

Lesson 8

READ THIS STORY #2, Advanced

The Metric System

The Metric system, devised by French scientists in the late 18th century, is used in all industrialized nations except the United States. There are seven basic units in the Metric system. The most common ones are meters for measuring length, grams for measuring weight, liters for measuring volume, and centigrade for measuring temperature.

The Metric system eliminates odd fractions by using decimals. Units for a given quantity are related by factors of 10. Calculations involve moving the decimal point to the right or to the left.

In 1875, the United States signed the Treaty of the Meter which committed it to the adoption of the metric system. The equivalent of the foot, pound, quart, etc. have been defined in relation to the meter and the kilogram ever since. But there was no compelling reason then to switch to the Metric system. Congress has studied this issue for decades.

Even today, people argue that the cost of complete conversion to Metric will outweigh the benefits of changing our system. Although our traditional system of weights and measures continues to be used, many industries have voluntarily converted to the Metric system in order to sell products to new European trading partners that use metric measures.