THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO

THE TEN DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLOUDS

AND HOW TO IDENTIFY THEM

what's this cloud

Dedicated to those who are passionately curious, keep their heads in the clouds, and keep their eyes on the skies. And to Luke Howard, the father of cloud classification.

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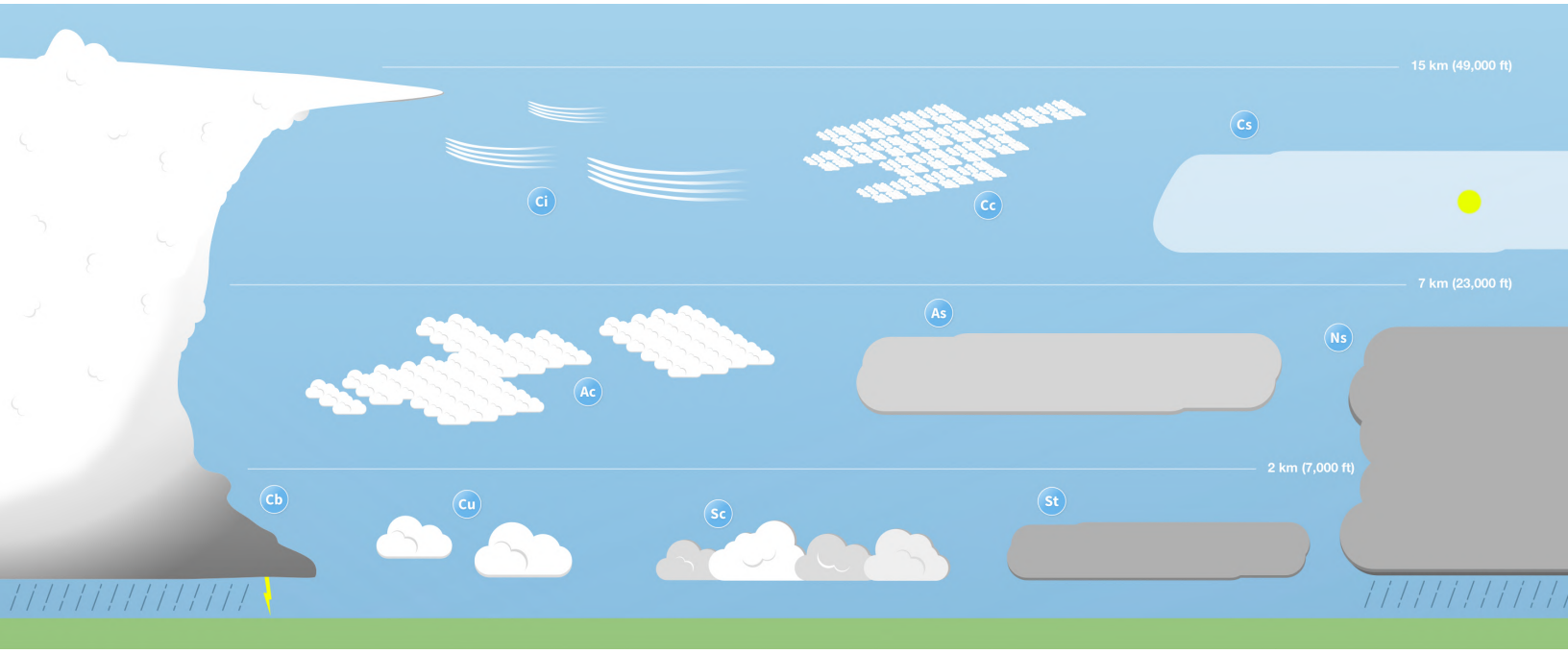
Cloud Types: An Infographic



CLOUD TYPE	LEVEL	SUMMARY	ALTITUDE RANGE	DESCRIPTION	ABBR
Cirrus	*High*	High, wispy streaks	5–15 km (16,000–49,000 ft)	High-altitude, thin, and wispy cloud streaks made of ice crystals	*Ci*
Cirrocumulus	*High*	High-altitude cloudlets	5–15 km (16,000–49,000 ft)	Small, flakey, and white high-altitude cumulus patches	*Cc*
Cirrostratus	*High*	Pale, veil-like layer	6–13 km (20,000–43,000 ft)	Thin, transparent, high-altitude layer capable of producing a halo	*Cs*
Altocumulus	*Middle*	Mid-altitude heaps	2–7 km (7,000–23,000 ft)	Middle-altitude cumuliform clouds arranged in heaps or rolls	*Ac*
Altostratus	*Middle*	Mid-altitude gray layer	2–7 km (7,000–23,000 ft)	Featureless, gray layer cloud capable of masking the sun	*As*
Nimbostratus	*Middle*	Precipitation layer	0.5–5.5 km (2,000–18,000 ft)	Dark and featureless layer cloud responsible for rain and snow	*Ns*
Cumulonimbus	*Low*	Thunderstorms	0.5–16 km (2,000–52,000 ft)	Dark-based storm cloud capable of impressive vertical growth	*Cb*
Cumulus	*Low*	Low, puffy, fair-weather	0.5–2 km (2,000–7,000 ft)	Low-altitude, fluffy heaps of clouds with cotton-like appearance	*Cu*
Stratus	*Low*	Low, featureless layer	0–2 km (0–7,000 ft)	Gray, featureless low-altitude cloud capable of ground contact	*St*
Stratocumulus	*Low*	Low, puffy layer	0.5–2 km (2,000–7,000 ft)	Thicker, dark gray, and somewhat conjoined heaps of clouds	*Sc*

whatsthiscloud

An Introduction to the 10 Different Types of Clouds

Clouds are the equivalent of an ever-evolving painting in the sky. They have the ability to make for magnificent sunrises and spectacular sunsets. We're surrounded by clouds almost every day of our lives.

Let's take the time and learn a little bit more about them!

The following information is presented to you as a comprehensive guide to the ten different types of clouds and how to idenify them.

Let's just say it's an instruction manual to the sky.

Here you'll learn about the ten different cloud types: their characteristics, how they differentiate from the other cloud types, and much more.

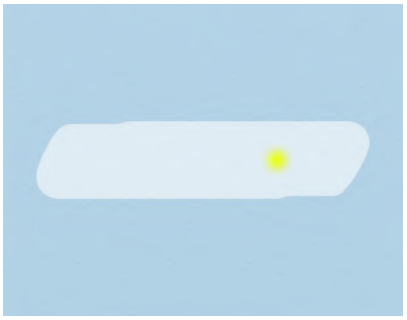
So three cheers to you for starting on your cloud identification journey.

Happy cloudspotting, friends! ⛅

The Three High Level Clouds

Cirrus (Ci)
High, wispy streaks

Cirrocumulus (Cc)
High-altitude cloudlets



Cirrostratus (Cs)
Pale, veil-like layer

Cirrus

High-altitude, thin, and wispy cloud streaks made of ice crystals

Cirro-cumulus

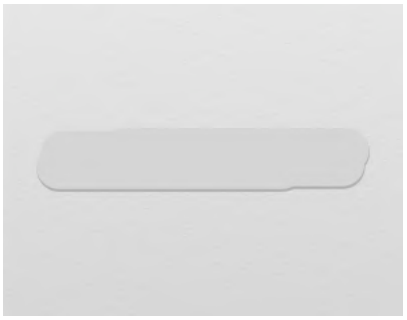
Small, flakey, and white high-altitude cumulus patches

Cirro-stratus

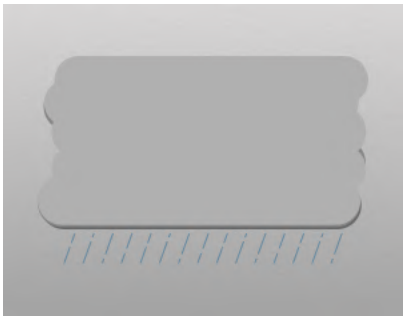
Thin, transparent, high-altitude layer capable of producing a halo

The Three Middle Level Clouds

Altocumulus (Ac)
Mid-altitude cloud heaps



Altostratus (As)
Mid-altitude gray layer



Nimbostratus (Ns)
Precipitation layer

Alto-cumulus

Middle-altitude cumulus clouds
arranged in groups or rolls

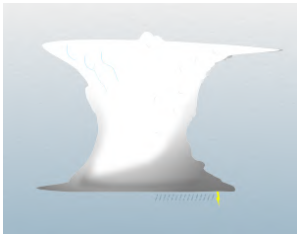
Alto-stratus

Featureless, gray layer cloud
capable of masking the sun

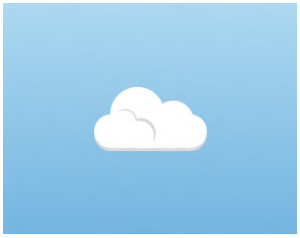
Nimbo-stratus

Dark and featureless layer cloud
responsible for rain and snow

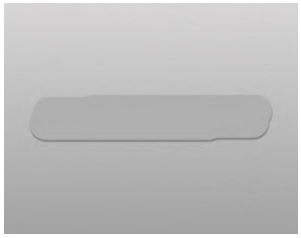
The Three Low Level Clouds



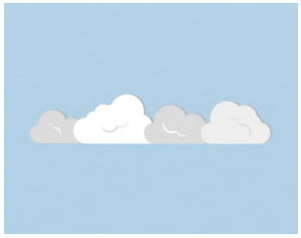
Cumulonimbus (Cb)
Thunderstorms



Cumulus (Cu)
Low, puffy, fair-weather



Stratus (St)
Low, featureless layer



Stratocumulus (Sc)
Low, puffy layer

Cumulo-nimbus

Dark-based storm cloud capable of impressive vertical growth

Cumulus

Low-altitude, fluffy heaps of clouds with cotton-like appearance

Stratus

Gray, featureless low-altitude cloud capable of ground contact

Strato-cumulus

Thicker, dark gray, and somewhat conjoined heaps of clouds

The 5 Latin Terms of Cloud Types

Cirro- is translated from latin meaning **‘curl’**.

The three clouds that include this term are cirrus, cirrocumulus, and cirrostratus. While this term is translated as ‘curl’, that doesn’t mean these clouds are curly (though cirrus clouds can be, which makes it an appropriate name). The important takeaway is that these three clouds are found in the highest layer of the troposphere (the lowest layer of the Earth’s atmosphere). These clouds are found at altitudes between approximately 16,000-50,000 ft, or 5-15 km.

Cumulo- is translated from latin meaning **‘heap’**.

The five clouds that include this term are cumulus, stratocumulus, cumulonimbus, altocumulus, and cirrocumulus. Heap can also be described as piled or puffy. These five clouds have at least some puffy and heap-like characteristics to them.

Strato- is translated from latin meaning **‘layer’**.

The five clouds that include this term are stratus, stratocumulus, nimbostratus, altostratus, and cirrostratus. A layer cloud is described as a cloud blanket that has much less definition relative to a heap cloud.

Nimbo- is translated from latin meaning **‘rain’**.

There are only two clouds that include the term ‘nimbo’: cumulonimbus and nimbostratus. They are the only clouds that are regular producers of precipitation.

Alto- is translated from latin meaning **‘high’**.

The two ‘alto’ clouds are altocumulus and altostratus. The translation is deceiving because these clouds aren’t found in the highest part of the troposphere. Altocumulus means they’re like cumulus clouds but found higher than regular cumulus clouds. Similarly, altostratus are stratus clouds but found higher than stratus clouds. These clouds are found at altitudes between approximately 7,000-23,000 ft, or 2-7 km.

The Contents of this Guide

The pages of this guide are organized in the following fashion.

Photographs. The images that have been selected are the best examples of each cloud type for you to reference.

Descriptions. A summary of each cloud type is provided, describing best how each cloud can be identified.

Cloud facts. Some facts about each cloud including its altitude, Latin translation, abbreviation, and more.

Similar cloud types. Tips and tricks to help you make the distinction from one cloud type to the next.

Cloud subtypes introduction. Did you know there are 34 subtypes that can be used to further classify a cloud?

Beyond the ten cloud types, there are fifteen cloud species, nine cloud varieties, eleven supplementary features, four accessory clouds, and five other kinds of clouds.

If you're learning about this for the first time, don't worry! We've designed a **cloud identification chart** that can help you visualize all cloud types and subtypes in a single infographic.


LET'S GET STARTED


Cirrus
HIGH, WISPY STREAKS

Cirrus Clouds: High, Wispy Streaks

High-altitude, thin, and wispy cloud streaks composed of ice crystals

Cirrus clouds have a distinct look relative to the other nine cloud types. Because cirrus clouds are made of ice crystals, they look different than your typical puffy cloud shape, and can take on a number of different forms that resemble spider webs, fish skeletons, mares' tail, or hair-like commas. If you're observing a cloud that's fibrous in nature, there's a strong chance you're looking at a cirrus cloud.

But all cirrus clouds don't have that distinctive, fibrous shape. They can also be found clumped together (spissatus cloud species), be entangled (intortus cloud variety), and don't look as majestic when you spot them closer to the horizon. Because of their ice crystal composition, cirrus clouds are also capable of various optical phenomena such as sun dogs and cloud iridescence.

Though human-formed, condensation trails from aircraft can become cirrus clouds in the technical sense (homogenitus), created as a result of jet exhaust in cold temperatures found in the upper parts of the troposphere.

Cirrus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): High
Altitude/Height: 5-15 km (16,000-49,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from cirro-, meaning curl
Abbreviation: Cirrus can be abbreviated as Ci

Cloud Color: White to light gray

Precipitation Potential: None

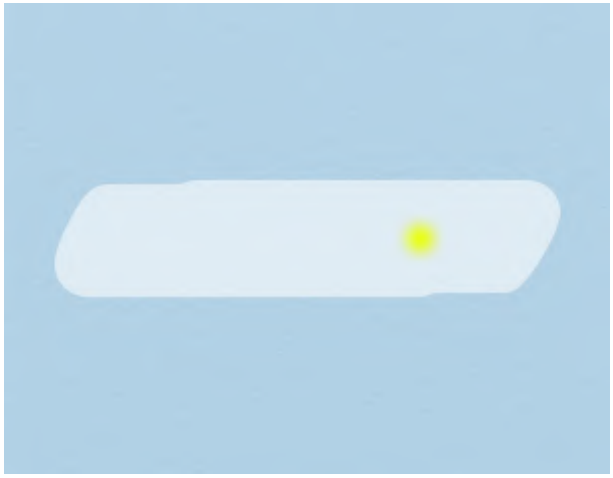
Sky Cover: Mostly sunny to sunny

Cloud Frequency: Very common

Cirrus vs. Cirrocumulus

Both cirrus and cirrocumulus clouds are found at the same altitude, and a lot of times when observing cirrocumulus clouds, you'll see cirrus clouds in close proximation. The biggest difference between the two is cirrocumulus clouds contain puffy cloudlets and look like grains of rice, where cirrus clouds are more fibrous and wispy in nature.

Cirrus vs Cirrostratus



Cirrus and cirrostratus clouds are found at the same altitude and both can be fibrous in nature. When deciding between the two, remember that a cirrostratus cloud generally covers the sky and is more of a pale, veil-like layer cloud, where you'll generally see more individual elements in a cirrus cloud, such as comma shapes, fishbone-like shapes, and other wispy designs.

Cirrus Cloud Species

Cirrus castellanus
Rising towers, turrets

Cirrus fibratus
Fiberlike, hairlike

Cirrus floccus
Puffy, ragged tufts

Cirrus spissatus
Packed tightly, dense

Cirrus uncinus
Curved, comma-shaped

Cirrus Cloud Varieties

Cirrus duplicatus
Multilayered

Cirrus intortus
Interlaced, entangled

Cirrus radiatus
Parallel bands and strips

Cirrus vertebratus
Fishbone-like, resembling ribs

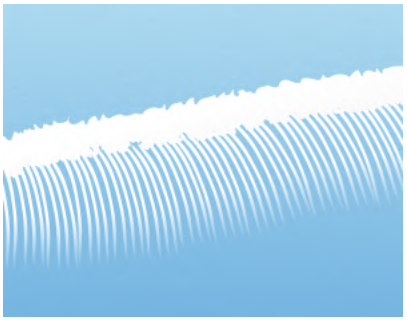
Cirrus Cloud Supplementary Features

Cirrus fluctus
Kelvin-Helmholtz waves, curls

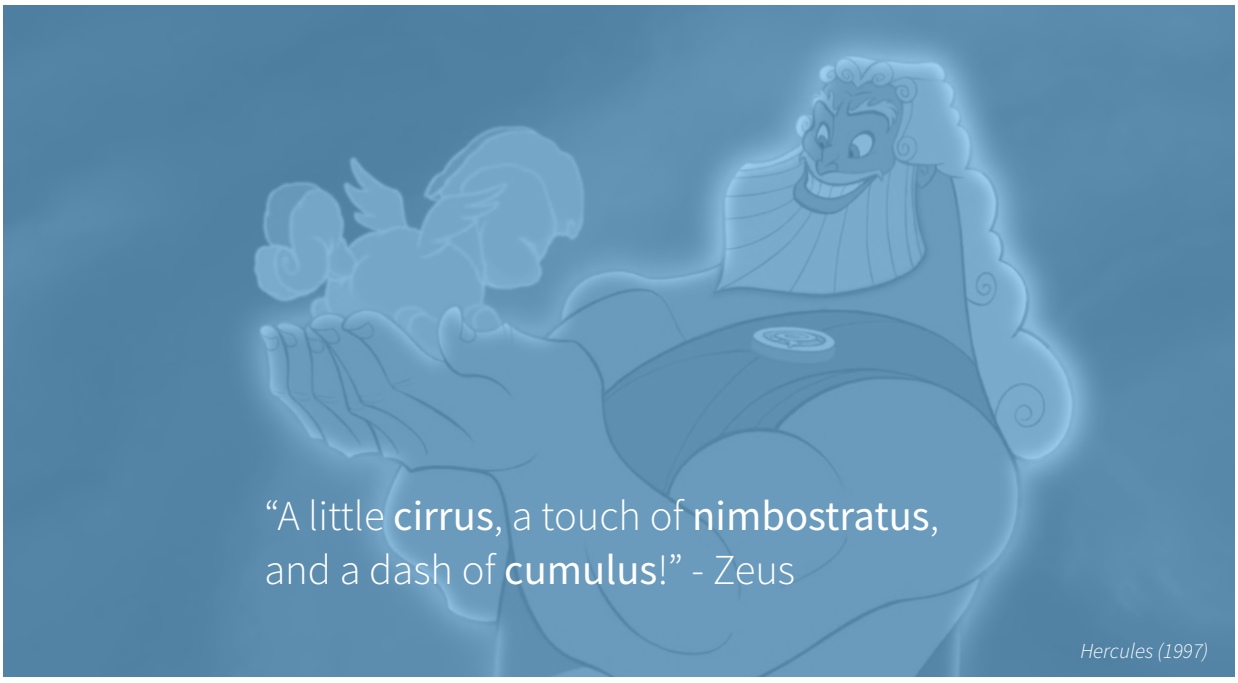
Cirrus mamma
Sac-like, resembling cow udders

Cirrus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds

Cirrus homogenitus
Caused by human activity



Cirrus homomutatus
Mutated from a homogenitus



Cirrus fibratus

Cirrus castellanus

Cirrocumulus

HIGH-ALTITUDE CLOUDLETS

Cirrocumulus Clouds: High-altitude Cloudlets

Small, flakey, and white high-altitude cumulus heaps and patches

Cirrocumulus clouds are thin cloud patches found high in the troposphere and are the only cloud found at this altitude that has cloud heap characteristics. Because cirrocumulus clouds are so high in altitude, the cloud heaps take on what can be described as a ‘grain of rice’ appearance. Take note when you see them because along with cumulonimbus, cirrocumulus clouds are the least seen among the ten main cloud types.

