

5 Of Earth's Surface

Earth

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Earth is the third planet from the Sun and the only astronomical object known to harbor life. This is enabled by Earth being an ocean world, the only one in the Solar System sustaining liquid surface water. Almost all of Earth's water is contained in its global ocean, covering 70.8% of Earth's crust. The remaining 29.2% of Earth's crust is land, most of which is located in the form of continental landmasses within Earth's land hemisphere. Most of Earth's land is at least somewhat humid and covered by vegetation, while large ice sheets at Earth's polar regions retain more water than Earth's groundwater, lakes, rivers, and atmospheric water combined. Earth's crust consists of slowly moving tectonic plates, which interact to produce mountain ranges, volcanoes, and earthquakes. Earth has a liquid outer core that generates a magnetosphere capable of deflecting most of the destructive solar winds and cosmic radiation.

Earth has a dynamic atmosphere, which sustains Earth's surface conditions and protects it from most meteoroids and UV-light at entry. It has a composition of primarily nitrogen and oxygen. Water vapor is widely present in the atmosphere, forming clouds that cover most of the planet. The water vapor acts as a greenhouse gas and, together with other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂), creates the conditions for both liquid surface water and water vapor to persist via the capturing of energy from the Sun's light. This process maintains the current average surface temperature of 14.76 °C (58.57 °F), at which water is liquid under normal atmospheric pressure. Differences in the amount of captured energy between geographic regions (as with the equatorial region receiving more sunlight than the polar regions) drive atmospheric and ocean currents, producing a global climate system with different climate regions, and a range of weather phenomena such as precipitation, allowing components such as carbon and nitrogen to cycle.

Earth is rounded into an ellipsoid with a circumference of about 40,000 kilometres (24,900 miles). It is the densest planet in the Solar System. Of the four rocky planets, it is the largest and most massive. Earth is about eight light-minutes (1 AU) away from the Sun and orbits it, taking a year (about 365.25 days) to complete one revolution. Earth rotates around its own axis in slightly less than a day (in about 23 hours and 56 minutes). Earth's axis of rotation is tilted with respect to the perpendicular to its orbital plane around the Sun, producing seasons. Earth is orbited by one permanent natural satellite, the Moon, which orbits Earth at 384,400 km (238,855 mi)—1.28 light seconds—and is roughly a quarter as wide as Earth. The Moon's gravity helps stabilize Earth's axis, causes tides and gradually slows Earth's rotation. Likewise Earth's gravitational pull has already made the Moon's rotation tidally locked, keeping the same near side facing Earth.

Earth, like most other bodies in the Solar System, formed about 4.5 billion years ago from gas and dust in the early Solar System. During the first billion years of Earth's history, the ocean formed and then life developed within it. Life spread globally and has been altering Earth's atmosphere and surface, leading to the Great Oxidation Event two billion years ago. Humans emerged 300,000 years ago in Africa and have spread across every continent on Earth. Humans depend on Earth's biosphere and natural resources for their survival, but have increasingly impacted the planet's environment. Humanity's current impact on Earth's climate and biosphere is unsustainable, threatening the livelihood of humans and many other forms of life, and causing widespread extinctions.

Earth's outer core

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Earth's outer core is a fluid layer about 2,260 km (1,400 mi) thick, composed of mostly iron and nickel that lies above Earth's solid inner core and below its mantle. The outer core begins approximately 2,889 km (1,795 mi) beneath Earth's surface at the core-mantle boundary and ends 5,150 km (3,200 mi) beneath Earth's surface at the inner core boundary.

List of sovereign states and dependent territories in South America

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There are 12 sovereign states and 3 non-sovereign dependent territories in South America. The continent is bordered on the west by the Pacific Ocean and on the north and east by the Atlantic Ocean. North America and the Caribbean Sea lie to the northwest. South America has an area of approximately 17,840,000 square kilometres (6,890,000 sq mi), or almost 3.5% of Earth's surface. As of 2018, its population is more than 430 million, according to estimates of population in The World Factbook. South America ranks fourth among all continents in area (after Asia, Africa, and North America) and fifth in population (after Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America).

