

1

Line them up before you look

Lay three ribbons of different lengths on the table with their ends staggered, so no two of them start in the same place. Ask which one is the longest. Then run a strip of tape across the table, slide every ribbon up to it and ask again.

"Which ribbon is the longest? How can you tell?"

"Now every ribbon starts at the tape. Which one is the longest now?"

Students often give a different answer the second time. The ribbons did not change, only where they started. Leave the tape on the table for the rest of the lesson.

2

Taking the width of the door to the bookshelf

Take the ball of string to the doorway and cut a piece that reaches exactly across it. Carry that piece to the bookshelf and hold it across the front, with one end at the edge.

"This string is as wide as the door. Is the bookshelf wider or narrower?"

"How do you know, when the door is over there?"

The string is not measuring. It is holding the width of the door so that width can be taken over to the bookshelf. Use this whenever two things are too big or too fixed to put side by side.

3

Two snakes and one paper strip

Keep the two toy snakes at opposite ends of the room so students never see them together. Lay a paper strip against each snake in turn and say out loud what each one showed.

"The blue snake is longer than this strip. The red snake is shorter than this strip."

"Which snake is longer? You have never seen them next to each other."

Both snakes were compared to the same strip, so they can be compared to each other. Students will want to fetch the snakes and put them together. Let them check after they have answered, not before.