Unlike cirrus and cirrostratus clouds, cirrocumulus clouds don’t typically produce sun halos, though they are capable of iridescence and coronas on the rare occasion. Additionally, these are the only clouds in the high level that cannot be found in the fibrous form.

If you see a cirrocumulus cloud, the chances are good that there are cirrus or cirrostratus clouds nearby. Similar to altocumulus clouds, cirrocumulus can also take on a mackerel sky effect, resembling fish scales. If you’re lucky enough to see a mackerel sky at sunset, you’re in for a treat.

Cirrocumulus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): High
Altitude/Height: 5-15 km (16,000-49,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from cirro-, meaning curl, and cumulo-, meaning heap
Abbreviation: Cirrocumulus can be abbreviated as Cc

Cloud Color: White to light gray

Precipitation Potential: Virga only

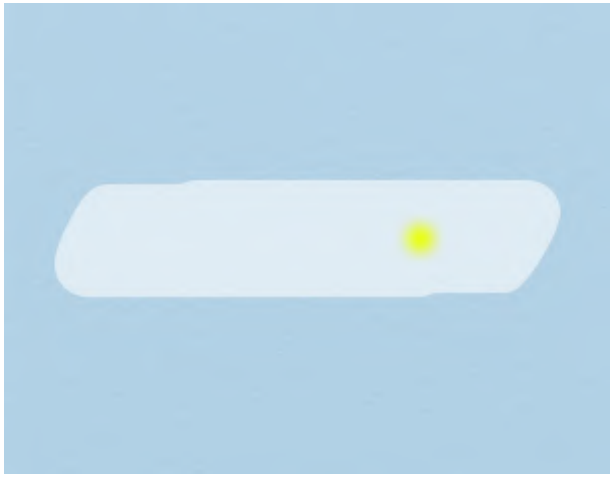
Sky Cover: Partly sunny to mostly sunny

Cloud Frequency: Uncommon

Cirrocumulus vs. Cirrus

Both cirrocumulus and cirrus clouds are found at the same altitude, and a lot of times when observing cirrocumulus clouds, you'll see cirrus clouds in close proximation. The biggest difference between the two is cirrocumulus clouds contain puffy cloudlets and look like grains of rice, where cirrus clouds are more fibrous and wispy in nature.

Cirrocumulus vs. Cirrostratus



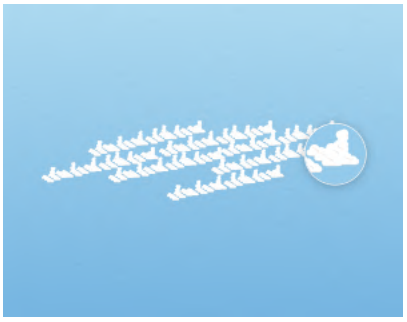
Cirrocumulus and cirrostratus clouds are both found at the same altitude and can be seen in close proximation with one another. If you're deciding between the two, and the cloud in question is featureless, or perhaps somewhat fibrous, chances are you're observing a cirrostratus cloud. Cirrocumulus clouds contain more features than cirrostratus clouds, whereas a cirrostratus cloud is more of a featureless layer.

Cirrocumulus vs. Altocumulus

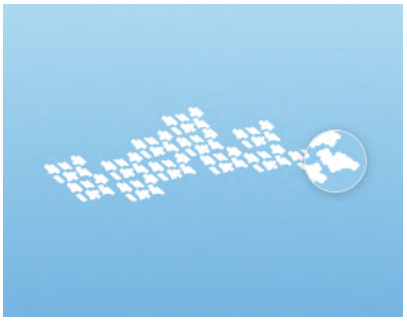
Cirrocumulus and altocumulus clouds share many of the same cloud species, but cirrocumulus clouds are higher in altitude, so their cloud patches appear smaller. Cirrocumulus clouds are more often than not seen with cirrus and cirrostratus clouds in near proximity. Altocumulus clouds are also much more commonly observed than cirrocumulus. It's more common to see the entire sky covered by a layer of altocumulus clouds than cirrocumulus clouds.

Cirrocumulus stratiformis

Cirrocumulus Cloud Species

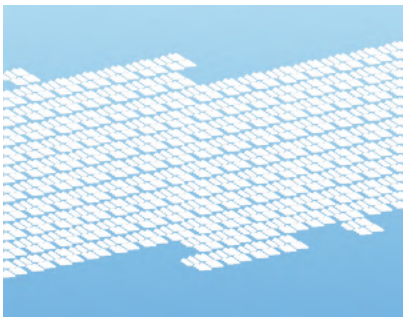


Cirrocumulus castellanus
Rising towers, turrets



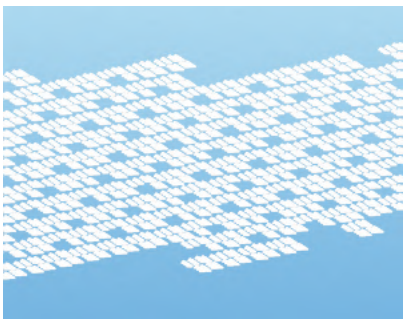
Cirrocumulus floccus
Puffy, ragged tufts

Cirrocumulus lenticularis
Lens-shaped, resembling a UFO



Cirrocumulus stratiformis
Horizontal, layer-like form

Cirrocumulus Cloud Varieties



Cirrocumulus lacunosus
Perforated, round frayed holes

Cirrocumulus undulatus
Wavelike, undulating

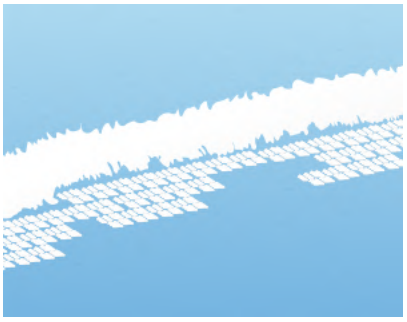
Cirrocumulus Cloud Supplementary Features

Cirrocumulus cavum
Fallstreak hole, hole punch

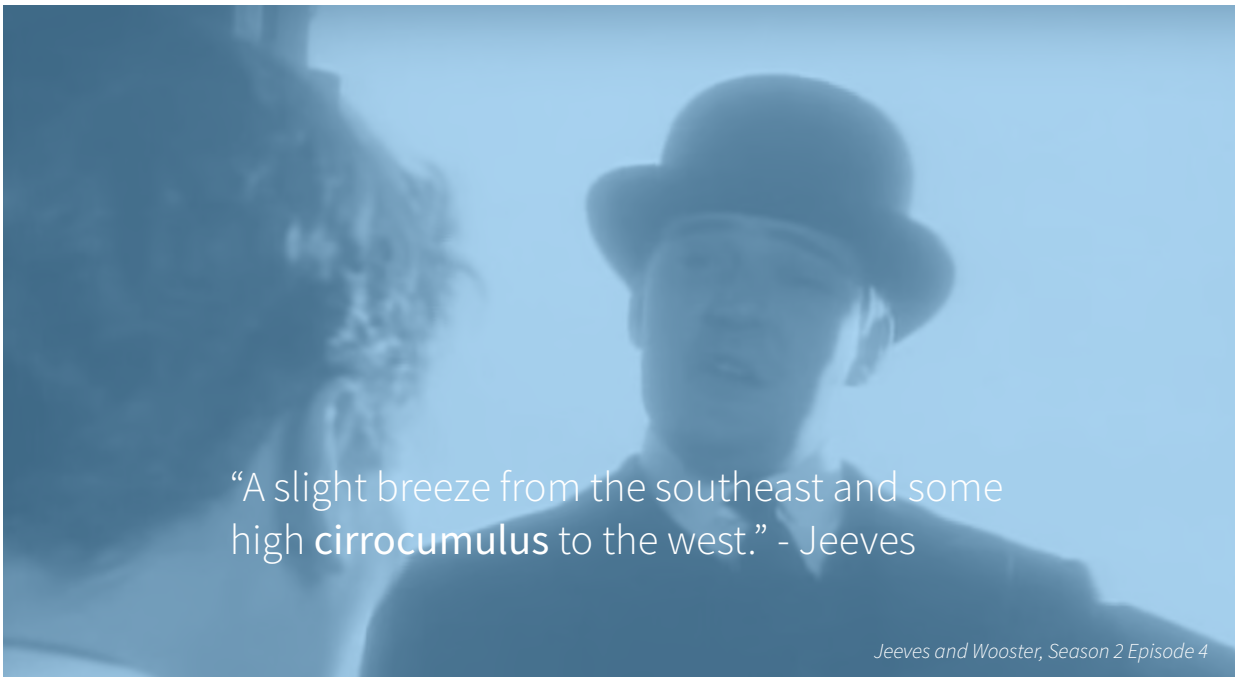
Cirrocumulus mamma
Sac-like, resembling cow udders

Cirrocumulus virga
Evaporating rain strips

Cirrocumulus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds



Cirrocumulus homomutatus
Mutated from a homogenitus



Cirrocumulus undulatus

Cirrocumulus floccus

Cirrostratus

PALE, VEIL-LIKE LAYER

Cirrostratus Clouds: Pale, Veil-like Layer

Thin, transparent, high-altitude cloud layer capable of producing a 22° halo

Cirrostratus clouds can best be described as a thin cloud blanket high up in the troposphere spread out across the sky. Found at the same altitude as their cirrus and cirrocumulus counterparts, these clouds are more widely known for being the culprit of sun and moon halos, as they're composed of ice crystals.

Like most layer clouds, cirrostratus clouds can take on a relatively dull appearance. They have very few cloud species and varieties associated with them. One distinction that cirrostratus clouds have going for them however is that they're one of two clouds that can be fibrous in appearance (cloud species fibratus). They're also one of two clouds, that can take on a hazy, nebulous feel (cloud species nebulosus), which is where the cloud completely lacks any kind of discernible detail. There are instances where they might take on a wavelike appearance (cloud variety undulatus) as well.

Because cirrostratus clouds are generally very thin, the sun will always be visible, which might help you distinguish it from its close relative, the altostratus cloud. Sometimes cirrostratus clouds are so thin, they're almost difficult to even make out.

Cirrostratus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): High
Altitude/Height: 6-13 km (20,000-43,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from cirro-, meaning curl, and strato-, meaning layer
Abbreviation: Cirrostratus can be abbreviated as Cs

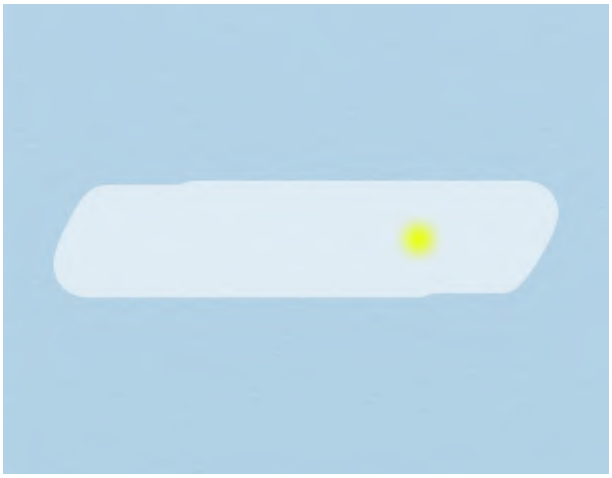
Cloud Color: White to light gray

Precipitation Potential: None

Sky Cover: Partly sunny to mostly sunny

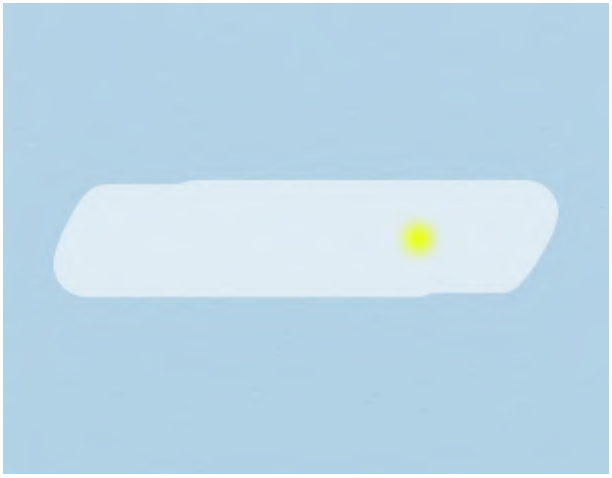
Cloud Frequency: Common

Cirrostratus vs. Cirrus



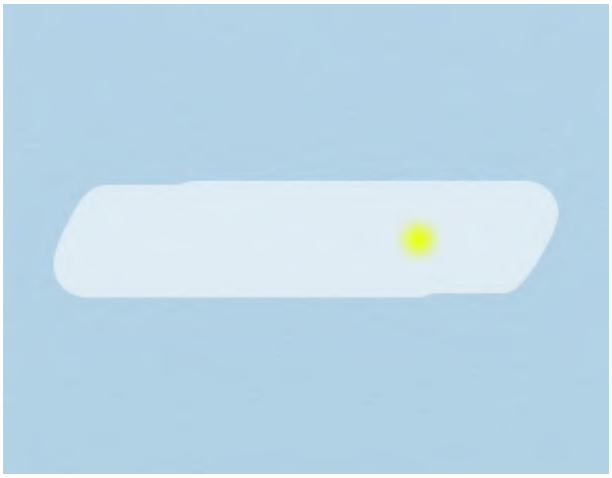
Cirrostratus and cirrus clouds are found at the same altitude and both can be fibrous in nature. When deciding between the two, remember that a cirrostratus cloud generally covers the sky and is more of a pale, veil-like layer cloud, where you'll generally see more individual elements in a cirrus cloud, such as comma shapes, fishbone-like shapes, and other wispy designs.

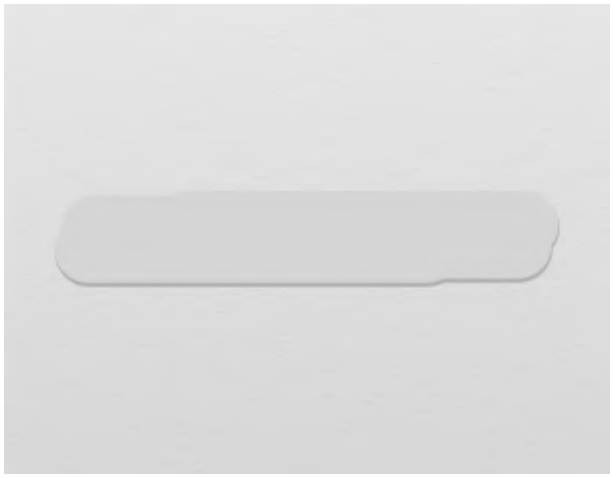
Cirrostratus vs. Cirrocumulus



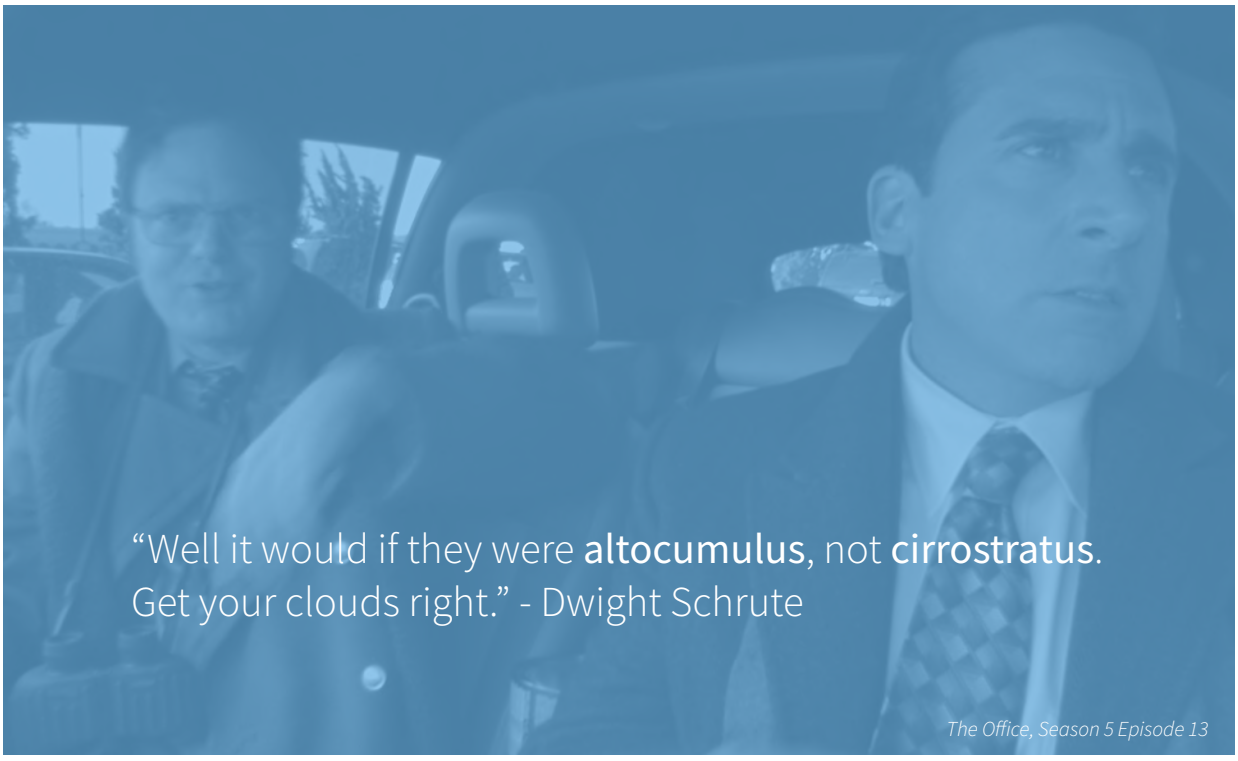
Cirrostratus and cirrocumulus clouds are both found at the same altitude and can be seen in close proximation with one another. If you're deciding between the two, and the cloud in question is featureless, or perhaps somewhat fibrous, chances are you're observing a cirrostratus cloud. Cirrocumulus clouds contain more features than cirrostratus clouds, whereas a cirrostratus cloud is more of a featureless layer.