The border between North and South America is at some point in the Isthmus of Panama. The most common demarcation in atlases and other sources follows the Darién Mountains watershed that divides along the Colombia–Panama border where the isthmus meets the South American continent (see Darién Gap). Virtually all atlases list Panama as a state falling entirely within North America and/or Central America.

Earth's inner core

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There are no samples of the core accessible for direct measurement, as there are for Earth's mantle. The characteristics of the core have been deduced mostly from measurements of seismic waves and Earth's magnetic field. The inner core is believed to be composed of an iron–nickel alloy with some other elements. The temperature at its surface is estimated to be approximately 5,700 K (5,430 °C; 9,800 °F), about the temperature at the surface of the Sun.

The inner core is solid at high temperature because of its high pressure, in accordance with the Simon-Glatzel equation.

Earth's orbit

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Earth orbits the Sun at an average distance of 149.60 million km (92.96 million mi), or 8.317 light-minutes, in a counterclockwise direction as viewed from above the Northern Hemisphere. One complete orbit takes 365.256 days (1 sidereal year), during which time Earth has traveled 940 million km (584 million mi). Ignoring the influence of other Solar System bodies, Earth's orbit, also called Earth's revolution, is an ellipse with the Earth–Sun barycenter as one focus with a current eccentricity of 0.0167. Since this value is close to zero, the center of the orbit is relatively close to the center of the Sun (relative to the size of the orbit).

As seen from Earth, the planet's orbital prograde motion makes the Sun appear to move with respect to other stars at a rate of about 1° eastward per solar day (or a Sun or Moon diameter every 12 hours). Earth's orbital speed averages 29.78 km/s (18.50 mi/s; 107,208.00 km/h; 66,615.96 mph), which is fast enough to cover the planet's diameter in 7 minutes and the distance to the Moon in 4 hours. The point towards which the Earth in its solar orbit is directed at any given instant is known as the "apex of the Earth's way".

From a vantage point above the north pole of either the Sun or Earth, Earth would appear to revolve in a counterclockwise direction around the Sun. From the same vantage point, both the Earth and the Sun would appear to rotate also in a counterclockwise direction.

Internal structure of Earth

its mass. Astronomers can also calculate Earth's mass by observing the motion of orbiting satellites. Earth's average density can be determined through

The internal structure of Earth is the layers of the Earth, excluding its atmosphere and hydrosphere. The structure consists of an outer silicate solid crust, a highly viscous asthenosphere, and solid mantle, a liquid outer core whose flow generates the Earth's magnetic field, and a solid inner core.

Scientific understanding of the internal structure of Earth is based on observations of topography and bathymetry, observations of rock in outcrop, samples brought to the surface from greater depths by volcanoes or volcanic activity, analysis of the seismic waves that pass through Earth, measurements of the gravitational and magnetic fields of Earth, and experiments with crystalline solids at pressures and temperatures characteristic of Earth's deep interior.

Earth's magnetic field

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Earth's magnetic field, also known as the geomagnetic field, is the magnetic field that extends from Earth's interior out into space, where it interacts with the solar wind, a stream of charged particles emanating from the Sun. The magnetic field is generated by electric currents due to the motion of convection currents of a mixture of molten iron and nickel in Earth's outer core: these convection currents are caused by heat escaping from the core, a natural process called a geodynamo.

The magnitude of Earth's magnetic field at its surface ranges from 25 to 65 μ T (0.25 to 0.65 G). As an approximation, it is represented by a field of a magnetic dipole currently tilted at an angle of about 11° with respect to Earth's rotational axis, as if there were an enormous bar magnet placed at that angle through the center of Earth. The North geomagnetic pole (Ellesmere Island, Nunavut, Canada) actually represents the South pole of Earth's magnetic field, and conversely the South geomagnetic pole corresponds to the north pole of Earth's magnetic field (because opposite magnetic poles attract and the north end of a magnet, like a compass needle, points toward Earth's South magnetic field.)

