Using ^2:

$$(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2 \tag{1}$$

$$\left(a + \frac{7}{2}\right)^2 \tag{2}$$

Using $^2$. The first example does not display the problem that well because the parenthesis are too small:

$$(a + b)^{\,2} = a^2 + 2ab + b^2 \tag{3}$$

$$\left(n + \frac{7}{2}\right)^{\,2} \tag{4}$$