



BABYLONIAN NUMBERS



Babylonian scribes wrote numbers with just two marks: an upright wedge for 1 and a corner wedge for 10. To write 1 to 59, they grouped the marks: 23 is two corner wedges and three upright wedges. After 59, they started a new place worth 60, the way we start a tens place after 9. At first there was no zero: scribes left a space, and readers used common sense.

= 1	= 10	= $10 + 10 + 3 = 23$	= $60 + 5 = 65$
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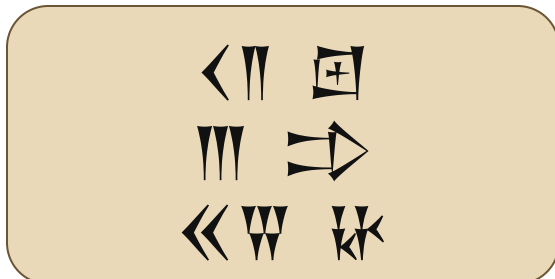
♦ READ THE NUMBERS ♦

1 = 	2 = 	3 = 	4 = 	5 = 	6 =
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♦ WRITE THESE NUMBERS IN WEDGES ♦

14	38	61
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♦ READ A CLAY RECEIPT ♦



This clay tablet is a receipt, like thousands found in temple storerooms. A scribe recorded animals brought in for the temple. Each line gives a number in wedges, then a sign that tells what was counted. Use the sign chart and the number chart to read it.

- How many sheep and oxen came in, all together? Write your answer in our numbers and in Babylonian wedges.

- Writing began for records like this one. Why did temples need to keep records of animals and goods?

Why 60?

We still count time the Babylonian way: 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour and 360 degrees in a circle. Sixty is handy because it divides evenly by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 15, 20 and 30, so a scribe could share 60 loaves or 60 measures of barley among many groups without fractions.