

On the Properties of Multiplication

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In a series of MAA columns, Keith Devlin argued that elementary teachers should not tell their students that "multiplication is repeated addition". What is it that students should understand instead? While mathematicians understand operations via their standard properties, their students, in particular future teachers, often do not understand the importance of this point of view. I will discuss how the properties of multiplication can be made more relevant to elementary teachers and their students, and I will also argue that some properties are more important than others.