SharpY Mind

Every great Mind starts with Why



10 questions your child will get wrong

— and exactly what to say when they do

Marking an answer wrong takes a second. Explaining **why** it's wrong is the hard part — and it's the part that actually moves a mark. These are the ten mistakes we see most often in 11+ practice, what your child was thinking when they made each one, and a single sentence you can say out loud that fixes it.

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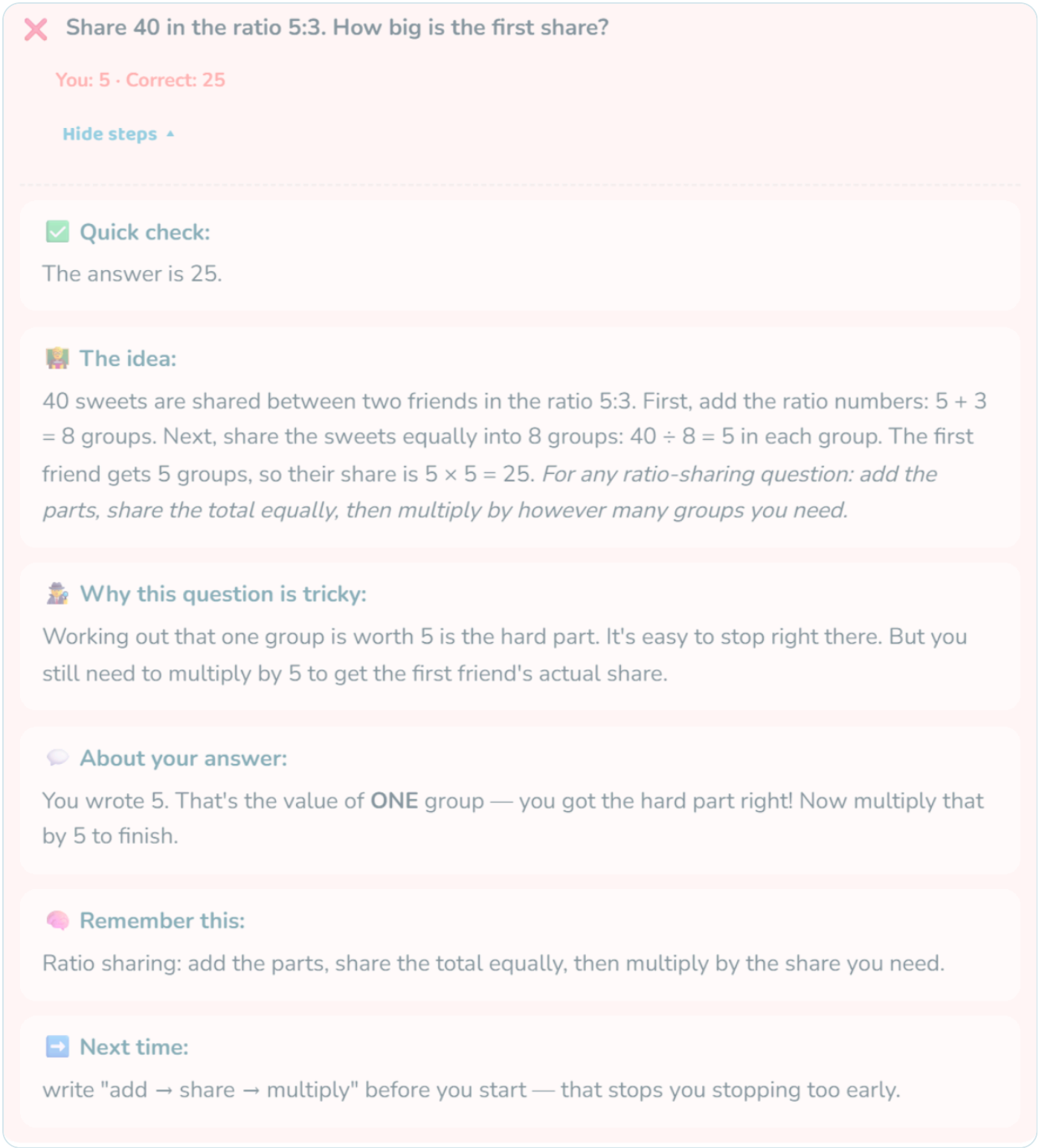
Your child isn't being careless. Almost every mistake in here is the result of applying a rule that was completely correct last term — doubling, adding straight across, matching denominators. That's why "read it again" rarely works, and why one well-aimed question usually does.

SharpY Mind

The free 11+ app for Years 3 to 5: no account, no card, no ads.
Free to print and share with any parent who needs it. Practise free at sharpymind.co.uk.

What this looks like in the app

Not a mock-up — this is the actual screen, captured from SharpY Mind.



This is mistake number 6 in this guide, exactly as your child sees it the moment they get it wrong. Look at *About your answer*: it doesn't just give the right answer, it reads what *their* answer was and tells them they found the value of one part and stopped one step early. That is the part a parent usually can't do from the back of a textbook — and it's the whole reason this guide exists.

The ten mistakes

Each one: the question, what your child writes, why they write it, and what to say.

1 Place value — the digit isn't the value

In 34558, what is the value of the digit 3?

YOUR CHILD WRITES	THE ANSWER IS
3	30,000

Why they write it: the question shows them a 3, so they hand back a 3. It's the right digit — just not what it's worth. Its column is doing all the work, and the column is invisible.

