

Chapter 1 Introduction to Earth Science

Summary

1.1 What Is Earth Science?

☞ Earth science is the name for the group of sciences that deals with Earth and its neighbors in space.

- **Geology** means “study of Earth.” Geology is divided into physical geology and historical geology.
- **Oceanography** is the study of the Earth’s oceans, as well as coastal processes, seafloor topography, and marine life.
- **Meteorology** is the study of atmosphere and the processes that produce weather and climate.
- **Astronomy** is the study of the universe.

☞ The nebular hypothesis suggests that the bodies of our solar system evolved from an enormous rotating cloud called the solar nebula. It was made up mostly of hydrogen and helium, with a small percentage of heavier elements.

- Shortly after the Earth formed, melting occurred in the Earth’s interior. Gravity caused denser elements to sink to Earth’s center. Less dense elements floated toward the surface. As a result, Earth is made up of layers of materials that have different properties.

1.2 A View of Earth

☞ Earth can be thought of as consisting of four major spheres: the hydrosphere, atmosphere, geosphere, and biosphere.

- The **hydrosphere** is the water portion of Earth.
- The **atmosphere** is an envelope of gases that surrounds Earth.
- The **geosphere** is the layer of Earth under both the atmosphere and the oceans. It includes the core, the mantle, and the crust.
- The **biosphere** is made up of all life on Earth.

☞ Because the geosphere is not uniform, it is divided into three main parts based on differences in composition—the core, the mantle, and the crust.

- The **core**, Earth’s innermost layer, is located just below the mantle.
- The **mantle** is 2890 kilometers thick. It is located below the Earth’s crust and above the Earth’s core.
- The **crust** is the thin, rocky, outer layer of Earth.

☞ The theory of plate tectonics provided geologists with a model to explain how earthquakes and volcanic eruptions occur and how continents move.

- Destructive forces wear away Earth’s surface.
- Constructive forces build up the Earth’s surface.
- Tectonic plates move constantly over the Earth’s mantle.

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Didier Musso



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