Cirrostratus vs. Altostratus

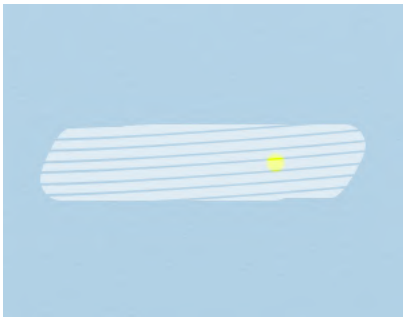




Cirrostratus and altostratus clouds are both layer clouds. A key difference is that if you see an optical phenomena in a cloud and are trying to decide between the two, you're probably looking at a cirrostratus cloud. Cirrostratus clouds are lighter in color, you can always see the sun's position through a cirrostratus cloud, which is not always the case with altostratus clouds, which are darker and lower to the ground.



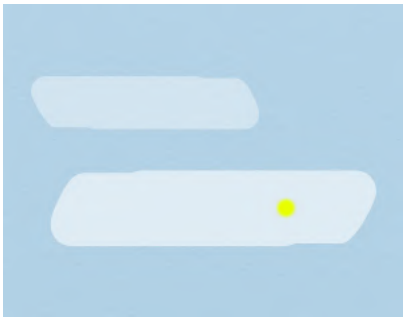
Cirrostratus Cloud Species



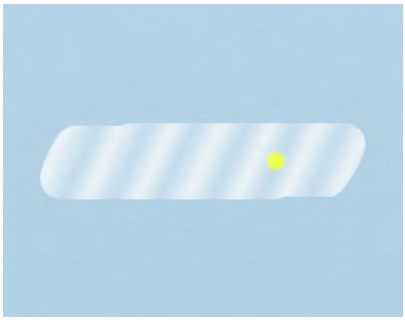
Cirrostratus fibratus
Fiberlike, hairlike

Cirrostratus nebulosus
Full of vapor, lacking detail

Cirrostratus Cloud Varieties



Cirrostratus duplicatus
Multilayered



Cirrostratus undulatus
Wavelike, undulating

Cirrostratus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds

Cirrostratus homomutatus
Mutated from a homogenitus

Cirrostratus nebulosus

Cirrostratus nebulosus

Altocumulus

MID-ALTITUDE CLOUD HEAPS

Altocumulus Clouds: Mid-altitude Cloud Heaps

Middle-altitude cumuliform clouds often arranged in heaps or rolls

Altocumulus clouds are typically found in groups or heaps clumped together. They're found in the middle layer of the troposphere, lower than cirrocumulus and higher than their cumulus and stratocumulus counterparts. The term mackerel sky is also common to altocumulus (and cirrocumulus) clouds that display a pattern resembling fish scales. Of all the ten different cloud types, altocumulus clouds are one of the most diverse and dynamic in terms of their appearance.

These clouds can take on a handful of shapes and sizes. They can include cloud heaps that resemble towering castles (castellanus cloud species), can sometimes resemble a lock of wool (cloud species floccus), can cover the entire sky (stratiformis cloud species), and can even come in the shape of roll clouds (volutus cloud species).

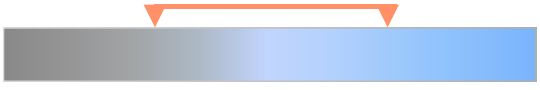
Altocumulus are also known for creating UFO-shaped clouds (lenticularis cloud species), are responsible for a lot of the uncommon fallstreak hole sightings you might be lucky enough to see (cavum cloud feature), and on the rarest of occasion, can produce a wavy, chaotic appearance (asperitas cloud feature).

Altocumulus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): Middle
Altitude/Height: 2-7 km (7,000-23,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from alto-, meaning high, and cumulo-, meaning heap
Abbreviation: Altocumulus can be abbreviated as Ac

Cloud Color: White to gray

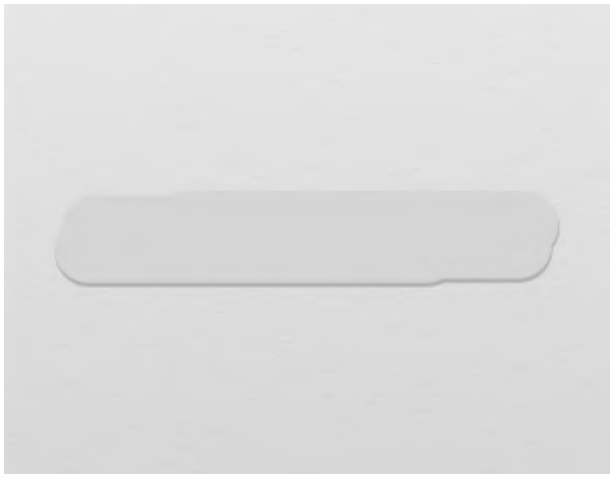
Precipitation Potential: Virga only



Sky Cover: Mostly cloudy to mostly sunny

Cloud Frequency: Very common

Altocumulus vs. Altostratus

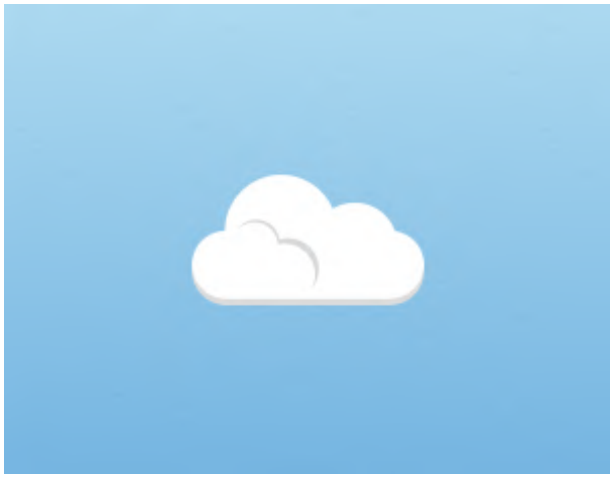


While altocumulus and altostratus clouds are found at the same altitude, altostratus clouds are generally a featureless layer, where altocumulus clouds typically have plenty of features. Altostratus clouds are absent of cloud species, so if you're deciding between an altostratus and altocumulus cloud and what you're observing looks to have an associated cloud species, you should lean towards an altocumulus.

Altocumulus vs. Cirrocumulus

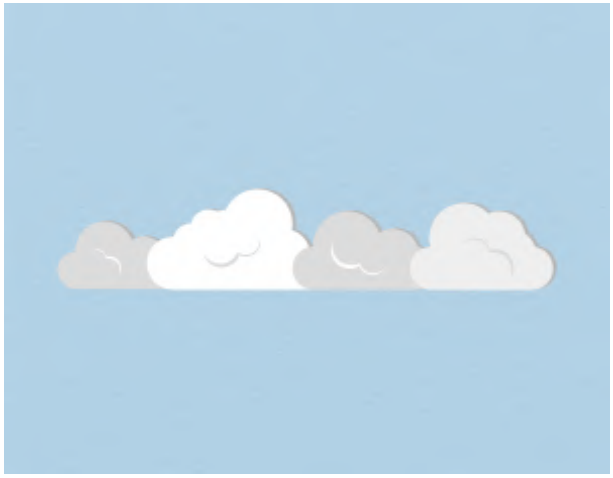
Altocumulus and cirrocumulus clouds share many of the same cloud species, but cirrocumulus clouds are higher in altitude, so their cloudlets are smaller. Cirrocumulus clouds are found with cirrus and cirrostratus clouds in near proximity. Altocumulus clouds are also more commonly observed than cirrocumulus. It's more common to see the sky covered by a layer of altocumulus clouds than cirrocumulus clouds.

Altocumulus vs. Cumulus



Altocumulus clouds are generally seen as patches of clouds grouped together, either in rolls, sheets, or heaps. Cumulus clouds are more often seen as individual clouds. Cumulus clouds are also much closer to the ground. A key reminder trying to determine the difference between cumulus and altocumulus clouds are that the two cloud types don't have any shared cloud species.

Altocumulus vs. Stratocumulus



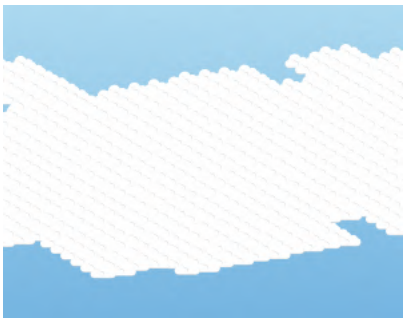
Altocumulus clouds are more closely related to stratocumulus clouds than they are to cumulus clouds. They share almost all of the same cloud species, cloud varieties, and other cloud features. Their altitude is their biggest differentiator, with stratocumulus clouds being closer to the ground. Stratocumulus cloud formations are seemingly bigger, and are generally a bit darker than altocumulus clouds.

Altocumulus Cloud Species

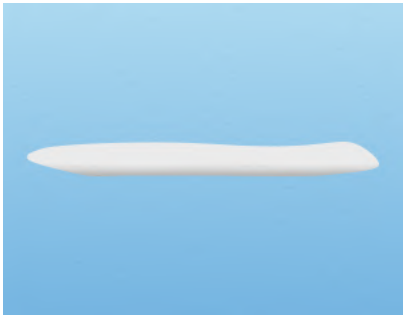
Altocumulus castellanus
Rising towers, turrets

Altocumulus floccus
Puffy, ragged tufts

Altocumulus lenticularis
Lens-shaped, resembling a UFO



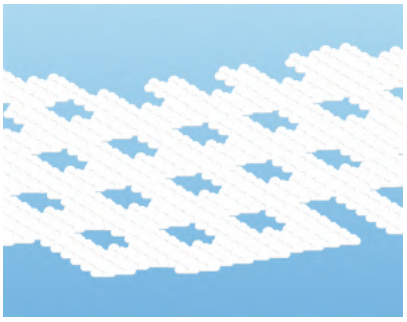
Altocumulus stratiformis
Horizontal, layer-like form



Altocumulus volutus
Tube-shaped roll cloud

Altocumulus Cloud Varieties

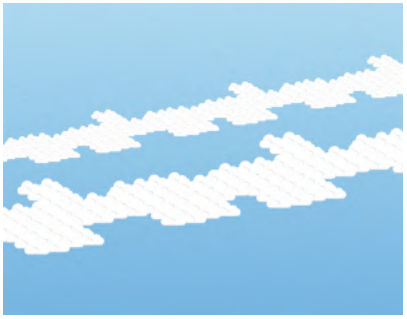
Altocumulus duplicatus
Multilayered



Altocumulus lacunosus
Perforated, round frayed holes

Altocumulus opacus
Opaque, masks the sun

Altocumulus perlucidus
Transparent by small gaps



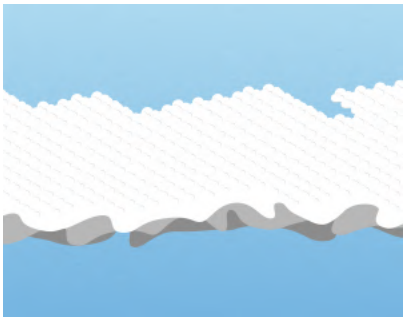
Altocumulus radiatus
Parallel bands and strips

Altocumulus translucidus
See-through, sun's position visible

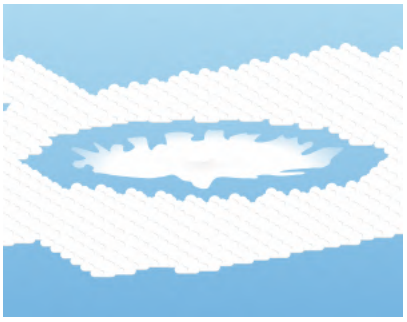
Altocumulus Cloud Varieties (cont.)

Altocumulus undulatus
Wavelike, undulating

Altocumulus Cloud Supplementary Features



Altocumulus asperitas
Chaotic, wavy underneath



Altocumulus cavum
Fallstreak hole, hole punch

Altocumulus fluctus
Kelvin-Helmholtz waves, curls

Altocumulus mamma
Sac-like, resembling cow udders

Altocumulus virga
Evaporating rain strips

Altocumulus stratiformis

Altocumulus floccus

Altostratus

MID-ALTITUDE GRAY LAYER

Altostratus Clouds: Mid-altitude Gray Layer

Sheet of featureless, gray clouds in the middle cloud level capable of masking the sun

Altostratus clouds are found in the middle cloud level. Unlike their altocumulus counterpart, they're often boring to look at. Along with nimbostratus clouds, these clouds don't have any species associated with them.

But they do come with a handful of cloud varieties, which can help you make the determination if you're looking at an altostratus cloud. If you see a cloud covering the sky's entirety that's not very close to the ground, and it's positioned such that it's visible through the clouds but giving off a 'frosted glass' appearance, chances are good that you're observing a cloud classified as altostratus translucidus. If the cloud is opaque and you can't see the sun's position, consider it an altostratus opacus.

These clouds can also be responsible for precipitation, though it's short-lived and not common. You might also find scud clouds (pannus cloud accessory) underneath the main cloud layer, which can be one more indication that you're looking at an altostratus cloud.

Altostratus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): Middle
Altitude/Height: 2-7 km (7,000-23,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from alto-, meaning high, and strato- meaning layer
Abbreviation: Altostratus can be abbreviated as As

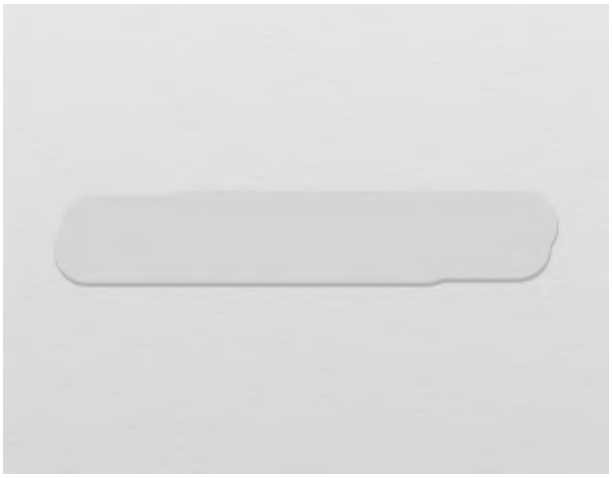
Cloud Color: Gray to dark gray

Precipitation Potential: Uncommon

Sky Cover: Cloudy to mostly cloudy

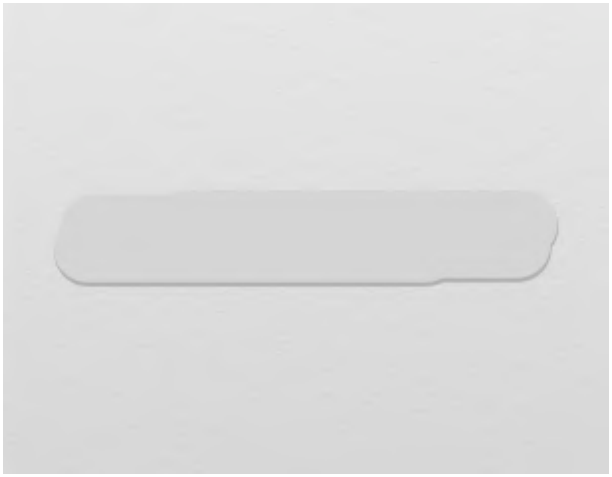
Cloud Frequency: Common

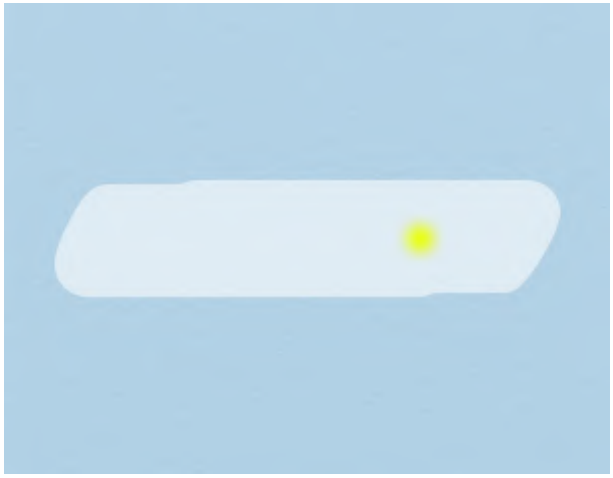
Altostratus vs. Altocumulus



While altostratus and altocumulus clouds are found at the same altitude, altostratus clouds are generally a featureless layer, where altocumulus clouds typically have plenty of features. Altostratus clouds are absent of cloud species, so if you're deciding between an altostratus and altocumulus cloud and what you're observing looks to have an associated cloud species, you should lean towards an altocumulus.

