

ABSOLUTE LOCATION

the exact location of a place on the earth—described by its global coordinates (longitude and latitude)

BASIN

an area of land drained by a given river and its branches

an area of land surrounded by higher land

BAY

part of a large body of water that extends into a shoreline, generally smaller than a gulf

CANYON

a deep and narrow valley with steep walls

CAPE

a point of land that extends into a river, lake, or ocean

UPSTREAM

direction opposite to the flow of a river or stream—toward the source

CLIFF

a steep, high wall of rock, earth, or ice

CONTINENT

one of the seven large landmasses on the earth

DIVIDE

a stretch of high land that separates river systems

DELTA

flat, low-lying land built up from soil carried downstream by a river and deposited at its mouth

ELEVATION

the height of land above sea level

DOWNSTREAM

direction in which a river or stream flows from its source to its mouth

CHANNEL

a wide strait or waterway between two landmasses that lie close to each other

a deep part of a river or other waterway

CULTURAL FEATURE

characteristic that humans have created in a place, such as language, religion, housing, and settlement patterns

EQUATOR

an imaginary line that runs around the earth halfway between the North and South Poles—used as a starting point to measure latitude

ISTHMUS

a narrow stretch of land connecting two larger land areas

LAKE

a sizeable inland body of water

LATITUDE

the distance north or south of the Equator, measured in degrees

MOUNTAIN

land with steep sides that rises sharply (1000 feet or more) from surrounding land—generally larger and more rugged than a hill

GULF

a large body of water that extends into a shoreline, generally larger and more deeply indented than a bay

HARBOR

a sheltered place along the shoreline where ships can safely anchor

HIGHLAND

elevated land area such as a hill, mountain, or plateau

HILL

elevated land with sloping sides and rounded summit, generally smaller than a mountain

ISLAND

a land area, smaller than a continent, completely surrounded by water

LONGITUDE

the distance east or west of the Prime Meridian, measured in degrees

LOWLAND

land, usually relatively level, at a low elevation

MAP

a drawing of the earth shown on a flat surface

OCEAN CURRENT

a stream of either warm or cold water that moves in a definite direction through the ocean

MESA

broad, flat-topped landform with steep sides—smaller than a plateau

GLACIER

large, thick body of slowly-moving ice

MOUNTAIN PEAK

the pointed top of a mountain

MOUNTAIN RANGE

a series of connected mountains

MOUTH

the place where a river or stream flows into a larger body of water

MERIDIAN

one of many imaginary lines on the global grid running from the North Pole to the South Pole—used to measure degrees of longitude

OCEAN

one of the *five* major bodies of salt water that surround the continents: Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic, and Southern

PARALLEL

one of many imaginary lines on the global grid that circle the earth north or south of the Equator—used to measure degrees of latitude

PENINSULA

a body of land that juts into a lake or ocean, surrounded on three sides by water

RELIEF

changes in elevation over a given area of land

PLAIN

an area of level land, usually at a low elevation and often covered with grasses

PLATEAU

an area of flat or rolling land at a high elevation—about 300 to 3000 feet above sea level

PRIME MERIDIAN

the imaginary line on the global grid that run from the North Pole to the South Pole through the city of Greenwich, England—it is the starting point for measuring degrees of longitude

PHYSICAL FEATURE

characteristic of a place occurring naturally, such as a landform, a body of water, a climate pattern, or a resource

RIVER

a large, natural stream of water that runs through the land

SEA

a large body of water completely or partly surrounded by land

SEACOAST

land lying next to a sea or ocean

SEA LEVEL

the position on land level with the surface of a nearby ocean or sea

SOUND

a body of water between a coastline and one or more islands off the coast

SOURCE

the place where a river or stream begins, often in the highlands

STRAIT

a narrow stretch of water joining two larger bodies of water

also called a “narrows”

TRIBUTARY

a small river or stream that flows into a larger river or stream

a branch of a river

VOLCANO

a mountain created as liquid rock or ash erupt from inside the earth

WETLAND

an area of land that seldom dries out, so plants in wetlands are adapted to life in wet soil

OASIS

a place in the desert that has water and is fertile

POND

a small body of water surrounded by land, smaller than a lake

ARCHIPELAGO

a group or chain of islands clustered together in a sea or ocean

CANAL

a man-made waterway used for transportation or irrigation

COVE

A small, horseshoe-shaped body of water along the coast—the water is surrounded by land formed of soft rock

ATOLL

a ring (or partial ring) of coral that forms an island in an ocean or sea

FJORD

a long, narrow sea inlet that is bordered by steep cliffs

BUTTE

a flat-topped rock or hill formation with steep sides

ESTUARY

where a river meets the sea or ocean

where the water is fresh part of the day and salty or brackish the rest of the day because of the tides

MARSH

a type of freshwater, brackish water, or saltwater wetland that is found along rivers, pond, lakes, and coasts—where marsh plants grow up out of the water

VALLEY

an area of low land between hills or mountains

a V-shaped valley was carved by water

a U-shaped valley was carved by a glacier

DESERT

a very dry area

REEF

an undersea growth of coral
near the surface of the water

RESERVOIR

a man-made lake that stores
water for future use

SWAMP

a type of freshwater wetland that
has spongy, muddy land and a
lot of water—many trees and
shrubs grow there

LAGOON

a shallow body of water that is
located alongside a coast and
separated from the ocean by a
strip of land or a sandbank

WATERFALL

where a river falls off steeply
from the land

TUNDRA

a cold, treeless area, the coldest biome

DUNE

a hill or a ridge made of sand, constantly shaped and changed by the wind

ATOLL

a ring (or partial ring) of coral that forms an island in an ocean or sea

PRAIRIE

a wide, relatively flat area of land covered with grasses and with relatively few trees

WATERSHED

the area which a river and all its tributaries drain

INLET

an indentation of water into land—usually small in size