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Percentage vs Percentage Points

When a percentage itself goes up or down, there are two ways to describe the change. Both are correct, but they are not the same.

% points	VS	% % change

WHAT IT MEASURES	
The plain gap between two percentages on the 0–100 scale.	How big that gap is compared with the starting percentage.

HOW TO WORK IT OUT	
New percentage − old percentage.	(New − old) ÷ old × 100.

INTEREST RATE 4% → 5%	
Up 1 percentage point: 5 − 4 = 1.	Up 25%: 1 ÷ 4 × 100 = 25.

VOTE SHARE 40% → 44%	
Up 4 percentage points: 44 − 40 = 4.	Up 10%: 4 ÷ 40 × 100 = 10.

PASS RATE 80% → 60%	
Down 20 percentage points: 80 − 60 = 20.	Down 25%: 20 ÷ 80 × 100 = 25.

SMALL RATE 2% → 3%	
Up just 1 percentage point: 3 − 2 = 1.	Up 50%: 1 ÷ 2 × 100 = 50. The same change sounds much bigger.

Small rates, big headlines

A risk that rises from 0.1% to 0.2% has doubled: a 100% increase. Yet it is up only 0.1 of a percentage point. Look for both numbers before deciding how big a change is.

NEXT IN THE SERIES

6. Common Percentage Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

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