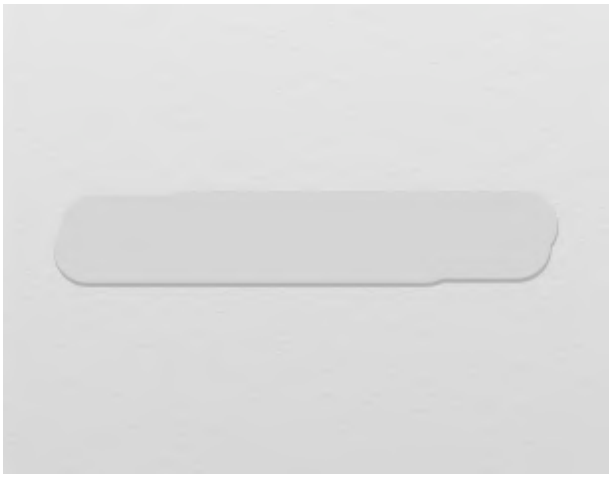
Altostratus vs. Cirrostratus

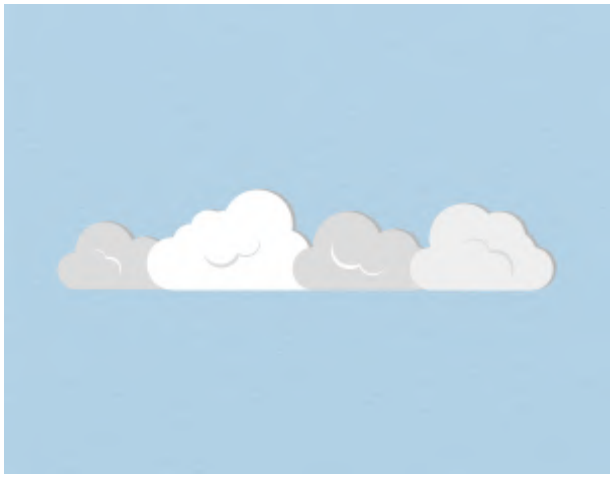




Cirrostratus and altostratus clouds are both layer clouds. A key difference is that if you see an optical phenomena in a cloud and are trying to decide between the two, you're probably looking at a cirrostratus cloud. Cirrostratus clouds are lighter in color, you can always see the sun's position through a cirrostratus cloud, which is not always the case with altostratus clouds, which are darker and lower to the ground.

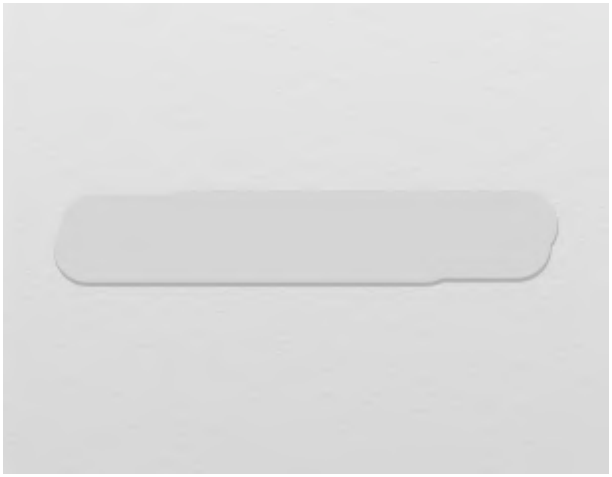
Altostratus vs. Stratocumulus

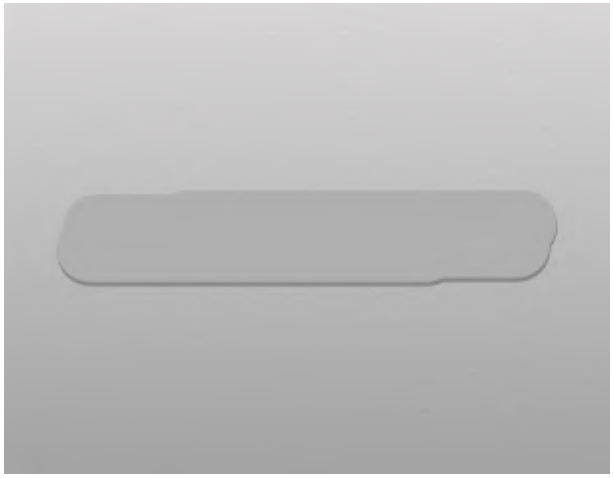




Altostratus clouds are generally a featureless layer cloud, whereas stratocumulus clouds have more detail. Remember, if you're trying to decide between an altostratus and stratocumulus cloud, and the cloud being observed has been determined to have an associated cloud species, it's not an altostratus cloud.

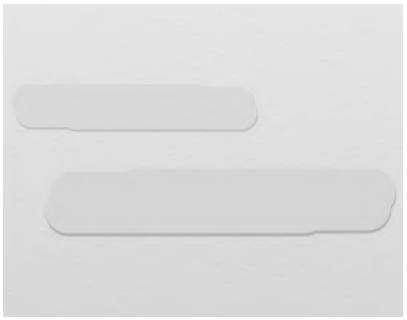
Altostratus vs. Stratus





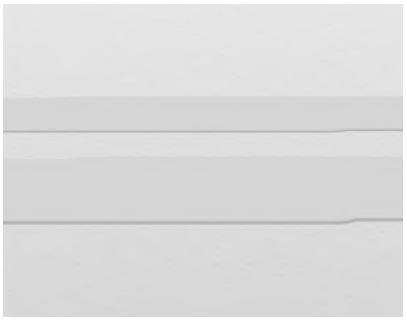
Both altostratus clouds and stratus clouds are both layer clouds, so they can certainly look the same. Altostratus clouds are higher in altitude though, which means they won't touch the ground or mask the tops of tall buildings like a stratus cloud would. When deciding between these clouds, if you're able to see further off in the distance, chances are likely that you're looking at an altostratus cloud.

Altostratus Cloud Varieties

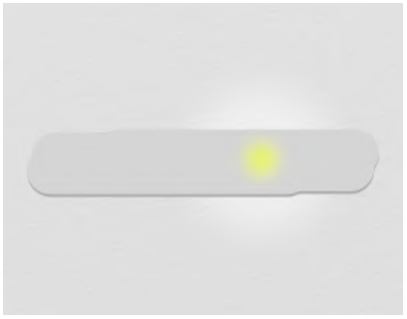


Altostratus duplicatus
Multilayered

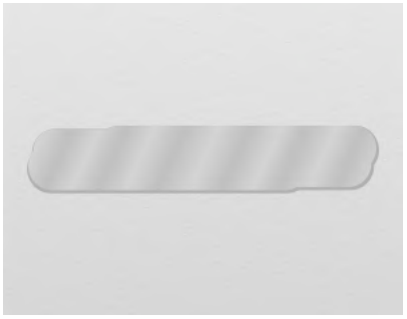
Altostratus opacus
Opaque, masks the sun



Altostratus radiatus
Parallel bands and strips

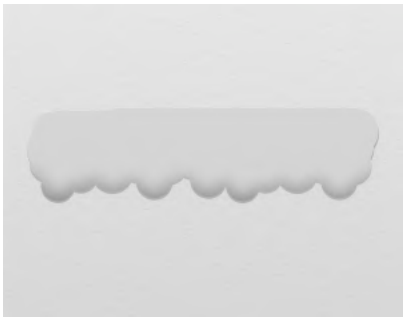


Altostratus translucidus
See-through, sun's position visible

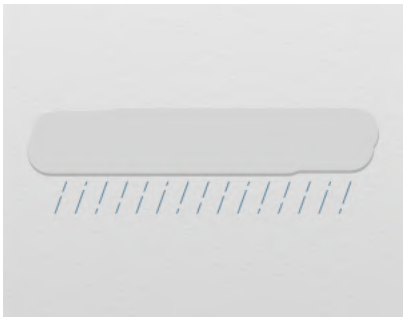


Altostratus undulatus
Wavelike, undulating

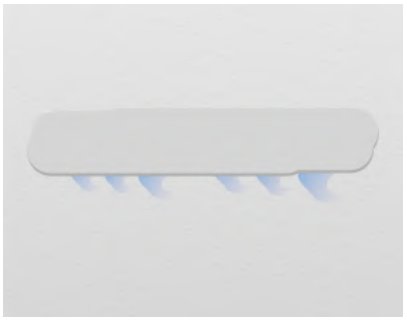
Altostratus Cloud Supplementary Features



Altostratus mamma
Sac-like, resembling cow udders

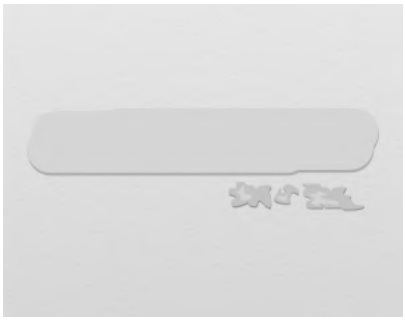


Altostratus praecipitatio
Precipitation reaching the surface



Altostratus virga
Evaporating rain strips

Altostratus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds



Altostratus pannus
Ragged frazzles, scud

Altostratus opacus

Altostratus opacus

Altostratus undulatus

Nimbostratus

PRECIPITATION LAYER

Nimbostratus Clouds: Precipitation Layer

Dark and featureless layer cloud responsible for rainy and snowy weather

Nimbostratus clouds are associated with rainy, dreary days. They're also responsible for snowy weather. Either way, these clouds are best known precipitation (and might be the cause for your outdoor activities to be postponed).

Though it's difficult to tell visually, these clouds can be put into the category of multilevel clouds, meaning the base of a nimbostratus cloud can be found relatively close to the ground, but the tops of them can extend upwards into the middle cloud level. The thickness of a nimbostratus cloud helps give it a darker appearance than most.

Of the ten main cloud types, only two are consistent precipitation producers: nimbostratus and cumulonimbus. Nimbostratus are responsible for continuous precipitation where cumulonimbus are more likely associated with more dramatic weather, including quick-hitting extreme downpours. So if it's raining, and has been raining all day, you're in the presence of a nimbostratus cloud.

Nimbostratus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): Middle, though its cloud base extends into the lower level
Altitude/Height: 0.5-5.5 km (2,000-18,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from nimbo-, meaning rain, and strato-, meaning layer
Abbreviation: Nimbostratus can be abbreviated as Ns

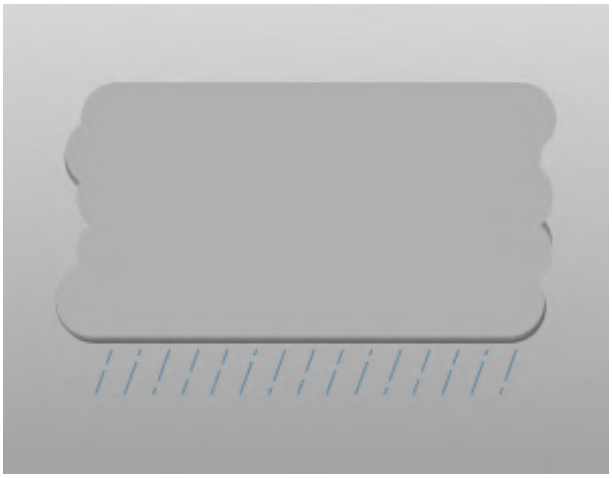
Cloud Color: Light gray to very dark gray

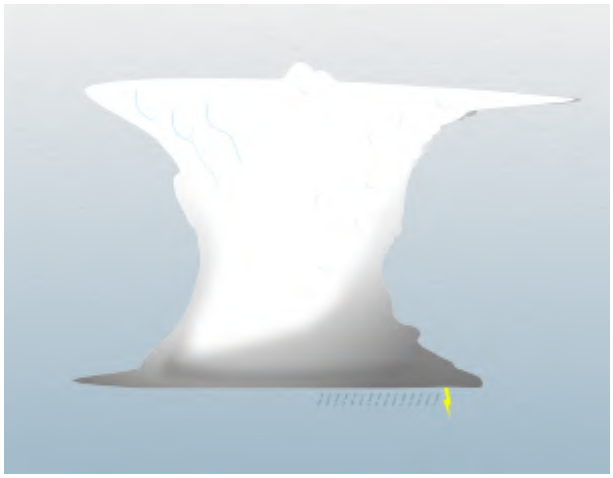
Precipitation Potential: Always

Sky Cover: Cloudy to mostly cloudy

Cloud Frequency: Common

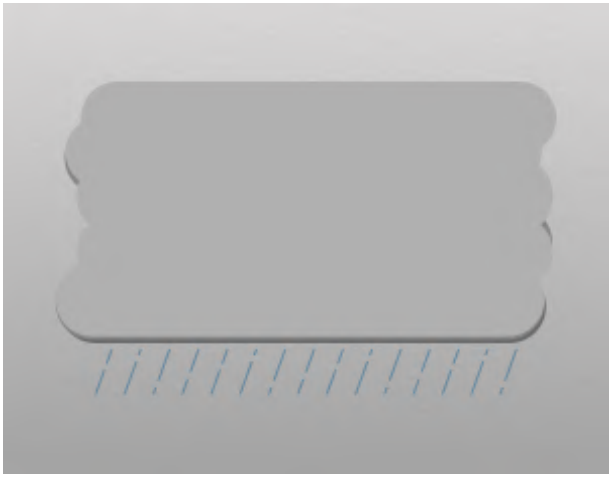
Nimbostratus vs. Cumulonimbus

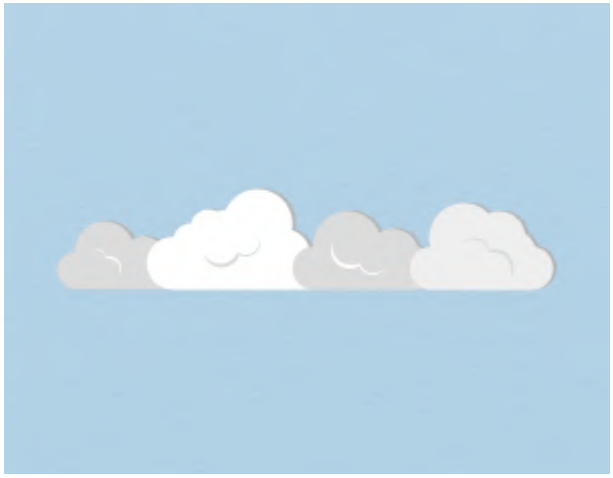




Both cumulonimbus clouds and nimbostratus clouds have precipitation, and when underneath them, it might be tough to differentiate the two. If the precipitation is particularly heavy, or if the rain is accompanied by thunder, lightning, or other cloud features like a wall cloud (murus cloud feature), shelf cloud (arcus cloud feature), or a tail cloud (cauda cloud feature), you're under a cumulonimbus cloud.

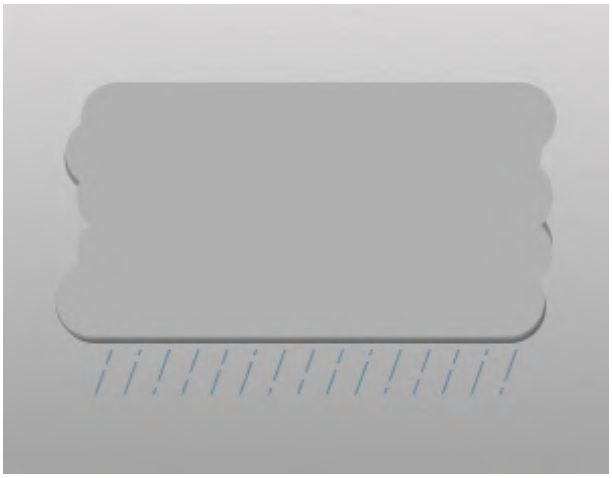
Nimbostratus vs. Stratocumulus

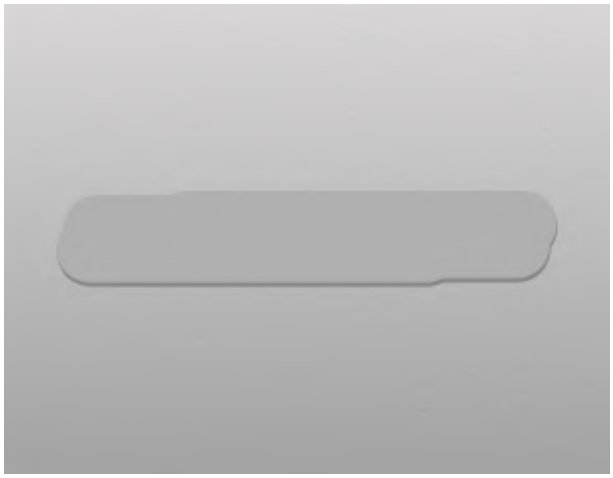




When deciding between nimbostratus and stratocumulus clouds, remember that nimbostratus clouds are associated with precipitation, where stratocumulus clouds only produce precipitation in certain conditions. Nimbostratus clouds are generally featureless and don't have any associated cloud species or varieties, while stratocumulus clouds have plenty of species and varieties to go around.

Nimbostratus vs. Stratus



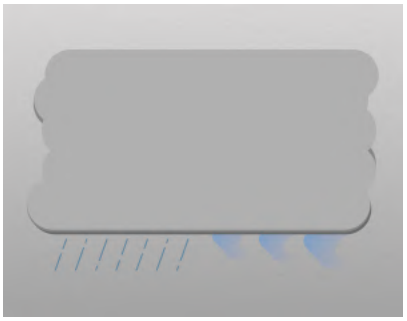


Both nimbostratus and stratus cloud bases can be found at the same height, are both relatively featureless, and are both the same light gray to dark gray color. The biggest differentiator is that nimbostratus clouds contain rain, whereas stratus clouds only precipitate on certain occasions. If it's raining, chances are it's a nimbostratus cloud. If it isn't, it's a stratus cloud.

Nimbostratus pannus

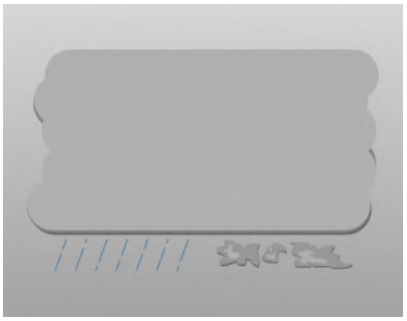
Nimbostratus Cloud Supplementary Features

Nimbostratus praecipitatio
Precipitation reaching the surface



Nimbostratus virga
Evaporating rain strips

Nimbostratus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds



Nimbostratus pannus
Ragged frazzles, scud

Nimbostratus pannus

Nimbostratus praecipitatio


Cumulonimbus
THUNDERSTORMS

Cumulonimbus Clouds: Thunderstorms

Dark-based storm cloud capable of impressive vertical growth and heavy precipitation

Cumulonimbus clouds are responsible for stormy weather. If you're looking up at a cloud that's causing rainy and windy conditions, creating hail, thunder, and lightning, chances are you got yourself a cumulonimbus cloud.

If you're observing this cloud from a distance, what will stand out most is the cloud's impressive height, as it's the only cloud that extends through all three cloud levels. Its base can be very low to the ground, and its top can extend to the highest layer of the troposphere. The top of the cloud might take on a bald appearance (calvus cloud species), or it can take on a hairy and fibrous upper portion (capillatus cloud species).

The more potent cumulonimbus clouds can create a handful of cloud features. Above the main cloud, an anvil cloud (incus cloud feature) can form, where the cloud hits the top of the troposphere and spreads out across the sky. Additionally, you might find the most dramatic examples of mammatus clouds (mamma cloud feature) in the upper portion of a cumulonimbus, caused by pockets of cool, sinking air.

