



NOAA Cloudwise

There are ten basic cloud types arranged in three divisions based on the altitude at which they form. Low level clouds are Cumulus, Cumulonimbus, Stratus, and Stratocumulus. Middle level clouds are Altocumulus, Altostratus and Nimbostratus. High level clouds are Cirrus, Cirrocumulus and Cirrostratus. Precipitation primarily occurs from Cumulus, Cumulonimbus and Nimbostratus.

These ten clouds are further divided into 27 classifications. Many of these classifications represent the same basic cloud type (or combinations of clouds) but in various stages of development, opacity, or sky cover.

Learn more about clouds at www.weather.gov/jetstream

www.noaa.gov/education

www.weather.gov

Sky cover

The percent of sky covered by clouds. Clouds near the horizon appear to be lower, more numerous and closer together.

Sky Clear 0%	Few 1 - 25%	Scattered 26 - 50%	Broken 51 - 99%	Overcast 100%

Other Cloud Phenomena

Mammatus: Small pouch or pocket-like clouds sinking into drier air and often seen near thunderstorms.	Fog: A cloud on the ground which lifts from the surface and becomes Stratus or dissipates with heat from the sun.	Wall Cloud: Rotating, lowered, rain-free base of thunderstorm in area of strongest updraft, under which a tornado may form.	Shelf Cloud: Forms in a gust front from a squall line or thunderstorm.	Asperitas: Long waves that ripple through the base of the cloud near the dry/moist air boundary of a thunderstorm.	Virga: Precipitation that evaporates before reaching the surface.
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