

When Should We Simplify Answers?

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This article explores the question, “When should we simplify answers?” by examining various scenarios where retaining “unsimplified” forms can enhance mathematical understanding and provide deeper insights. Specifically, we delve into four situations when teachers may want to avoid simplifying—namely, generalizing numerical patterns, understanding mathematical structures, real-world contextual understanding, and supporting effective technology use. By illustrating how unsimplified answers can improve learning and problem solving in mathematics, this article argues for a more flexible approach to mathematical instruction, emphasizing the educational benefits of working with alternative answer formats.

Keywords: problem solving, sense making, simplified answers, conceptual understanding



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