The water on Earth is always on the move, changing state from liquid to vapor back to liquid and snow and ice near the poles and mountains. The process used to describe the continuous movement of water between the Earth and atmosphere is known as the water cycle, and is often referred to as the hydrologic cycle. There is no beginning or end to the water cycle; it behaves much like a Ferris wheel at an amusement park, moving around and around.

The Earth’s Water Cycle

Cloud Cover
- Clear
- Partly Cloudy
- Mostly Cloudy
- Overcast

Visual Opacity
- Transparent
- Translucent
- Opaque

Clouds and Cloud Cover

The thickness of a cloud determines the amount of light being transmitted through the cloud. Shadows often provide a clue.

Cloud Level
- High
- Mid
- Low

Ever wonder how clouds got their names? Well you may be surprised to find out!

In 1803 Luke Howard used Latin terms to classify four main cloud types.
- Cumulus means pile and describes heaped, lumpy clouds.
- Cirrus, meaning hair, describes high level clouds that look wispy, like locks of hair.
- Featureless clouds that form sheets are called Stratus, meaning layer.
- The term Nimbus, which means *precipitating cloud*, refers to low, grey rain clouds.
- Alto is used to describe mid level clouds.
- Finally, convective clouds have a vertical development extending through large portions of the atmosphere.