Cumulonimbus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): Low, though it extends into the middle and high levels
Altitude/Height: 0.5-16 km (2,000-52,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from cumulo-, meaning heap, and nimbo-, meaning rain
Abbreviation: Cumulonimbus can be abbreviated as Cb

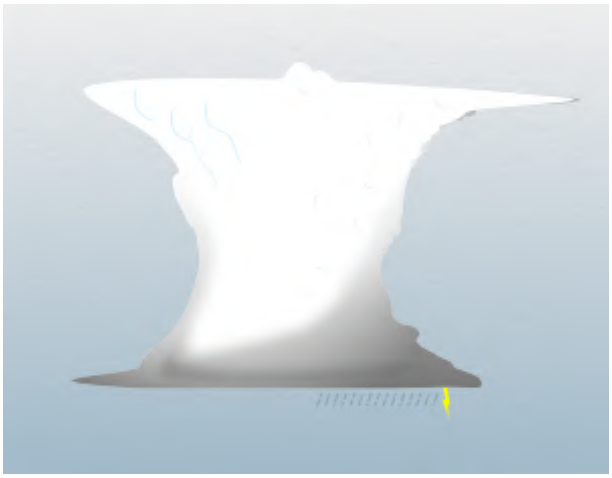
Cloud Color: Light gray to very dark gray

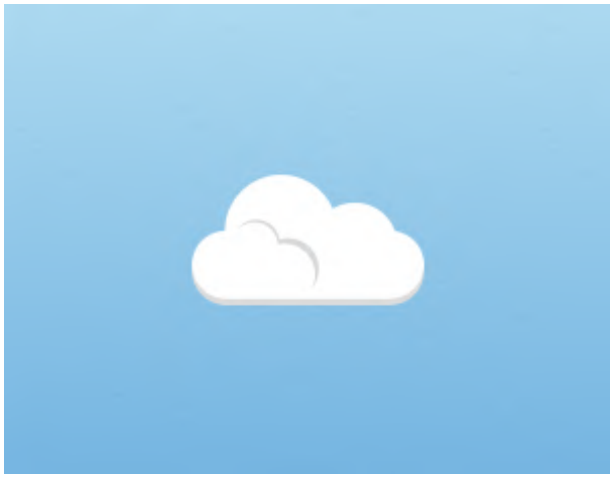
Precipitation Potential: Very common

Sky Cover: Cloudy to partly sunny

Cloud Frequency: Uncommon

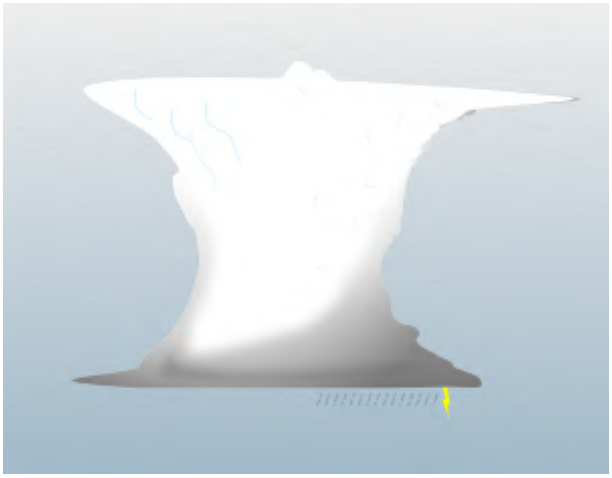
Cumulonimbus vs. Cumulus

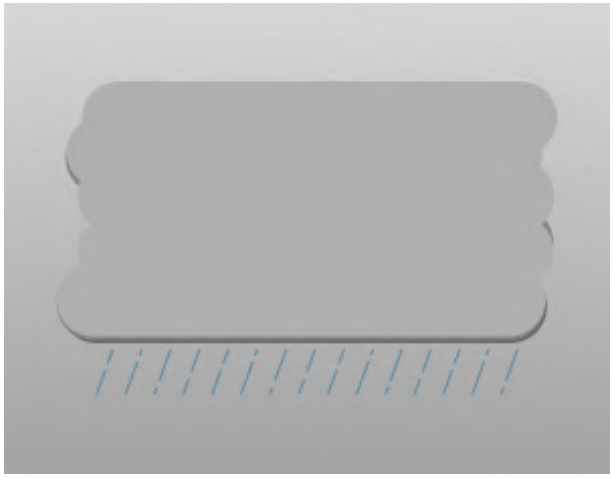




Fully developed cumulonimbus clouds are much different than typical fair-weather cumulus clouds, but a cumulus congestus cloud is the precursor to a cumulonimbus cloud. If you're trying to decide between the two, and the cloud in question has precipitation, lightning, or a fibrous upper portion, you can consider it a cumulonimbus cloud. Otherwise, it would be identified as a cumulus cloud.

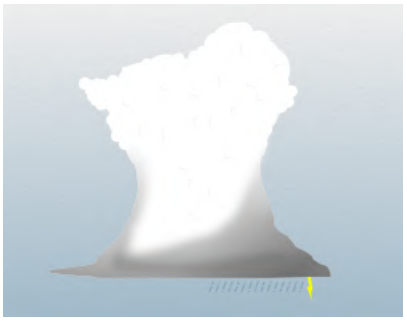
Cumulonimbus vs. Nimbostratus



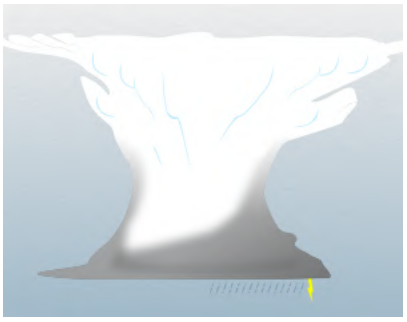


Both cumulonimbus clouds and nimbostratus clouds have precipitation, and when underneath them, it might be tough to differentiate the two. If the precipitation is particularly heavy, or if the rain is accompanied by thunder, lightning, or other cloud features like a wall cloud (murus cloud feature), shelf cloud (arcus cloud feature), or a tail cloud (cauda cloud feature), you're under a cumulonimbus cloud.

Cumulonimbus Cloud Species

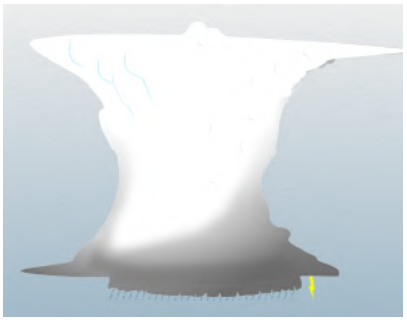


Cumulonimbus calvus
Without cirriform, hairless

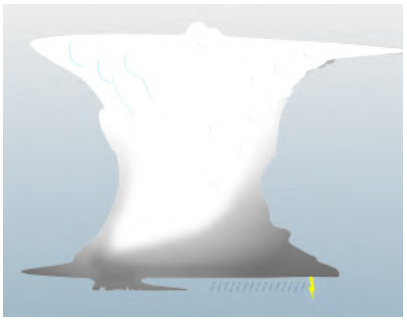


Cumulonimbus capillatus
Fibrous upper portion

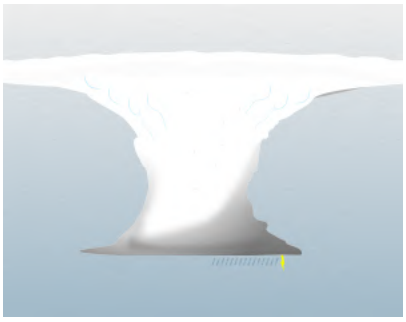
Cumulonimbus Cloud Supplementary Features



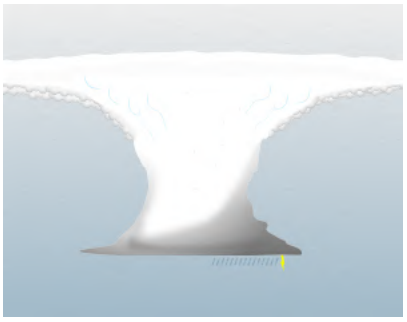
Cumulonimbus arcus
Shelf cloud, gust collar



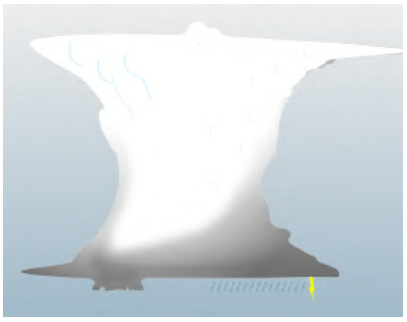
Cumulonimbus cauda
Tail cloud, attached to murus



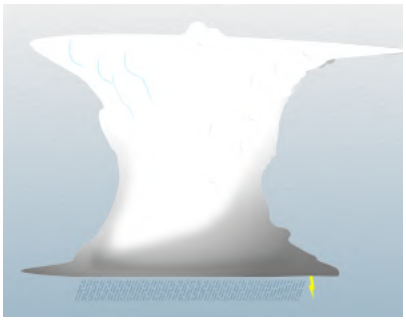
Cumulonimbus incus
Anvil above a cumulonimbus



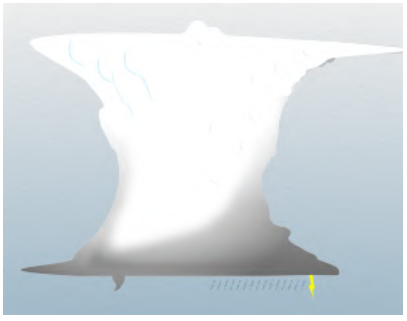
Cumulonimbus mamma
Sac-like, resembling cow udders



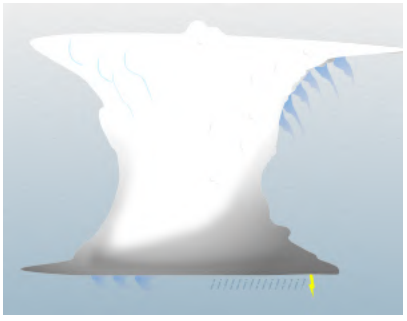
Cumulonimbus murus
Wall cloud, cloud lowering



Cumulonimbus praecipitatio
Precipitation reaching the surface

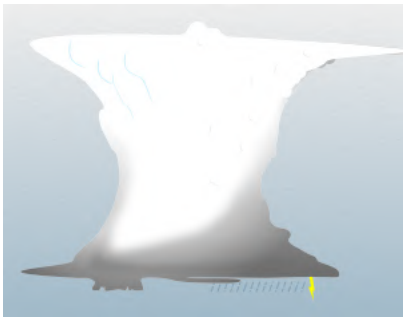


Cumulonimbus tuba
Funnel cloud, tornado

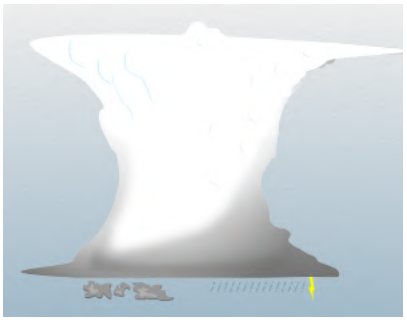


Cumulonimbus virga
Evaporating rain strips

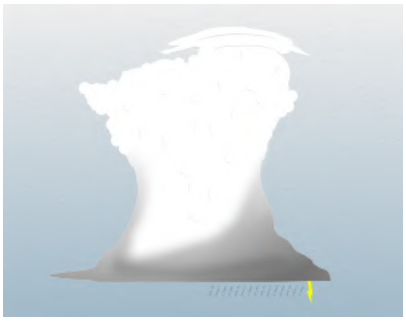
Cumulonimbus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds



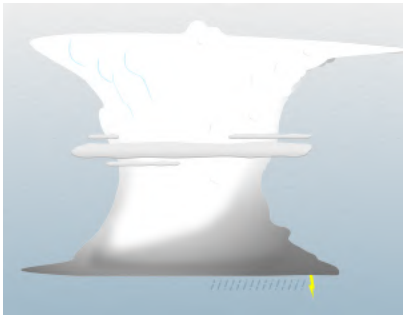
Cumulonimbus flumen
Beaver tail, detached from murus



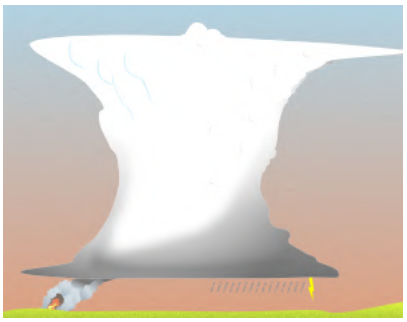
Cumulonimbus pannus
Ragged frazzles, scud



Cumulonimbus pileus
Cap or hood over a cumuliform



Cumulonimbus velum
Horizontal cloud veil



Cumulonimbus flammagenitus
Pyrocumulus, caused from fire

Cumulonimbus calvus

Cumulonimbus arcus


Cumulus
LOW, PUFFY, FAIR-WEATHER

Cumulus Clouds: Low, Puffy, Fair-weather

Low-altitude, fluffy heaps of clouds with cotton-like appearance

Cumulus clouds are the clouds that we all drew as kids. They're cotton ball clouds, popcorn clouds, and the clouds in the opening scene of The Simpsons. Though they come in different shapes and sizes, they're generally the easiest type of cloud to pick out of the ten different cloud types. When the average person is asked to visualize a cloud, cumulus clouds are generally the first to come to mind.

The different sizes of cumulus clouds are described by their four associated species. If the cumulus cloud you're looking at is wider than it is tall, then it's a cumulus humilis. If it's as wide as it is tall, then it's a cumulus mediocris. But when a cumulus cloud is taller than it is wide, known as cumulus congestus, things can get interesting. If a cumulus congestus cloud continues its vertical growth, they're capable of producing rain, and can eventually morph into a cumulonimbus cloud.

Finally, if you see a cumulus cloud that's ragged and broken up, consider it of the species cumulus fractus. You might witness these clouds in the evening as cumulus clouds begin to dissipate, or perhaps on a windy day.

Cumulus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): Low, but capable of extending into higher levels (congestus)
Altitude/Height: 0.2-2 km (2,000-7,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from cumulo-, meaning heap
Abbreviation: Cumulus can be abbreviated as Cu

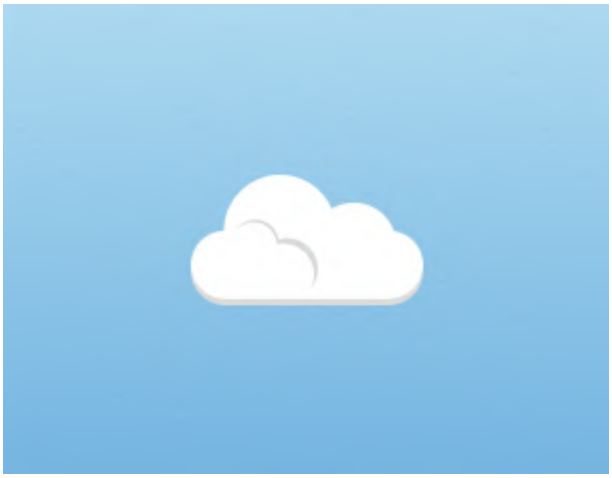
Cloud Color: White to gray

Precipitation Potential: Uncommon

Sky Cover: Mostly sunny to sunny

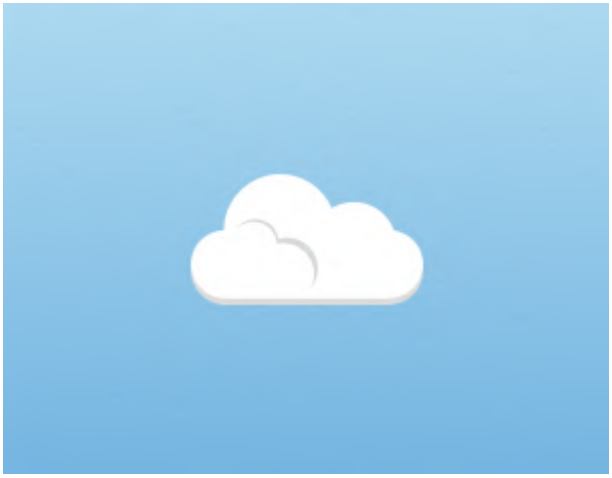
Cloud Frequency: Very common

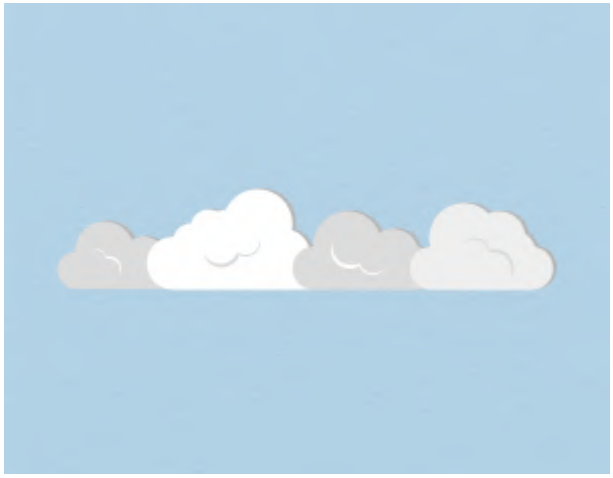
Cumulus vs. Altocumulus



Altocumulus clouds are generally seen as patches of clouds grouped together, either in rolls, sheets, or heaps. Cumulus clouds are more often seen as individual clouds. Cumulus clouds are also much closer to the ground. A key reminder trying to determine the difference between cumulus and altocumulus clouds are that the two cloud types don't have any shared cloud species.

