

Significant Figures

	Example	Sig. Digits	Sci-Notation
1 All non-zero digits are significant			
	1.589	4	1.589E+00
	0.897	3	8.97E-01
	36000	2	3.6E+04
2 Significant Zero's			
a All sandwiched zero's			
	13.02	4	1.302E+01
	1.0002	5	1.0002E+00
	10.5	3	1.05E+01
b All trailing zero's preceded by a digit			
	5.000	4	5.000E+00
	20.000	5	2.00000E+01
	15.00	4	1.500E+01
3 Non significant Zero's			
a Leading Zeros			
	0.0200	3	2.00E-02
	0067	2	6.7E+01
b Trailing Zero's to the left of the decimal point in a number without a decimal point			
	56000	2	5.6E+04
	1360	3	1.36E+03

*NOTE: Write the numbers in exponential notation if you have any doubt. All zeros used to indicate the power of 10 (order of magnitude) are not significant.

Rounding Off

1 If the last digit to be retained in a number is followed by a number less than 5 (<5),

ROUND DOWN.

Round to 3 significant figures:

28.23	rounds to	28.2
578.1	rounds to	578

2 If the last digit to be retained in a number is followed by a number greater than 5 (>5),

ROUND UP.

Round to 2 significant figures:

5.998	rounds to	6.0
0.00258	rounds to	0.0026
3.6502	rounds to	3.7

3 If the last digit to be retained in a number is followed by 5 (0000000... implied),

ROUND the last digit retained to an **EVEN NUMBER**.

Round to 2 significant figures:

1.75	rounds to	1.8
1.050	rounds to	1.0
1.45	rounds to	1.4

Round to 4 significant figures:

67.835	rounds to	67.84
67.885	rounds to	67.88

Calculations

Uncertainty and Significant Figures

The **Least Accurate Number (LAN)** determines the number of digits to which the answer is expressed.

Addition and Subtraction

1. The LAN is the number with the least number of digits following the decimal point.
2. The answer (*sum* or *difference*) can have no more digits *following the decimal point* than the LAN.

Example:

What is the total mass of a mixture made by mixing the following substances?

212	g water (LAN)
1.8	g salt
1.88	g sugar
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215.98	g (incorrect)
216	g (correct)

Multiplication and Division

1. The LAN is the number with the least number of significant figures.
2. The answer (*product* or *quotient*) can have no more significant figures than the LAN.

Example:

Calculate the volume of a rectangular solid that has a length of 4.16 cm, a width of 2.2 cm, and a height of 2.00 cm.

$$\text{Volume} = \text{Length} \times \text{Width} \times \text{Height}$$

$$\text{Volume} = (4.16\text{cm}) (2.2\text{cm}) (2.00\text{cm})$$

LAN

$$\text{Volume} = \del{18.304 \text{ cm}^3} \text{ (incorrect)}$$

$$\text{Volume} = 18 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ (correct)}$$