While the North and South magnetic poles are usually located near the geographic poles, they slowly and continuously move over geological time scales, but sufficiently slowly for ordinary compasses to remain useful for navigation. However, at irregular intervals averaging several hundred thousand years, Earth's field reverses and the North and South Magnetic Poles abruptly switch places. These reversals of the geomagnetic poles leave a record in rocks that are of value to paleomagnetists in calculating geomagnetic fields in the past. Such information in turn is helpful in studying the motions of continents and ocean floors. The magnetosphere is defined by the extent of Earth's magnetic field in space or geospace. It extends above the ionosphere, several tens of thousands of kilometres into space, protecting Earth from the charged particles of the solar wind and cosmic rays that would otherwise strip away the upper atmosphere, including the ozone layer that protects Earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation.

Earth's mantle

67% of the mass of Earth. It has a thickness of 2,900 kilometers (1,800 mi) making up about 46% of Earth's radius and 84% of Earth's volume. It is predominantly

Earth's mantle is a layer of silicate rock between the crust and the outer core. It has a mass of 4.01×10^{24} kg (8.84×10^{24} lb) and makes up 67% of the mass of Earth. It has a thickness of 2,900 kilometers (1,800 mi) making up about 46% of Earth's radius and 84% of Earth's volume. It is predominantly solid but, on geologic time scales, it behaves as a viscous fluid, sometimes described as having the consistency of caramel. Partial melting of the mantle at mid-ocean ridges produces oceanic crust, and partial melting of the mantle at subduction zones produces continental crust.

Ocean

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The ocean is the body of salt water that covers approximately 70.8% of Earth. The ocean is conventionally divided into large bodies of water, which are also referred to as oceans (the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Antarctic/Southern, and Arctic Ocean), and are themselves mostly divided into seas, gulfs and subsequent bodies of water. The ocean contains 97% of Earth's water and is the primary component of Earth's hydrosphere, acting as a huge reservoir of heat for Earth's energy budget, as well as for its carbon cycle and water cycle, forming the basis for climate and weather patterns worldwide. The ocean is essential to life on Earth, harbouring most of Earth's animals and protist life, originating photosynthesis and therefore Earth's atmospheric oxygen, still supplying half of it.

Ocean scientists split the ocean into vertical and horizontal zones based on physical and biological conditions. Horizontally the ocean covers the oceanic crust, which it shapes. Where the ocean meets dry land it covers relatively shallow continental shelves, which are part of Earth's continental crust. Human activity is mostly coastal with high negative impacts on marine life. Vertically the pelagic zone is the open ocean's water column from the surface to the ocean floor. The water column is further divided into zones based on depth and the amount of light present. The photic zone starts at the surface and is defined to be "the depth at which light intensity is only 1% of the surface value" (approximately 200 m in the open ocean). This is the zone where photosynthesis can occur. In this process plants and microscopic algae (free-floating phytoplankton) use light, water, carbon dioxide, and nutrients to produce organic matter. As a result, the photic zone is the most biodiverse and the source of the food supply which sustains most of the ocean ecosystem. Light can only penetrate a few hundred more meters; the rest of the deeper ocean is cold and dark (these zones are called mesopelagic and aphotic zones).

Ocean temperatures depend on the amount of solar radiation reaching the ocean surface. In the tropics, surface temperatures can rise to over 30 °C (86 °F). Near the poles where sea ice forms, the temperature in equilibrium is about 2 °C (28 °F). In all parts of the ocean, deep ocean temperatures range between 2 °C (28 °F) and 5 °C (41 °F). Constant circulation of water in the ocean creates ocean currents. Those currents are caused by forces operating on the water, such as temperature and salinity differences, atmospheric circulation (wind), and the Coriolis effect. Tides create tidal currents, while wind and waves cause surface currents. The Gulf Stream, Kuroshio Current, Agulhas Current and Antarctic Circumpolar Current are all major ocean currents. Such currents transport massive amounts of water, gases, pollutants and heat to different parts of the world, and from the surface into the deep ocean. All this has impacts on the global climate system.

