

# The Original Numerals

The Hindu-Arabic numerals that we use today evolved from a set of numerals known as *Brahmi* numerals. These numerals were used in India from around 300 BC. Here are the first nine Brahmi numerals.



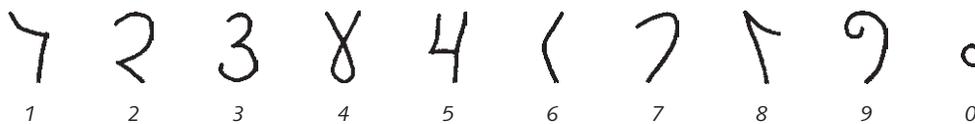
- Which Brahmi numerals look like those we use today? \_\_\_\_\_
- Which numerals do you think would be easy to remember? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

There were also Brahmi numerals for the multiples of 10 less than 100. These are shown below.



- This is how 37 was written with Brahmi numerals –  $\text{J}7$ .  
Write the value of these Brahmi numbers?  
 a)  $\text{J} =$  \_\_\_\_\_    b)  $\text{Jr} =$  \_\_\_\_\_    c)  $\text{OS} =$  \_\_\_\_\_    d)  $\text{Z}\text{Y} =$  \_\_\_\_\_
- Write how you think each of these numbers would have been written using Brahmi numerals.  
 a) 86 \_\_\_\_\_    b) 12 \_\_\_\_\_    c) 94 \_\_\_\_\_    d) 60 \_\_\_\_\_
- Was there a symbol for zero? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you think a symbol for zero was needed? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

The Brahmi numerals slowly changed over the next nine hundred or so years. How or why these changes took place is uncertain, but around AD 600, the Brahmi numerals became known as *Hindu numerals* – and they worked in a very different way. There were no longer individual symbols for numbers greater than nine. Instead, the Hindu simply invented a symbol for zero. This was used as a place holder and all numbers greater than nine could be shown using just ten symbols.



- Which Hindu numerals are similar to those we use today? \_\_\_\_\_
- The Hindu system of writing numbers was far superior to that of the Brahmi numerals. Write why you think this might be true. \_\_\_\_\_