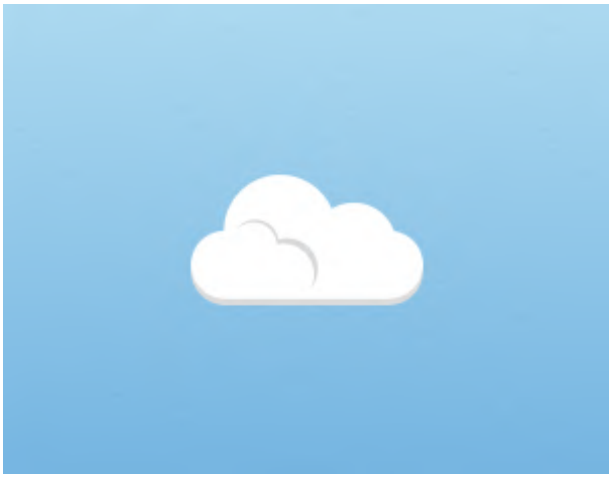
Cumulus vs. Stratocumulus

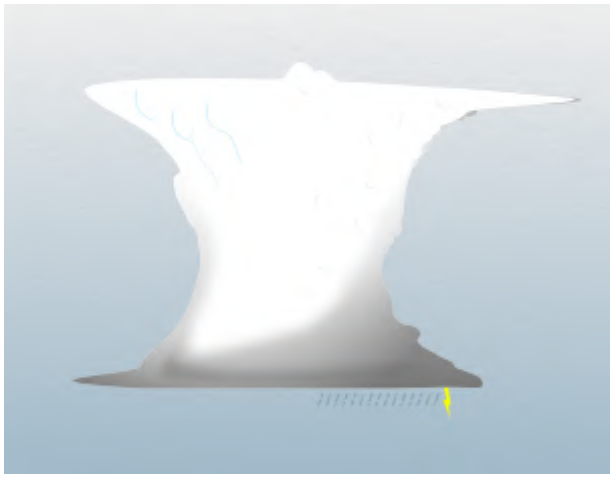




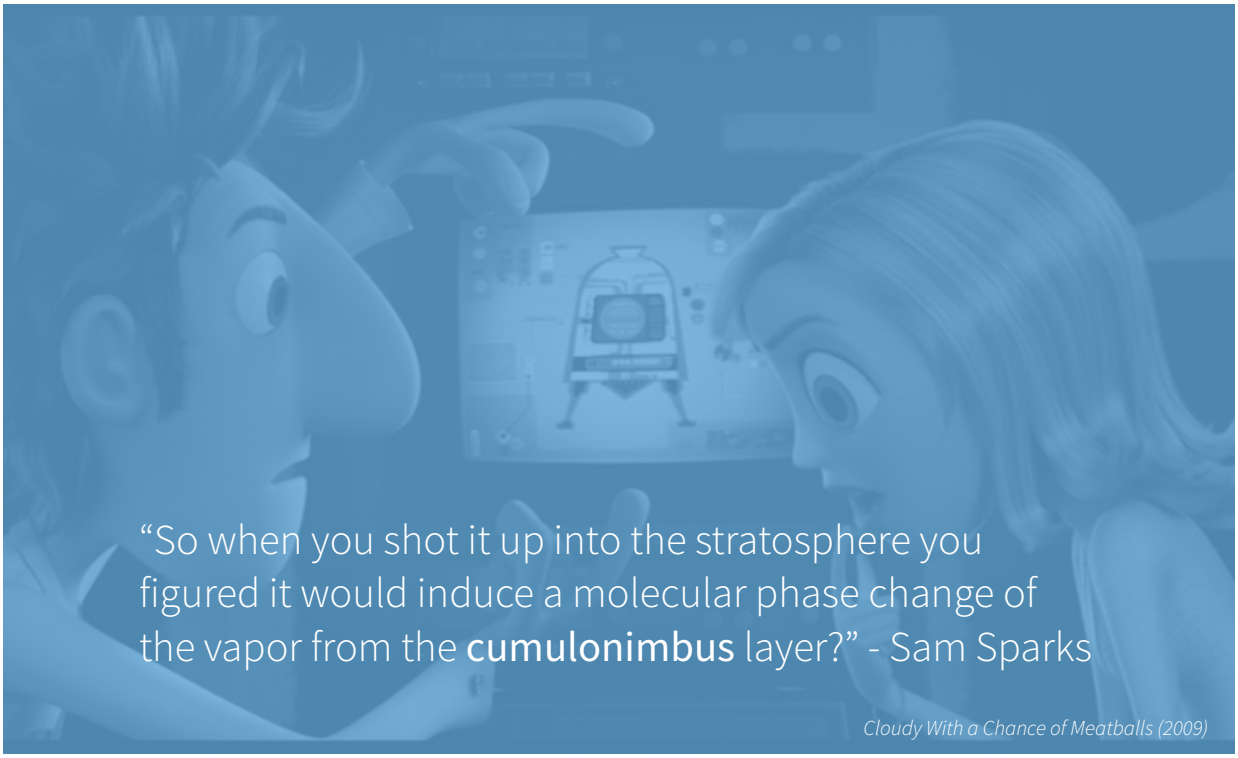
Both cumulus and stratocumulus clouds are found at the same height, but stratocumulus clouds are more of a layer cloud than a cumulus cloud, usually found in conjoined groups or clumps of clouds. Additionally, stratocumulus clouds are generally darker than cumulus clouds. It's also important to note that both clouds don't share any cloud species or varieties besides the radiatus cloud variety.

Cumulus vs. Cumulonimbus





Fully developed cumulonimbus clouds are much different than typical fair-weather cumulus clouds, but a cumulus congestus cloud is the precursor to a cumulonimbus cloud. If you're trying to decide between the two, and the cloud in question has precipitation, lightning, or a fibrous upper portion, you can consider it a cumulonimbus cloud. Otherwise, it would be identified as a cumulus cloud.



Cumulus Cloud Species

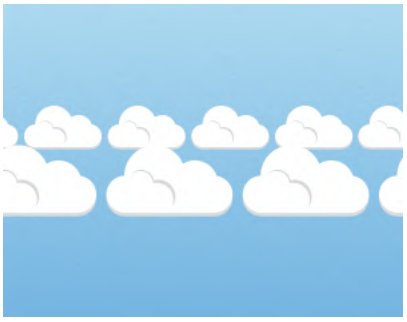
Cumulus congestus
Vertical, cauliflower outline

Cumulus fractus
Ragged, broken up

Cumulus humilis
Flattened, wider than it is tall

Cumulus mediocris
Medium height, tall as it is wide

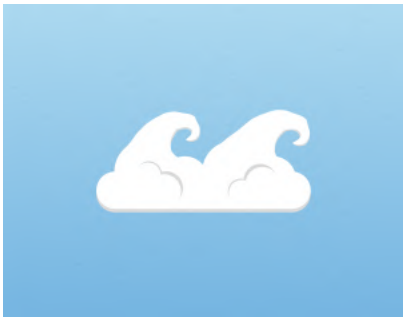
Cumulus Cloud Varieties



Cumulus radiatus
Parallel bands and strips

Cumulus Cloud Supplementary Features

Cumulus arcus
Shelf cloud, gust collar



Cumulus fluctus
Kelvin-Helmholtz waves, curls

Cumulus praecipitatio
Precipitation reaching the surface

Cumulus tuba
Funnel cloud, tornado

Cumulus virga
Evaporating rain strips

Cumulus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds

Cumulus pannus
Ragged frazzles, scud

Cumulus pileus
Cap or hood over a cumuliform

Cumulus velum
Horizontal cloud veil

Cumulus cataractagenitus
Waterfall condensation and spray

Cumulus flammagenitus
Pyrocumulus, caused from fire

Cumulus homogenitus
Caused by human activity

Cumulus

Cumulus humilis


Stratus
LOW, FEATURELESS LAYER

Stratus Clouds: Low, Featureless Layer

Gray, featureless low-altitude layer cloud capable of ground contact

When you think of a cloudy, dreary day, you might have stratus clouds on your mind. Stratus clouds are blanket clouds that sit low to the ground, and on occasion, come in contact with the ground, better known as fog. If you're a city dweller, you might know stratus clouds by their ability to obscure the tops of tall buildings.

These clouds only have two species associated with them: nebulosus and fractus. Stratus nebulosus clouds are arguably the dullest of the clouds out there. They're featureless, lack detail, and probably wouldn't be considered picturesque. Stratus fractus aren't exactly picturesque either, but at least there's a little detail, as these clouds are broken up shards of stratus clouds.

Depending on the conditions, stratus clouds can mask the sun (opacus cloud variety), though sometimes the sun can be observed (translucidus cloud variety). It's also possible to find wavelike, undulating features in them (undulatus cloud variety). Regardless, stratus clouds aren't the most memorable cloud and often leave you wishing for sunnier days.

Stratus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): Low
Altitude/Height: 0-2 km (0-7,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from strato-, meaning layer
Abbreviation: Stratus can be abbreviated as St

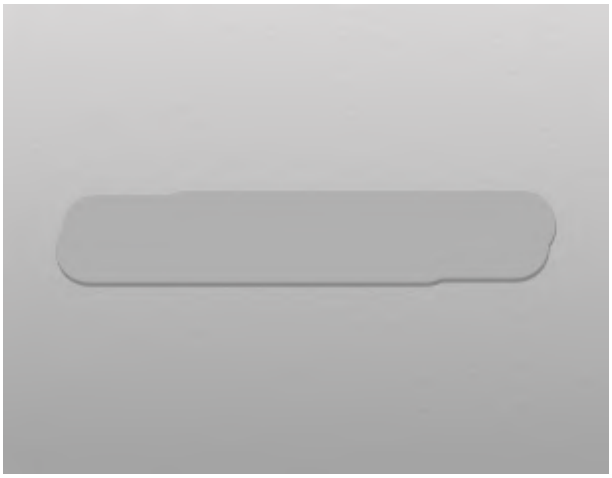
Cloud Color: Gray to dark gray

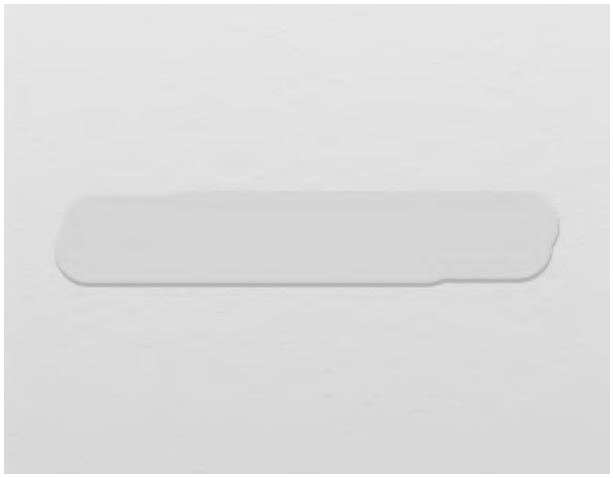
Precipitation Potential: Uncommon

Sky Cover: Cloudy to mostly cloudy

Cloud Frequency: Common

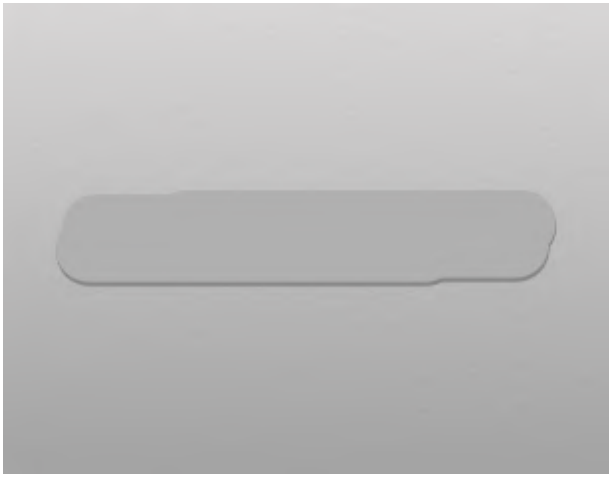
Stratus vs. Altostratus

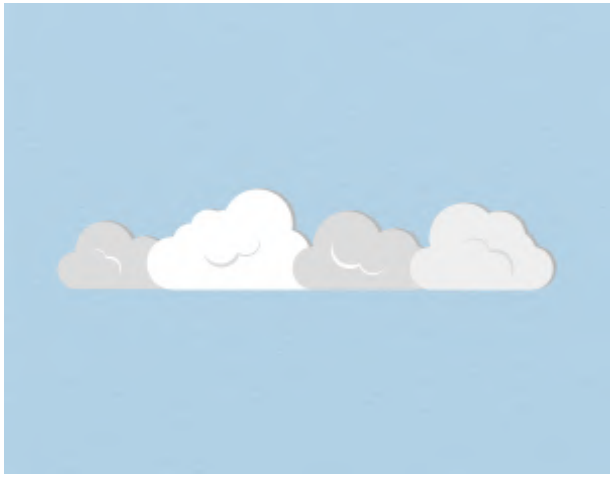




Both altostratus clouds and stratus clouds are both layer clouds, so they can certainly look the same. Altostratus clouds are higher in altitude though, which means they won't touch the ground or mask the tops of tall buildings like a stratus cloud would. When deciding between these clouds, if you're able to see further off in the distance, chances are likely that you're looking at an altostratus cloud.

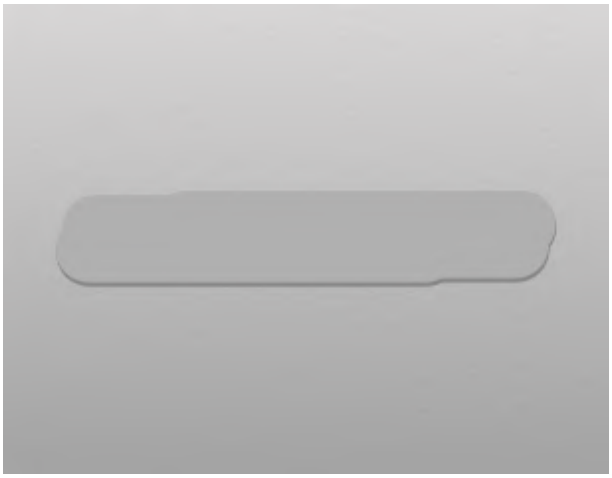
Stratus vs. Stratocumulus

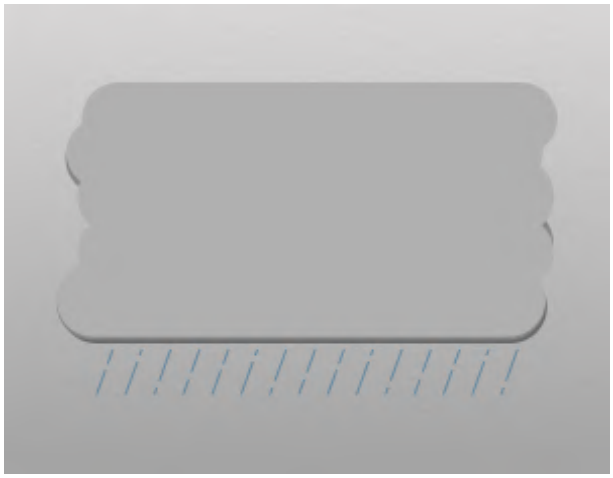




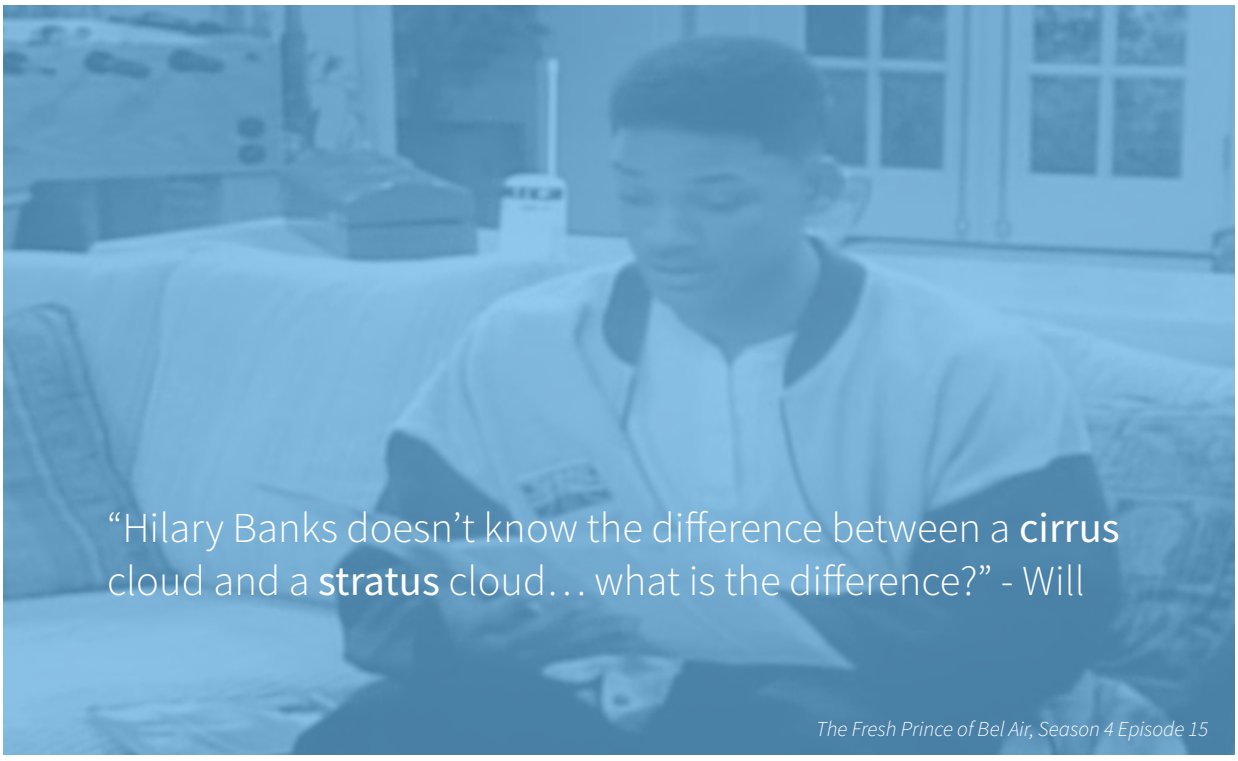
Both stratus and stratocumulus clouds are found at the same altitude. But if you're deciding between a stratus and stratocumulus cloud, remember that stratus clouds are generally featureless layer clouds. On the contrary, stratocumulus clouds can contain plenty of features. Both clouds don't share any of the same cloud species, which can help differentiate the two.

Stratus vs. Nimbostratus





Both nimbostratus and stratus cloud bases can be found at the same height, are both relatively featureless, and are both the same light gray to dark gray color. The biggest differentiator is that nimbostratus clouds contain rain, whereas stratus clouds only precipitate on certain occasions. If it's raining, chances are it's a nimbostratus cloud. If it isn't, it's a stratus cloud.



