

Cloud Identification Guide

A Dichotomous Key

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Look carefully at your cloud. Answer the questions below, and follow the instructions. When you reach a cloud name in **bold**, that is the type of cloud you are observing.

1. Is it raining?

No- go to number 2.

Yes- with thunder, lightning, & heavy rain - your cloud is a **cumulonimbus**.



Yes- but only drizzly, with small raindrops - your cloud is a **nimbostratus**.



2. Is it a high wispy cloud, like a horse's tail?

No- go to number 3.

Yes- your cloud is a **cirrus**.



3. Is it flat & layered, puffy & bumpy, or some of both?

Flat & layered-go to number 4

Puffy & bumpy-go to number 5

Both- If your cloud is a nearly solid layer of large puffs (the size of your fist or larger), your cloud is a **stratocumulus**.



4. Determine how high and how thick your flat layered cloud is.

If your cloud is high, thin, and the sun is shining casting distinct shadows, it is a **cirrostratus**.



If it is thicker, the sun is dimmer, and there are hardly any shadows, it is an **altostratus**.



If it is a low cloud, so low it's hard to see the bottom and it covers most of the sky, it is a **stratus**.



5. Hold your hand up toward your cloud. Look at the size of the puffs.

Compare them to your hand.

If the puffs are the size of your fingernail (very small), your cloud is a **cirrocumulus**.



If the puffs are the size of your thumb (medium-sized), your cloud is an **altocumulus**.



If the puffs are the size of your fist (large), your cloud is a **cumulus**.

