



## Think like a Geologist... a scientist who studies the history of the Earth and its life, especially as recorded in rocks.



### Language of the Discipline:

**Alluvium:** An unconsolidated accumulation of stream-deposited sediments, including sands, silts, clays or gravels.

**Angle of Repose:** The maximum angle that a soil, sediment or other loose material can be placed or accumulate and be stable.

**Arroyo:** A flat-bottom gully with steep sides that is a channel for an intermittent stream.

**Basalt:** A dark-colored fine-grained extrusive igneous rock composed largely of plagioclase feldspar and pyroxene. Basalt is thought to be one of the main components of oceanic crust.

**Bedrock:** Solid rock present beneath any soil, sediment or other surface cover. In some locations it may be exposed at Earth's surface.

**Butte:** A conspicuous hill with steep sides and a flat top. The top is usually a cap-rock of resistant material. This structure is frequently an erosional remnant in an area of flat-lying sedimentary rocks.

**Chemical Weathering:** The breaking down of surface rock material by solution or chemical alteration. Common alteration processes are oxidation and hydrolysis.

**Debris Avalanche:** The sudden downslope movement of rock and soil on a steep slope.

**Delta:** A deposit of sediment that forms where a stream enters a standing body of water such as a lake or ocean.

**Deposition:** The settling from suspension of transported sediments.

**Drift:** A general term for all sedimentary materials deposited directly from the ice or melt water of a glacier.

**Dune:** A mound or ridge of wind-blown sand typically found in deserts and inland from a beach.

**Earthquake:** A trembling of the earth caused by a sudden release of energy stored in subsurface rock units.

**Epicenter:** The point on the Earth's surface directly above the focus of an earthquake.

**Erosion:** A general term applied to the wearing away and movement of earth materials by gravity, wind, water and ice.

**Evaporation:** The process of liquid water becoming water vapor. Includes vaporization from water surfaces, land surfaces and snow/ice surfaces.

**Fault:** A fracture or fracture zone in rock along which movement has occurred.

**Fossil:** Remains, imprints or traces of an ancient organism that have been preserved in the rock record. Bones, shells, casts, tracks and excrement can all become fossils.

**Glacier:** A thick mass of ice that forms on land from an accumulation and recrystallization of snow significant enough to persist through the summer and grow year by year. There are two basic types of glaciers: 1) valley (or alpine) glaciers that creep downslope under the influence of gravity, and 2) continental glaciers that flow outward from a thick central area under their own weight.

**Gneiss:** A coarse-grained, foliated rock produced by regional metamorphism. The mineral grains within gneiss are elongated due to pressure and the rock has a compositional banding due to chemical activity.

**Magma:** Molten rock material that occurs below Earth's surface.

**Mantle:** A major subdivision of Earth's internal structure. Located between the base of the crust and overlying the core.

**Mineral:** A naturally occurring, inorganic solid with a definite chemical composition and an ordered internal structure.

**Moraine:** A mound, ridge or ground covering of unstratified and unsorted till, deposited by ice action or by melting away of a glacier.

**Pangaea:** A large continental landmass that existed from about 300 million years ago through about 200 million years ago. It included most of the continental lithosphere present at that time. It has since broken up and the fragments have drifted to become the configuration of Earth's present day continents.

**Physical Weathering:** A general term applied to a variety of weathering processes that result in the particle size reduction of rock materials with no change in composition. Frost action, salt crystal growth and pressure relief fracturing are examples. Also known as mechanical weathering.

**Quartzite:** A metamorphic rock formed by the alteration of sandstone by heat, pressure and chemical activity.

**Resource:**

Geology.com Geology Dictionary <http://geology.com/dictionary/glossary-p.shtml>