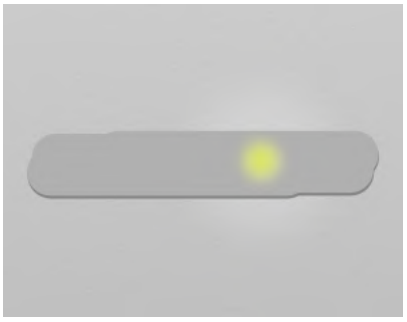
Stratus Cloud Species

Stratus fractus
Ragged, broken up

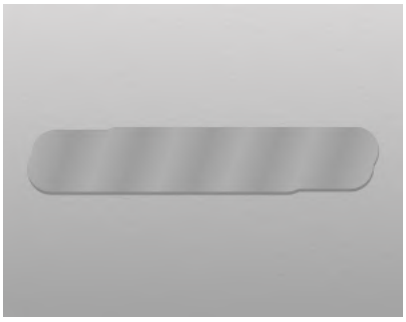
Stratus nebulosus
Full of vapor, lacking detail

Stratus Cloud Varieties

Stratus opacus
Opaque, masks the sun

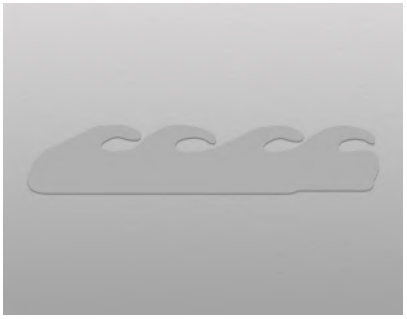


Stratus translucidus
See-through, sun's position visible

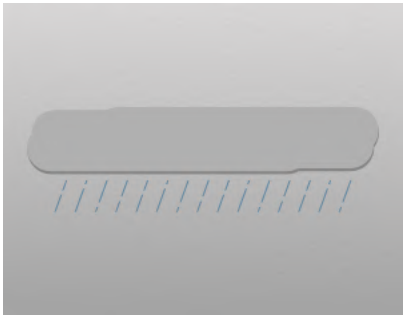


Stratus undulatus
Wavelike, undulating

Stratus Cloud Supplementary Features



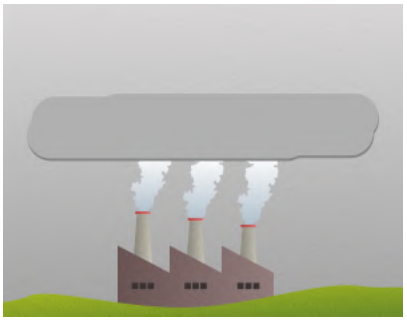
Stratus fluctus
Kelvin-Helmholtz waves, curls



Stratus praecipitatio
Precipitation reaching the surface

Stratus Cloud Accessories & Other Clouds

Stratus cataractagenitus
Waterfall condensation and spray



Stratus homogenitus
Caused by human activity

Stratus silvagenitus
Evaporation from a forest

Stratus opacus

Stratus nebulosus

Stratus

Stratocumulus

LOW, PUFFY LAYER

Stratocumulus Clouds: Low, Puffy Layer

Thicker, low-altitude, and somewhat conjoined heaps of clouds

Consider stratocumulus clouds a mix of stratus and cumulus clouds, hence the name (strato- and cumulo- are latin for layer and heap, respectively). They're a layer of puffy clouds, and can usually be found as conjoined heaps, similar to altocumulus clouds. In many ways, these clouds are like altocumulus clouds closer to the ground.

Similar to altocumulus, stratocumulus clouds come in many different shapes and sizes and have a handful of associated species, varieties, and features, more than any of the ten main cloud types in fact. They come in various cloud species that describe forms of rising turret formations (castellanus cloud species), wooly locks (floccus cloud species), smooth lens shaped (lenticularis cloud species), layer form blanketing the sky (stratiformis cloud species), and even as a roll cloud (volutus cloud species).

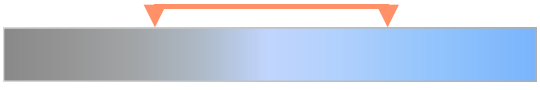
More dramatic versions of stratocumulus clouds include (but aren't limited to) chaotic and wavy features (asperitas cloud feature), sac-like features (mamma cloud feature), and can even have the rare Kelvin-Helmholtz wave cloud (fluctus cloud feature) association. Stratocumulus clouds are diverse and capable of many different looks.

Stratocumulus Cloud Facts

Cloud Level (Étage): Low
Altitude/Height: 0.2-2 km (2,000-7,000 ft)
Latin Term: Derives from strato-, meaning layer, and cumulo-, meaning heap
Abbreviation: Stratocumulus can be abbreviated as Sc

Cloud Color: Light gray to dark gray

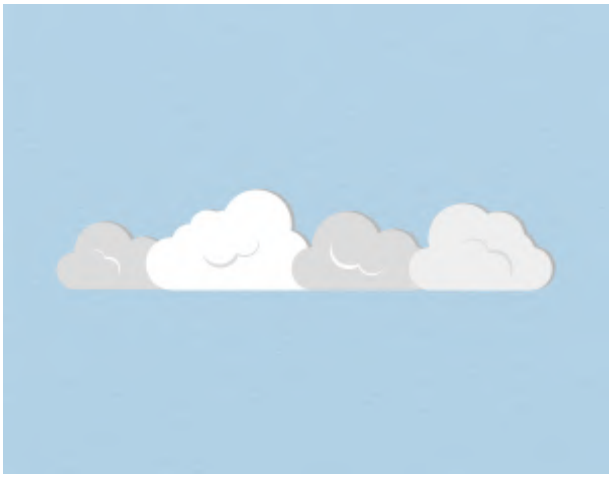
Precipitation Potential: Uncommon



Sky Cover: Mostly cloudy to mostly sunny

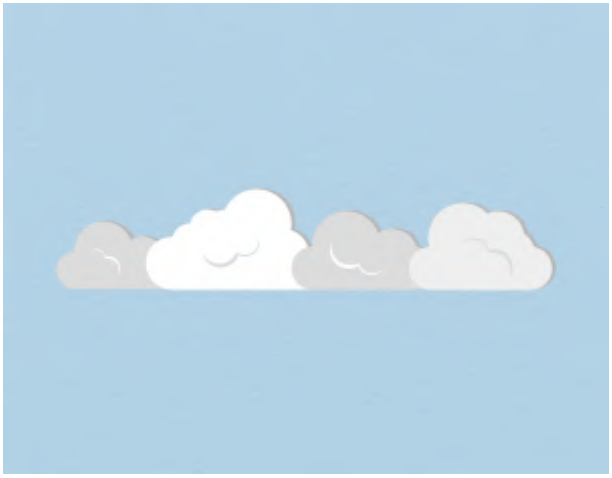
Cloud Frequency: Very common

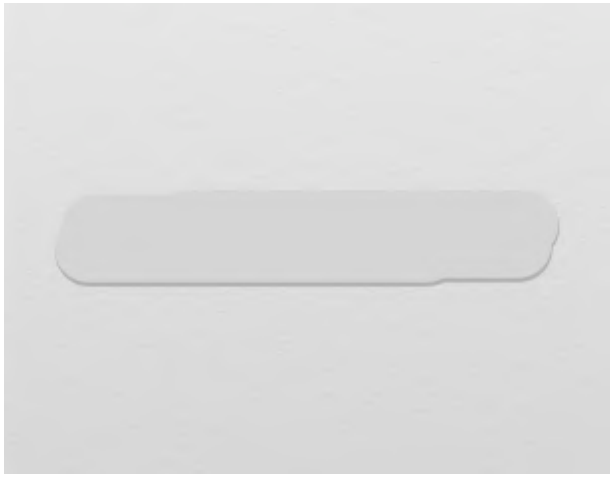
Stratocumulus vs. Altocumulus



Stratocumulus clouds are more closely related to altocumulus clouds than they are to cumulus clouds. They share almost all of the same cloud species, cloud varieties, and other cloud features. Their altitude is their biggest differentiator, with stratocumulus clouds being closer to the ground. Stratocumulus cloud formations are seemingly bigger, and are generally a bit darker than altocumulus clouds.

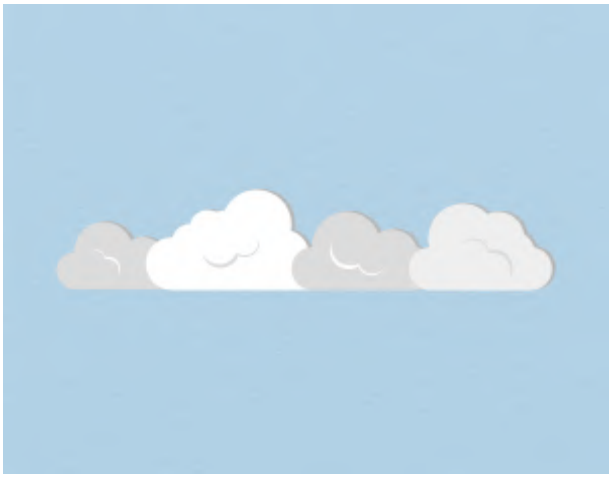
Stratocumulus vs. Altostratus

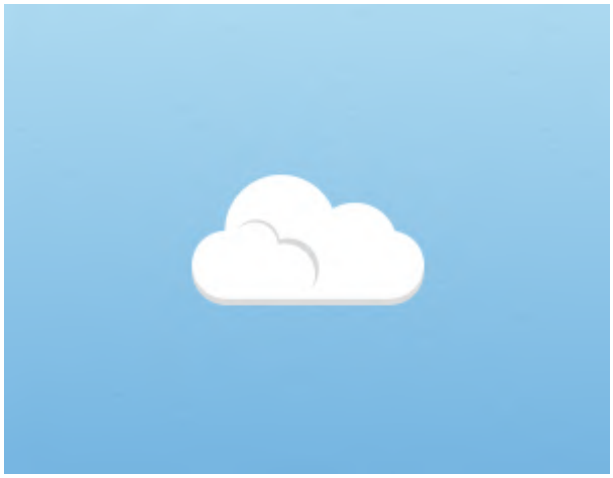




Stratocumulus clouds have more detail, whereas altostratus clouds are generally a featureless layer cloud. Remember, if you're trying to decide between an altostratus and stratocumulus cloud, and the cloud being observed has been determined to have an associated cloud species, it's not an altostratus cloud.

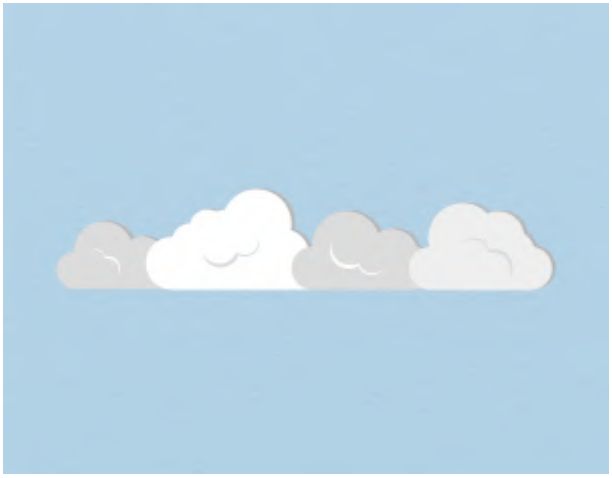
Stratocumulus vs. Cumulus

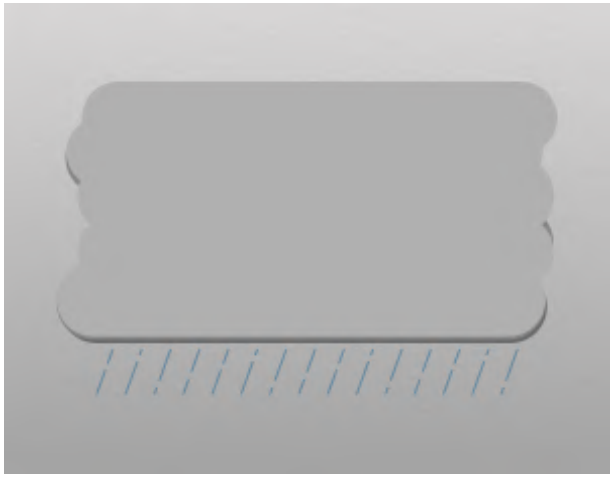




Both stratocumulus and cumulus clouds are found at the same height, but stratocumulus clouds are more of a layer cloud than a cumulus cloud, usually found in conjoined groups or clumps of clouds. Additionally, stratocumulus clouds are generally darker than cumulus clouds. It's also important to note that both clouds don't share any cloud species or varieties besides the radiatus cloud variety.

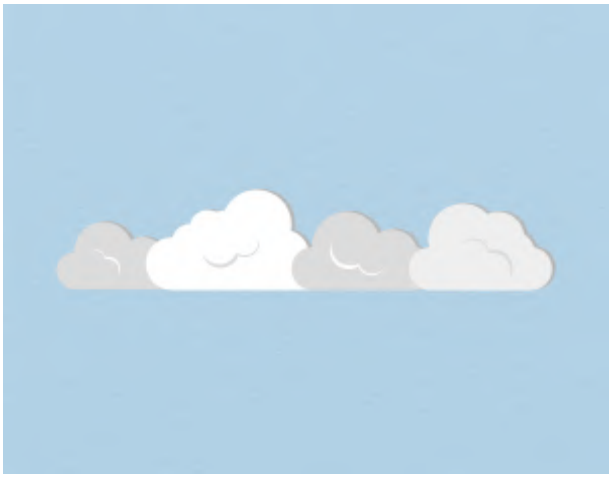
Stratocumulus vs. Nimbostratus

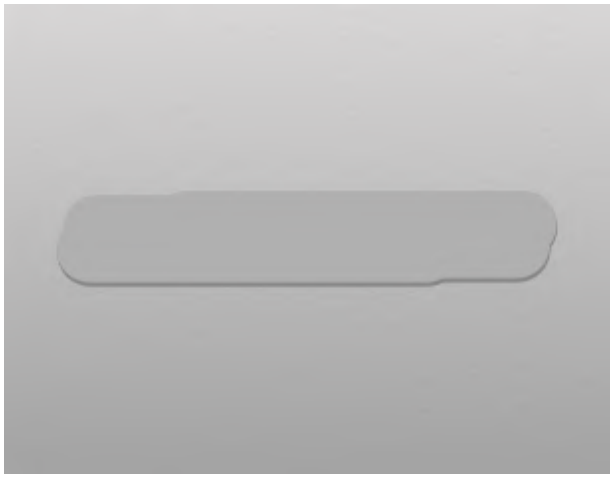




When deciding between nimbostratus and stratocumulus clouds, remember that nimbostratus clouds are associated with precipitation, where stratocumulus clouds only produce precipitation in certain conditions. Nimbostratus clouds are generally featureless and don't have any associated cloud species or varieties, while stratocumulus clouds have plenty of species and varieties to go around.

Stratocumulus vs. Stratus





Both stratus and stratocumulus clouds are found at the same altitude. But if you're deciding between a stratus and stratocumulus cloud, remember that stratus clouds are generally featureless layer clouds. On the contrary, stratocumulus clouds can contain plenty of features. Both clouds don't share any of the same cloud species, which can help differentiate the two.

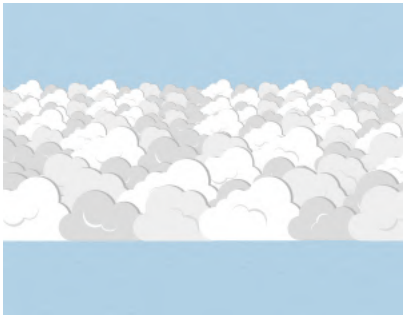
Stratocumulus floccus

Stratocumulus Cloud Species

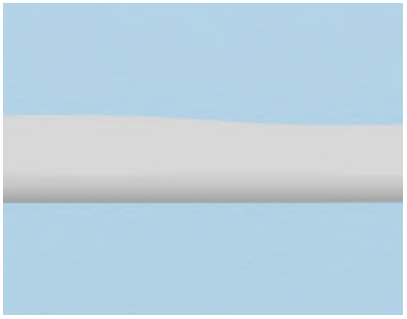
Stratocumulus castellanus
Rising towers, turrets

Stratocumulus floccus
Puffy, ragged tufts

Stratocumulus lenticularis
Lens-shaped, resembling a UFO

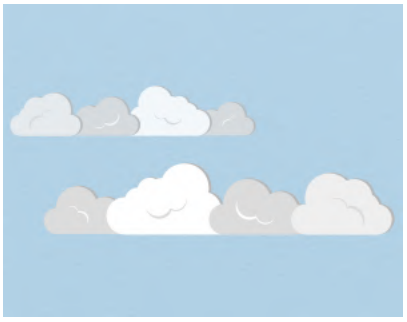


Stratocumulus stratiformis
Horizontal, layer-like form

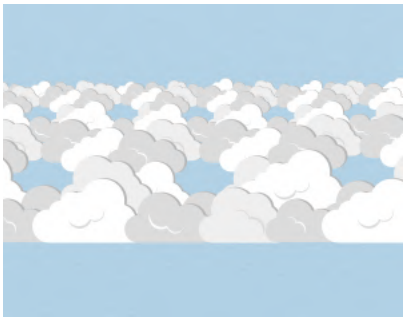


Stratocumulus volutus
Tube-shaped roll cloud

Stratocumulus Cloud Varieties

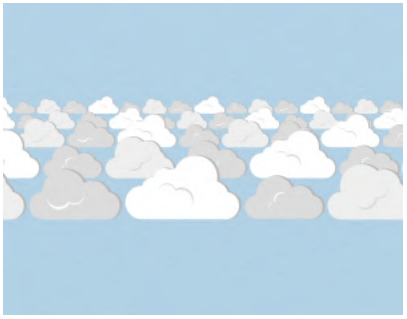


Stratocumulus duplicatus
Multilayered

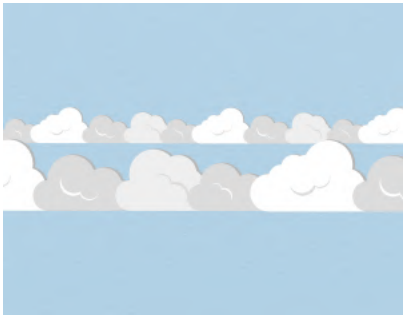


Stratocumulus lacunosus
Perforated, round frayed holes

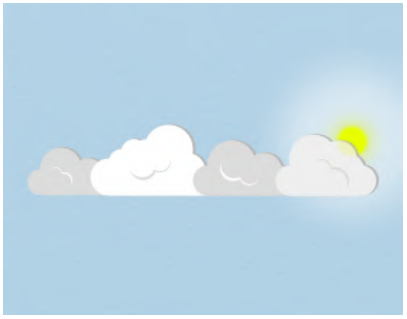
Stratocumulus opacus
Opaque, masks the sun



Stratocumulus perlucidus
Transparent by small gaps

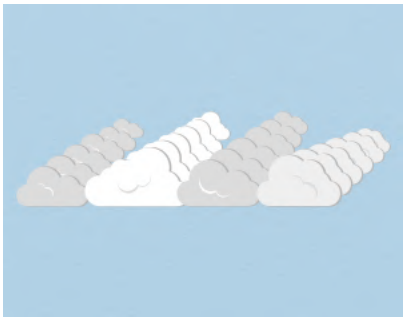


Stratocumulus radiatus
Parallel bands and strips



Stratocumulus translucidus
See-through, sun's position visible

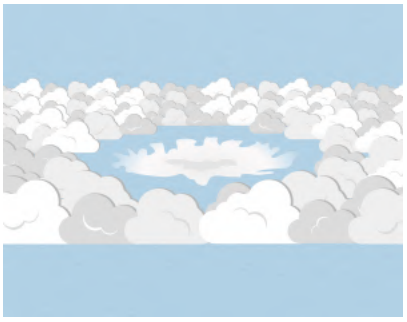
Stratocumulus Cloud Varieties (cont.)



