Like and Unlike Terms

When you visit a market, you can see that, the vegetables and fruits of same kind are kept as separate heaps. Similarly, we can group the same kind of terms in an algebraic expression.

For example, the expression 7x + 3x + 2x – 16 has 4 terms but the first three terms have the same variable factor x. We say that 7x, 3x and 2x are **like terms**.

However, the terms 2x and −16 have different variable factors. The term 2x has the variable x and the term −16 is a constant. Such terms are called **unlike terms**.

Consider another example. In the expression 4xy−7y−2yx+5y−10, the terms −7y and 5y are like terms. Also, 4xy and −2yx are like terms. But, we cannot group the terms 4xy, 7y and − 10, as they do not have the same variables, thus called unlike terms.

Hence, the terms of an expression having the same variable(s) are called **like terms;** otherwise, they are called **unlike terms**. The following activity is helpful in identifying the like terms and unlike terms.