

Chemistry: Significant Digits

In an attempt to get away from the mathematical burden of uncertainties, scientists have gone to the use of established rules for significant digits that have greatly simplified calculations. These rules are:

1. Significant numbers are always measurements and thus should always be accompanied by the measurement's unit. For simplicity, units are not included in the following examples.
2. Any numbers (that are measurements) other than zero are significant. (Many times the zeros are also significant as you will see below.) Thus **123.45** contains five significant digits.
3. Any zeros between numbers are significant, thus **1002.05** contains six significant digits.
4. Unless told differently, all zeros to the left of an understood decimal point (a decimal that is not printed) but to the right of the last number are not significant. The number **921000** contains three significant digits.
5. Any zeros to the right of a number but to the left of a decimal point are significant. **921000.** has six significant digits.
6. These zeros are present merely to indicate the presence of a decimal point (they are used as place holders), (these zeros are not part of the measurement). The number **0.00123** has three significant digits. The reason that these zeros are not significant is that the measurement **0.00123 grams** is equal in magnitude to the measurement **1.23 milligrams**. **1.23** has three significant digits, thus **0.0123** must also have three significant digits.
7. Any zeros to the right of a number and the right of a decimal point are significant. The value **0.012300** and **25.000** both contain five significant digits. The reason for this is that significant figures indicate to what place a measurement is made. Thus the measurement 25.0 grams tells us that the measurement was made to the tenths place. (The accuracy of the scale is to the tenths place.)

Give the number of significant digits in each of the following measurements:

1. 1278.50 _____
 2. 120000 _____
 3. 90027.00 _____
 4. 0.0053567 _____
 5. 670 _____
 6. 0.00730 _____
 7. 8.002 _____
 8. 823.012 _____
 9. 0.005789 _____
 10. 2.60 _____
 11. 542000. _____
 12. 2653008.0 _____
 13. 43.050 _____
 14. 0.147 _____
 15. 6271.91 _____
 16. 6 _____
 17. 3.47 _____
 18. 387465 _____
- Round off the following numbers to three significant digits:
19. 120000 _____
 20. 5.457 _____
 21. 0.0008769 _____
 22. 4.53619 _____
 23. 43.659 _____
 24. 876493 _____

Significant figures in derived quantities (Calculations)

In all calculations, the answer must be governed by the least significant figure employed.

ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION: The answer should be rounded off so as to contain the same number of decimal places as the number with the least number of decimal places. In other words, *an answer can be only as accurate as the number with the least accuracy.*
Thus: **11.31 + 33.264 + 4.1 = 48.674 Rounded off to 48.7**

MULTIPLICATION AND DIVISION: The answer should be rounded off to contain the same number of digits as found in the LEAST accurate of the values.

Thus: **5.282 x 3.42 = 18.06444 Rounded off to 18.1**

Perform the following operations giving the proper number of significant figures in the answer:

25. 23.4×14 _____
26. $7.895 + 3.4$ _____
27. 0.0945×1.47 _____
28. $0.005 - 0.0007$ _____
29. $7.895 / 3.4$ _____
30. $0.2 / 0.0005$ _____