How to Calculate the Formal Charge

Formal charge = # valence electrons - # actual electrons

Let's use NO$_2^-$ as an example.

Oxygen has 6 valence electrons. The left O has 7 electrons around itself.
Formal charge on the left O = 6-7 = -1

Split the electrons in the O-N bond. O gets 1 e⁻ and N gets 1 e⁻.

Nitrogen has 5 valence electrons. N has 5 electrons around itself.
Formal charge on N = 5-5 = 0

**Summary:**
- Oxygen: Formal charge = 6 - 7 = -1
- Nitrogen: Formal charge = 5 - 5 = 0
The right O has 6 electrons around itself.  
Formal charge on the right O = 6-6 = 0

The sum of the formal charges should be the same as the charge on the molecule. Now, try the formal charge calculation on the other NO$_2^-$ resonance structure.