WHAT TO SAY

"Which column is that 3 sitting in? Say the column name out loud — then tell me what it's worth."

The rule: a digit's value = the digit × what its column is worth. Never the digit on its own.

2 Squared, not doubled

7^2 (7 squared)

YOUR CHILD WRITES	THE ANSWER IS
14	49

Why they write it: squaring and doubling both make the number bigger, and the little 2 floating above looks a lot like an instruction to multiply by 2. So the two blur together.

WHAT TO SAY

"Draw me 7 squared. How many rows, and how many in each row?"

The rule: squared means × itself. Doubled means × 2. Not the same thing.

3 Adding fractions straight across

2/4 + 4/5

YOUR CHILD WRITES
6/9

THE ANSWER IS
13/10

Why they write it: it looks entirely reasonable — the right operation, on the right numbers, in the right order. The only missing step is the one you can't see: the pieces aren't the same size yet.

WHAT TO SAY

"Are those pieces the same size? Cut them both into the same-size pieces first, then add."

The rule: different bottoms? Match them first — then the tops are the easy part.

4 Multiplying fractions like you add them

2/9 × 2/4

YOUR CHILD WRITES
13/18

THE ANSWER IS
1/9

Why they write it: this lands right after weeks of adding fractions, where finding a common denominator *is* the correct move. The habit carries over into the one operation that doesn't need it.

WHAT TO SAY

"Which operation is this one? And which operation actually needs the bottoms to match?"

The rule: × means multiply straight across — tops together, bottoms together. No common denominator needed.

5 Percentages — stopping at 10%

25% of 80

YOUR CHILD WRITES
8

THE ANSWER IS
20

Why they write it: finding 10% first is genuinely good technique, and they've done it correctly. They've just answered a question nobody asked, and stopped one step short.

WHAT TO SAY

"Good — what percentage have you found there? Now, what percentage did the question ask for?"

The rule: percent means out of 100. Multiply by the percent, then divide by 100.

6 Sharing in a ratio — stopping one step early

This is the one pictured on page 2, as it appears in the app.

Share 40 in the ratio 5:3. How big is the first share?

YOUR CHILD WRITES	THE ANSWER IS
5	25

Why they write it: this one is painful, because they got the hard part right. Working out that one part is worth 5 is the real work — and the question is built to catch them the moment after they've done it.

WHAT TO SAY

"That's one part — and that's the hard bit done. So how many parts does the first share get?"

The rule: add the parts, divide the total, then multiply by the share you need. Three steps, in that order.

7 Perimeter and area, swapped

Perimeter of a rectangle 8 cm by 5 cm?

YOUR CHILD WRITES	THE ANSWER IS
40	26

Why they write it: perimeter and area use exactly the same two numbers and differ only in the operation. There is no clue in the numbers themselves to tell them which one they are in.

WHAT TO SAY

"Are we walking around the edge, or covering the inside? Trace it with your finger and tell me."

The rule: perimeter adds the sides. Area multiplies them. Around means add.

8 Angles — a line isn't a full turn

Two angles on a straight line. One is 65°. The other?

YOUR CHILD WRITES	THE ANSWER IS
295°	115°

Why they write it: 180° and 360° get taught together as the angle facts, so both sit in memory with equal weight. They reached for the wrong one — the method itself was right.

WHAT TO SAY

"Is that a straight line, or a full turn all the way round? How many degrees in each?"

The rule: a straight line is 180°. A full turn around a point is 360°.

9 Rounding the wrong way

Round 3847 to the nearest 100

YOUR CHILD WRITES
3900

THE ANSWER IS
3800

Why they write it: they found the right place — the bit most children get wrong — and then rounded on instinct instead of checking the one digit that decides the direction.

WHAT TO SAY
"Underline the digit just after the hundreds. Is it 5 or more, or less than 5?"

The rule: 5 or more rounds up. Less than 5 rounds down. Check the digit, not the feeling.

10 Negative numbers — adding feels like falling

-3 + 5

YOUR CHILD WRITES
-8

THE ANSWER IS
2

Why they write it: the starting number is already below zero, so the whole question feels like it is heading downwards. The minus sign at the front quietly overrides the plus sign in the middle.

WHAT TO SAY
"Start at -3 on a number line. Does + mean go up, or go down? Show me with your finger."

The rule: adding moves up. Subtracting moves down — even past zero.

One question beats ten corrections

If you take one thing from this guide, make it this: **don't give the answer.** Every script in here is a question, not a correction, and that is deliberate. A child who is told the answer has learned that answer. A child who is asked the right question has learned how to catch the mistake themselves next time — which is the only version that survives into an exam hall.

You don't need to be good at maths to do this. You need to know where the trap is. That's what these ten pages are for.

Where these came from

Every explanation in this guide is taken from the answer review inside SharpY Mind — the screen your child sees the moment they get something wrong. We wrote them by hand, one question type at a time. None of them are generated live by AI.

SharpY Mind is a free 11+ practice app for Years 3–5, covering Maths, English, Vocabulary and Reasoning. No ads, no trackers, and nothing sold to your child.

Try it free at sharpymind.co.uk

Being straight with you: every wrong answer in the app gets a worked explanation, and on 48 core topics — including all ten in this guide — you get the full six-step breakdown you've seen here: the idea, the trap, what your child's specific answer tells you, the rule, and what to do next time. The remaining topics currently get a shorter worked solution while we extend the longer treatment across the rest. We'd rather tell you that than let you find out.

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