:

You decide to open a small business making gluten-free cakes.

Your start-up costs were \$3,000 .

In addition, it costs \$10 to produce each cake.

What is the average total cost (ie. including the start-up costs) to produce each cake if you produce x cakes altogether?

Average total cost = _____

$$=$$
$$=$$

The average total cost above is an example of a rational expression (a polynomial divided by a polynomial).

Rational expressions follow the rules of fractions, but are more complicated because they don't just involve numbers, but also variables.

Skills which involve rational expressions that we will cover include

Simplifying

Multiplying and dividing

Adding and subtracting (with like or unlike denominators)

Simplifying complex fractions

Writing and solving equations

HOW SIMPLIFYING/CANCELLING ACTUALLY WORKS

$$\frac{ac}{bc} = \frac{a}{b} \times \frac{c}{c} = \frac{a}{b} \times 1 = \frac{a}{b}$$

EXAMPLE:

$$\frac{144}{63} = \frac{16 \times 9}{7 \times 9} = \frac{16}{7} \times \frac{9}{9} = \frac{16}{7} \times 1 = \frac{16}{7} \quad \text{which is often written as } \frac{\cancel{144}^{16}}{\cancel{63}_7} = \frac{16}{7}$$

WHY IS THIS INCORRECT ?

$$\cancel{3} \frac{\cancel{18}+12}{\cancel{6}} = 3+12 = 15$$

What's happening in the above:

$$\frac{18+12}{6} = \frac{6 \times 3 + 12}{6} = \frac{6 \times (3+2)}{6} = \frac{6}{6} \times (3+2) = 1 \times (3+2) = 3+2 = 5$$

In reality:

$$\frac{18+12}{6} = \frac{30}{6} = 5 \quad \text{or}$$

$$\frac{18+12}{6} = \frac{6 \times 3 + 6 \times 2}{6} = \frac{6 \times (3+2)}{6} = \frac{6}{6} \times (3+2) = 1 \times (3+2) = 3+2 = 5$$

The result is only correct when you cancel a factor of the numerator against a factor of the denominator. It is not correct to cancel a factor of part of the numerator against a factor of part of the denominator.

The key to simplifying fractions and rational expressions is to factor first.

SIMPLIFYING A RATIONAL EXPRESSION

PROCESS:

1. Factor the numerator and denominator of each expression.
Do the easier factoring first, so you can get hints on how to do the harder factoring.
For example, a factor in a numerator may appear as a factor in the denominator.
2. Simplify by cancelling.
The simplification is only valid for values of x for which no denominator was ever 0.

EXAMPLES:

$$\frac{3x^2 - 6x - 24}{x^2 + 5x + 6} =$$

$$\frac{3x^2 + x - 2}{3x^2 - 8x + 4} =$$

MULTIPLYING TWO RATIONAL EXPRESSIONS

PROCESS:

- 0. Do not multiply the numerators or denominators together yet.**
 1. Factor the numerator and denominator of each expression.
Do the easiest factoring first, so you can get hints on how to do the harder factoring.
For example, a factor in a numerator may appear as a factor in another denominator.
 2. Simplify by cancelling.
You may cancel a factor in any numerator against a factor in any denominator.
 3. Multiply together all remaining factors in the numerator and denominator respectively.
You may leave the numerator and denominator factored in the final answer.
- The multiplication is only valid for values of x for which no denominator was ever 0.**

EXAMPLES:

$$\frac{x^2 - 5x - 6}{x^2 + 3x + 2} \times \frac{x^2 + x - 2}{x^2 - 36} =$$

$$\frac{6x^2 - x - 12}{2x^2 - 7x + 6} \times \frac{x^2 + 7x - 18}{3x^2 - 23x - 36} =$$

DIVIDING TWO RATIONAL EXPRESSIONS

PROCESS:

1. Replace the divisor with its reciprocal, and replace the division with multiplication.
2. Multiply the dividend by the reciprocal of the divisor.

The division is only valid for values of x for which no denominator was ever 0.