Ocean water contains dissolved gases, including oxygen, carbon dioxide and nitrogen. An exchange of these gases occurs at the ocean's surface. The solubility of these gases depends on the temperature and salinity of the water. The carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere is rising due to CO₂ emissions, mainly from

fossil fuel combustion. As the oceans absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere, a higher concentration leads to ocean acidification (a drop in pH value).

The ocean provides many benefits to humans such as ecosystem services, access to seafood and other marine resources, and a means of transport. The ocean is known to be the habitat of over 230,000 species, but may hold considerably more – perhaps over two million species. Yet, the ocean faces many environmental threats, such as marine pollution, overfishing, and the effects of climate change. Those effects include ocean warming, ocean acidification and sea level rise. The continental shelf and coastal waters are most affected by human activity.

Moon

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The Moon is Earth's only natural satellite. It orbits around Earth at an average distance of 384,399 kilometres (238,854 mi), about 30 times Earth's diameter. Its orbital period (lunar month) and its rotation period (lunar day) are synchronized at 29.5 days by the pull of Earth's gravity. This makes the Moon tidally locked to Earth, always facing it with the same side. The Moon's gravitational pull produces tidal forces on Earth which are the main driver of Earth's tides.

In geophysical terms, the Moon is a planetary-mass object or satellite planet. Its mass is 1.2% that of the Earth, and its diameter is 3,474 km (2,159 mi), roughly one-quarter of Earth's (about as wide as the contiguous United States). Within the Solar System, it is the largest and most massive satellite in relation to its parent planet. It is the fifth-largest and fifth-most massive moon overall, and is larger and more massive than all known dwarf planets. Its surface gravity is about one-sixth of Earth's, about half that of Mars, and the second-highest among all moons in the Solar System after Jupiter's moon Io. The body of the Moon is differentiated and terrestrial, with only a minuscule hydrosphere, atmosphere, and magnetic field. The lunar surface is covered in regolith dust, which mainly consists of the fine material ejected from the lunar crust by impact events. The lunar crust is marked by impact craters, with some younger ones featuring bright ray-like streaks. The Moon was until 1.2 billion years ago volcanically active, filling mostly on the thinner near side of the Moon ancient craters with lava, which through cooling formed the prominently visible dark plains of basalt called maria ('seas'). 4.51 billion years ago, not long after Earth's formation, the Moon formed out of the debris from a giant impact between Earth and a hypothesized Mars-sized body named Theia.

From a distance, the day and night phases of the lunar day are visible as the lunar phases, and when the Moon passes through Earth's shadow a lunar eclipse is observable. The Moon's apparent size in Earth's sky is about the same as that of the Sun, which causes it to cover the Sun completely during a total solar eclipse. The Moon is the brightest celestial object in Earth's night sky because of its large apparent size, while the reflectance (albedo) of its surface is comparable to that of asphalt. About 59% of the surface of the Moon is visible from Earth owing to the different angles at which the Moon can appear in Earth's sky (libration), making parts of the far side of the Moon visible.

The Moon has been an important source of inspiration and knowledge in human history, having been crucial to cosmography, mythology, religion, art, time keeping, natural science and spaceflight. The first human-made objects to fly to an extraterrestrial body were sent to the Moon, starting in 1959 with the flyby of the Soviet Union's Luna 1 probe and the intentional impact of Luna 2. In 1966, the first soft landing (by Luna 9) and orbital insertion (by Luna 10) followed. Humans arrived for the first time at the Moon, or any extraterrestrial body, in orbit on December 24, 1968, with Apollo 8 of the United States, and on the surface at Mare Tranquillitatis on July 20, 1969, with the lander Eagle of Apollo 11. By 1972, six Apollo missions had landed twelve humans on the Moon and stayed up to three days. Renewed robotic exploration of the Moon, in particular to confirm the presence of water on the Moon, has fueled plans to return humans to the Moon, starting with the Artemis program in the late 2020s.

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