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# Common Pre-Algebra Mistakes

## Example: Simplifying a Fraction

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### The Goal

Simplify the expression:

$$\frac{2(-1) - 1(4)}{(-1)^2}$$

### The Mistake

Find the mistake:

$$\frac{2(-1) - 1(4)}{(-1)^2} = \frac{-6}{-1} = 6$$

Need a hint? Look carefully at the red part of the expression:

$$\frac{2(-1) - 1(4)}{(-1)^2} = \frac{-6}{-1} = 6$$

### The Correction

$$\frac{2(-1) - 1(4)}{(-1)^2} = \frac{-6}{1} = -6$$

### An Explanation

Use care with signs. The square of a negative number is *positive*.