EXAMPLES:

$$\frac{\frac{x^2 - 2x - 3}{x^2 + x - 2}}{x^2 - x - 2} =$$

$$\frac{5x^2 - 16x + 12}{10x^2 - 17x^2 + 6x} \div \frac{2x^2 - x - 6}{14x^2 + 13x - 12} =$$

ADDING / SUBTRACTING TWO RATIONAL EXPRESSIONS WITH LIKE DENOMINATORS

PROCESS:

1. Add / subtract the numerators, and use the common denominator.
When subtracting, the second numerator must be treated as if it were in a pair of parentheses.
2. Simplify. (The answer might not simplify.)
The addition / subtraction is only valid for values of x for which no denominator was ever 0.

EXAMPLES:

$$\frac{3x^2 + 9x - 5}{3x^2 - 12} + \frac{17 + 5x - 13x^2}{3x^2 - 12} =$$

$$\frac{4x^2 - 5x - 15}{x^2 + 13x - 48} - \frac{9 - 2x - 2x^2}{x^2 + 13x - 48} =$$

$$\frac{x^2 - 8x + 2}{x^2 - 2x - 24} + \frac{2x^2 - 9x - 14}{x^2 - 2x - 24} =$$

$$\frac{4x^2 - 2x + 11}{x^2 + 9x - 36} - \frac{7x^2 - 3x - 13}{x^2 + 9x - 36} =$$

FINDING THE LEAST COMMON DENOMINATOR (LCD) OF FRACTIONS

PROCESS:

- 0. Do not multiply the denominators together yet.**
1. Factor each denominator completely into prime numbers.
2. Each distinct prime factor in any denominator must appear in the LCD.
3. The power of each prime factor in the LCD is the greatest power of that factor in any denominator.

EXAMPLES:

Find the LCD of $\frac{3}{8}, \frac{7}{54}$

Find the LCD of $\frac{1}{18}, \frac{1}{24}, \frac{3}{40}$

FINDING THE LEAST COMMON DENOMINATOR (LCD) OF RATIONAL EXPRESSIONS

PROCESS:

- 0. Do not multiply the denominators together yet.**
1. Factor each denominator completely, including factoring out leading negatives.
2. Each distinct factor in any denominator must appear in the LCD.
A leading negative can be ignored.
3. The power of each factor in the LCD is the greatest power of that factor in any denominator.

EXAMPLES:

Find the LCD of $\frac{11}{12x^2y^3}, \frac{7}{15x^4y^2}$

Find the LCD of $\frac{6x-5}{24x-36}, \frac{2x}{27-18x}$

ADDING / SUBTRACTING FRACTIONS WITH UNLIKE DENOMINATORS

PROCESS:

1. Find the LCD.
2. For each fraction, determine which factors in the LCD are missing in the original denominator, then multiply the numerator and denominator by the missing factors.
Carry through the multiplication in the numerator, but keep the denominator in factored form.
3. Add / subtract and simplify.
The fraction will simplify only if the denominator and the numerator share prime factors.
4. Carry through the multiplication in the denominator for the final answer.

EXAMPLES:

$$\frac{3}{16} - \frac{7}{54} =$$

$$\frac{1}{18} + \frac{1}{24} - \frac{3}{40} =$$

ADDING / SUBTRACTING RATIONAL EXPRESSIONS WITH UNLIKE DENOMINATORS

PROCESS:

1. Find the LCD.
2. For each rational expression, determine which factors in the LCD are missing in the original denominator, then multiply the numerator and denominator by the missing factors.
Carry through the multiplication in the numerator, but keep the denominator in factored form.
3. Add / subtract and simplify.
The fraction will simplify only if the denominator and the numerator share factors.
The addition / subtraction is only valid for values of x for which no denominator was ever 0.

EXAMPLES:

$$\frac{11}{12x^2y^3} - \frac{7}{15x^4y^2} =$$

$$\frac{6x-5}{24x-36} + \frac{2x}{27-18x} =$$

$$\frac{2x-1}{x^2-x-2} - \frac{x+3}{x^2-4} =$$

$$\frac{2}{7x+5} + \frac{10}{21x+15} - \frac{5}{42x^2+2x-20} =$$