The Exotic Animal Emporium is a storage facility for a variety of creatures, from the Amazon jungle to the Sahara Desert.

Today you will be working in the business office at EAE, while I will be calling you from the loading dock as trucks arrive and depart, bringing in animals and taking them away to circuses, zoos and private collectors. Your job is to answer the phone, and write down the number and species of each animal as I tell you about their arrival and departure.

Are you ready? Pencils Up! Ring, ring…

"Yes, this is the loading dock, we just got in three rhinoceroses, two hippopotamuses and a giraffe. Gotta go, there's another truck coming."

Ring, ring…

 "Ya, loading dock. That was the zebra guy, he brought 10 of 'em. And he took the giraffe. Whoops, gotta go."

Ring, ring…

 [*to driver*] "How many? Drive them out back. Sorry about that. We just got two jaguars, three hippopotamuses, a rhinoceros and three chimpanzees. And the guy is taking four zebras with him.

Ring, ring…

 "Okay, final truck of the day. McGregor's. They brought six chimpanzees, two rhinoceroses and two giraffes, and they took a zebra and a jaguar. Oops, my wife is on the other line. Gotta go. Talk to you tomorrow."

Okay phone answerers, rhinoceros is hard to spell, but you still had a job to do, and that job is to keep track of how many animals are in your company's care. How much and what kind of food, and how much water we need tonight depends on how many animals we have of each type. We know how many of each animal we had yesterday. Use your notes and tell me how many new animals you believe we gained today.

Point of the lesson: A person who has to take notes like this one – quickly and accurately – may use abbreviations such as "$4h$" to represent four hippos. They may indicate that two hippos have departed by writing "$-2h$." This is the type of notation that is used in Algebra. Here, "h" represents a hippopotamus, while in other instances; an "x" might represent the number of miles a train travelled in one hour, or the cost of an apple.