

Significant Digits are digits that are the result of careful measurement.

Rules

1. All non-zero digits are significant i.e. 4.2359 (5)
2. Zeros contained between non-zero digits are significant.
i.e. 2.09 (3)
3. Zeros after a decimal following a non-zero are significant.
i.e. 2.3000 (5)
4. Zeros used to locate a decimal are not significant
i.e. 3000 (1), 0.0009 (1) *

HINT Use scientific notation to avoid confusion.

i.e. 0.009073 = 9.073 x 10⁻³ (4)

5. Values that are a count, constant or conversion are infinitely significant

i.e. $c = 3 \times 10^8 \text{ m/s}$ (∞)

Conversions with SI Prefixes

Steps

1. Put the value in scientific notation.
2. Determine the conversion (\downarrow x, \uparrow \div)
3. Adjust the exponent (x +, \div -)

Example:

$$\begin{aligned} 36700 \text{ ng} &\rightarrow \text{zg} \\ 3.67 \times 10^4 \times 10^{12} & \\ = 3.67 \times 10^{16} \text{ zg} & \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Example} \\ 0.0045 \text{ cB} &\rightarrow \text{MB} \\ \frac{4.5 \times 10^{-3}}{10^8} & \\ = 4.5 \times 10^{-11} \text{ MB} & \end{aligned}$$