Stratocumulus undulatus
Wavelike, undulating

Stratocumulus Cloud Supplementary Features

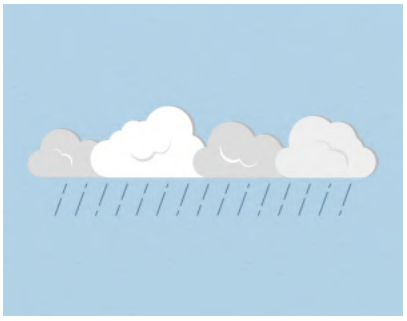
Stratocumulus asperitas
Chaotic, wavy underneath



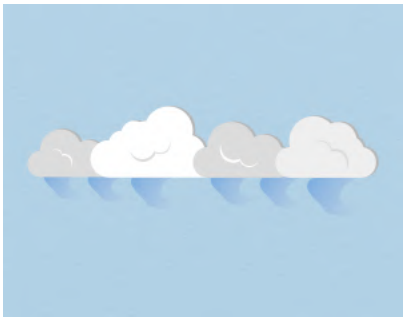
Stratocumulus cavum
Fallstreak hole, hole punch

Stratocumulus fluctus
Kelvin-Helmholtz waves, curls

Stratocumulus mamma
Sac-like, resembling cow udders



Stratocumulus praecipitatio
Precipitation reaching the surface



Stratocumulus virga
Evaporating rain strips

Stratocumulus radiatus

Stratocumulus

The 'What's This Cloud' Mission

You don’t have to be a meteorologist or fluent in Latin to learn about clouds. Cloud identification can be a hobby that can be enjoyed by people both young and old. Whether you’re a student, pilot, meteorologist, teacher, or a general weather enthusiast, our mission is to help make cloud identification a fun and accessible hobby for everyone.

We think every individual can benefit from learning more about the weather. Even just a little bit. Our hypothesis is that cloud identification is a great way to get people more interested in our ever changing atmosphere. So why not create educational materials and resources revolving around identifying clouds and cloud types?

Between our website, social media accounts, and other tools and products, it’s our hope to make the hobby of cloudspotting fun and educational. Thanks for joining us on our journey!

Meet the Team Behind What's This Cloud

Greg’s passion for weather began growing up in New Jersey, watching Jim Cantore on television in the 90s, forecasting the incoming squall lines during the summer season. Since then, he’s been chasing storms in the high plains of eastern Colorado, central Virginia, and beyond.

Follow him on Twitter at @GregGoodson.

Growing up in Maryland, Austin’s passion for meteorology began after Hurricane Isabel rolled through the area in 2003. Austin is a graduate of University of Colorado Boulder with a degree in Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences and serves as an on-air meteorologist at WSAW-TV in central Wisconsin.

Follow him on Twitter at @AustinKopnitsky.

Further Expand Your Knowledge of Cloud Identification in Three Steps

1. Join the @WhatsThisCloud community on Instagram to learn more about cloud types, participate in quizzes, & much more.

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2. Check out our cloud classification lessons and practice your cloud identification skills with step-by-step instructions.

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3. Check out our cloud identification guide and learn the ins and outs of cloud identification and classification.

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Cloud Classification Poster

$25 USD (24 x 36, print only)

Featuring 126 illustrations of all cloud types and subtype combinations on one giant 24”x36” print.

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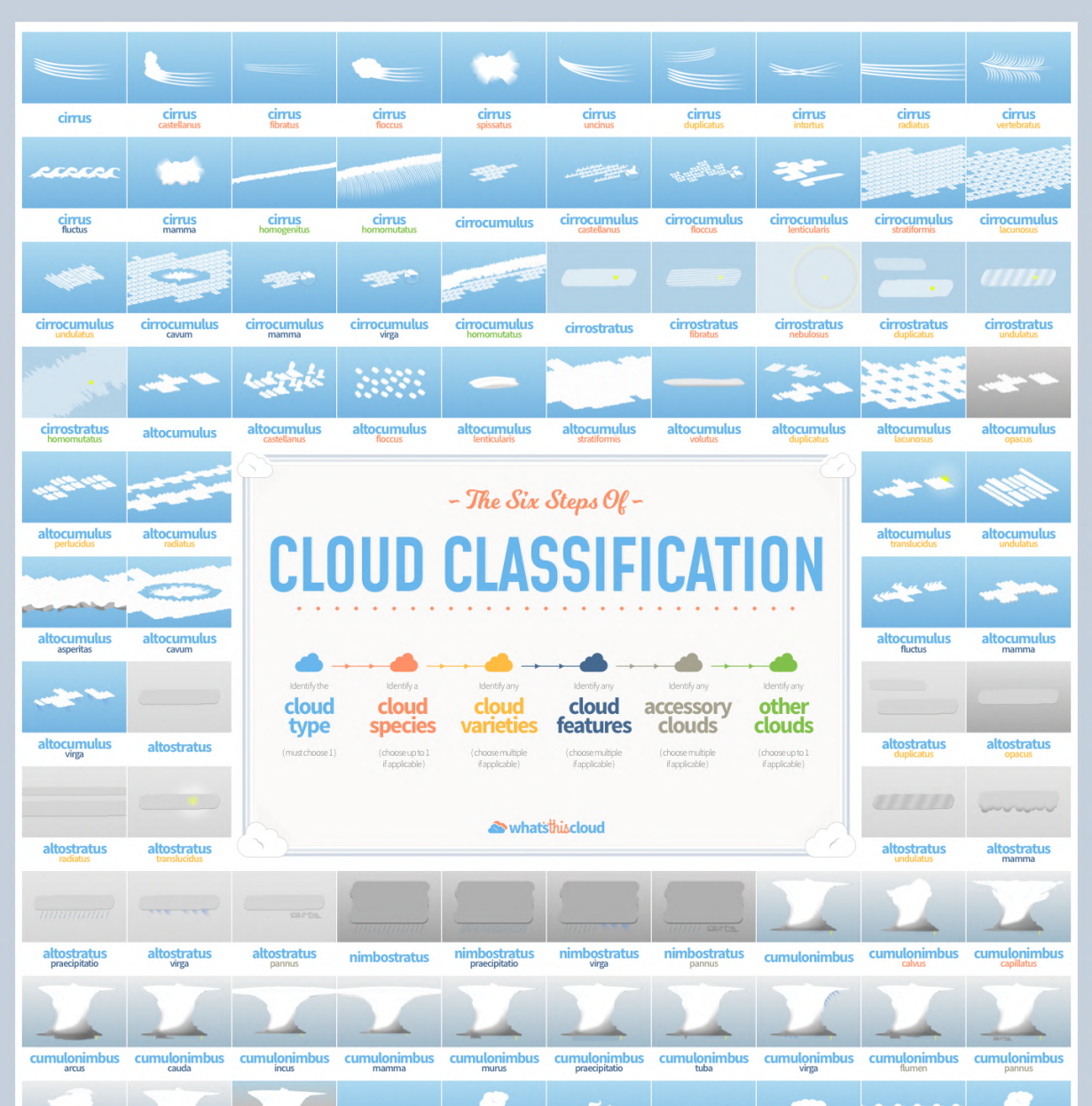

Cloud Identification Chart

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An 18"x24" print designed as a learning tool to help supercharge your cloud identification skills.

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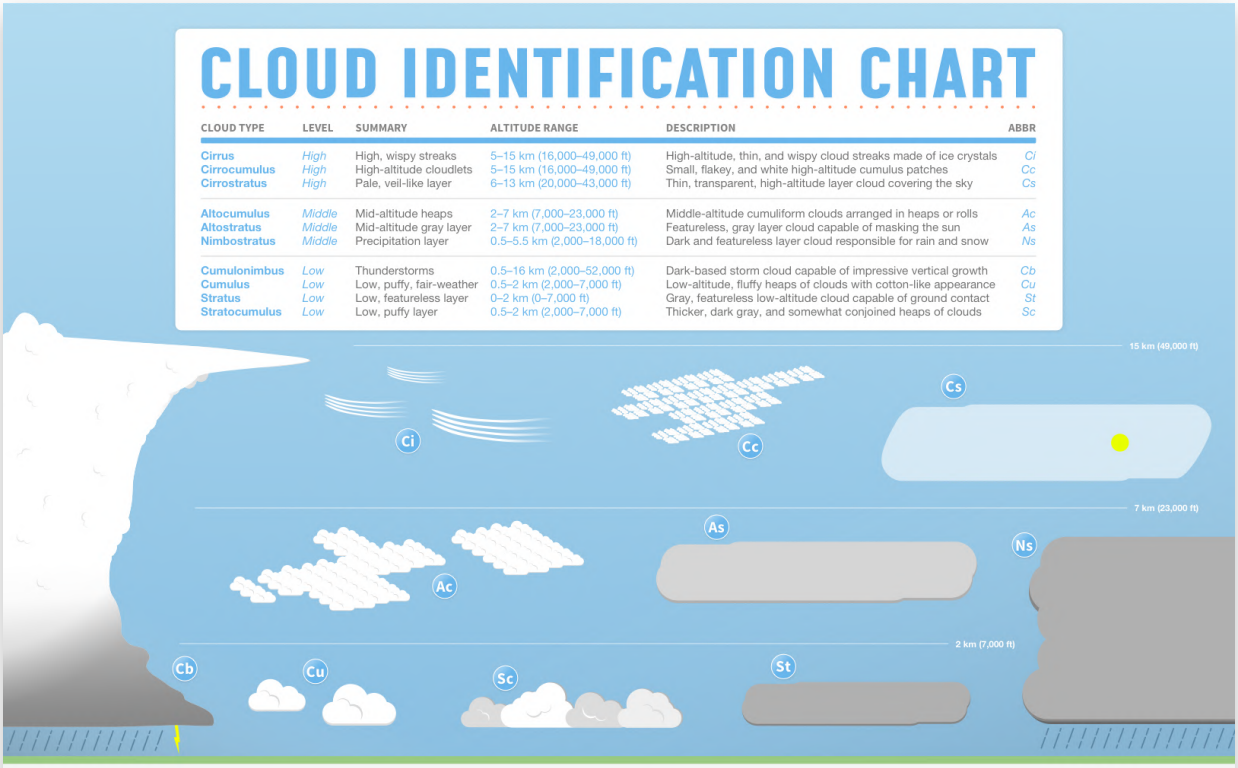

CLOUD TYPE	LEVEL	SUMMARY	ALTITUDE RANGE	DESCRIPTION	ABBR
Cirrus	*High*	High, wispy streaks	5–15 km (16,000–49,000 ft)	High-altitude, thin, and wispy cloud streaks made of ice crystals	*Ci*
Cirrocumulus	*High*	High-altitude cloudlets	5–15 km (16,000–49,000 ft)	Small, flakey, and white high-altitude cumulus patches	*Cc*
Cirrostratus	*High*	Pale, veil-like layer	6–13 km (20,000–43,000 ft)	Thin, transparent, high-altitude layer cloud covering the sky	*Cs*
Altocumulus	*Middle*	Mid-altitude heaps	2–7 km (7,000–23,000 ft)	Middle-altitude cumuliform clouds arranged in heaps or rolls	*Ac*
Altostratus	*Middle*	Mid-altitude gray layer	2–7 km (7,000–23,000 ft)	Featureless, gray layer cloud capable of masking the sun	*As*
Nimbostratus	*Middle*	Precipitation layer	0.5–5.5 km (2,000–18,000 ft)	Dark and featureless layer cloud responsible for rain and snow	*Ns*
Cumulonimbus	*Low*	Thunderstorms	0.5–16 km (2,000–52,000 ft)	Dark-based storm cloud capable of impressive vertical growth	*Cb*
Cumulus	*Low*	Low, puffy, fair-weather	0.5–2 km (2,000–7,000 ft)	Low-altitude, fluffy heaps of clouds with cotton-like appearance	*Cu*
Stratus	*Low*	Low, featureless layer	0–2 km (0–7,000 ft)	Gray, featureless low-altitude cloud capable of ground contact	*St*
Stratocumulus	*Low*	Low, puffy layer	0.5–2 km (2,000–7,000 ft)	Thicker, dark gray, and somewhat conjoined heaps of clouds	*Sc*

NAME	LATIN	DESCRIPTION	ABBR
CLOUD SPECIES			
Calvus	*Bald*	without cirriform, hairless	*cal*
Capillatus	*Having Hair*	fibrous upper portion	*cap*
Castellanus	*Castle*	rising towers, turrets	*cas*
Congestus	*Piled Up*	vertical, taller than it is wide	*con*
Fibratus	*Fibered*	fiberlike, hairlike	*fib*
Floccus	*Lock of Wool*	puffy, ragged tufts	*flo*
Fractus	*Broken*	ragged, broken up	*fra*
Humilis	*Humble*	flattened, wider than it is tall	*hum*
Lenticularis	*Lentil*	lens-shaped, resembling a UFO	*len*
Mediocris	*Moderate*	medium height, tall as it is wide	*med*
Nebulosus	*Nebulous*	full of vapor, lacking detail	*neb*
Spissatus	*Thick*	packed tightly, dense	*spi*
Stratiformis	*Layer Form*	horizontal, layer-like form	*str*
Uncinus	*Hook*	curved, comma-shaped	*unc*
Volutus	*Revolve*	tube-shaped roll cloud	*vol*
CLOUD VARIETIES			
Duplicatus	*Double*	multilayered	*du*
Intortus	*Contorted*	interlaced, entangled	*in*
Lacunosus	*Full of Gaps*	perforated, round frayed holes	*la*
Opacus	*Darkened*	opaque, masks the sun	*op*
Perlucidus	*Pellucid*	transparent by small gaps	*pe*
Radiatus	*Striped*	parallel bands and strips	*ra*
Translucidus	*Transparent*	see-through, sun's position visible	*tr*
Undulatus	*Undulated*	wavelike, undulating	*un*
Vertebratus	*Jointed*	fishbone-like, resembling ribs	*ve*
SUPPLEMENTARY FEATURES			
Arcus	*Arch*	shelf cloud, gust collar	*arc*

CIRRUS *Ci*	CIRRO-CUMULUS *Cc*	CIRRO-STRATUS *Cs*	ALTO-CUMULUS *Ac*	ALTO-STRATUS *As*	NIMBO-STRATUS *Ns*	CUMULO-NIMBUS *Cb*	CUMULUS *Cu*	STRATUS *St*	STRATO-CUMULUS *Sc*
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Cloud Types Poster

$20 USD (24 x 36, print only)

Your introduction to cloud types with illustrations and descriptions on a large 36"x24" print.

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CLOUD TYPE	SUMMARY	LEVEL	LATIN TRANSLATION	ALTITUDE RANGE	DESCRIPTION	ABBR
Cirrus	High, wispy streaks	*High*	Cirro- (curl)	5–15 km (16,000–49,000 ft)	High-altitude, thin, and wispy cloud streaks made of ice crystals	*Ci*
Cirrocumulus	High-altitude cloudlets	*High*	Cirro- (curl), cumulo- (heap)	5–15 km (16,000–49,000 ft)	Small, flakey, and white high-altitude cumulus patches	*Cc*
Cirrostratus	Pale, veil-like layer	*High*	Cirro- (curl), strato- (layer)	6–13 km (20,000–43,000 ft)	Thin, transparent, high-altitude layer cloud covering the sky	*Cs*
Altocumulus	Mid-altitude heaps	*Middle*	Alto- (high), cumulo- (heap)	2–7 km (7,000–23,000 ft)	Middle-altitude cumulus clouds arranged in heaps or rolls	*Ac*
Altostratus	Mid-altitude gray layer	*Middle*	Alto- (high), strato- (layer)	2–7 km (7,000–23,000 ft)	Featureless, gray layer cloud capable of masking the sun	*As*
Nimbostratus	Precipitation layer	*Middle*	Nimbo- (rain), strato- (layer)	0.5–5.5 km (2,000–18,000 ft)	Dark and featureless layer cloud responsible for rain and snow	*Ns*
Cumulonimbus	Thunderstorms	*Low*	Cumulo- (heap), nimbo- (rain)	0.5–16 km (2,000–52,000 ft)	Dark-based storm cloud capable of impressive vertical growth	*Cb*
Cumulus	Low, puffy, fair-weather	*Low*	Cumulo- (heap)	0.5–2 km (2,000–7,000 ft)	Low-altitude, fluffy heaps of clouds with cotton-like appearance	*Cu*
Stratus	Low, featureless layer	*Low*	Strato- (layer)	0–2 km (0–7,000 ft)	Gray, featureless low-altitude cloud capable of ground contact	*St*
Stratocumulus	Low, puffy layer	*Low*	Strato- (layer), cumulo- (heap)	0.5–2 km (2,000–7,000 ft)	Thicker, dark gray, and somewhat conjoined heaps of clouds	*Sc*

The Ten Different Types of Clouds

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Thanks for reading… *cirrus-ly*!

If there's anything else you'd like to chat about, we'd love to hear from you and encourage you to get in touch with us! The three best ways to get in touch would be over email, Twitter, and Instagram.

Direct message us at @whatsthiscloud on Instagram or @whatsthiscloud on Twitter. Or flood my inbox with an email at greg@whatsthiscloud.com.

Message us and we'll respond to you quickly… unless we're storm chasing.
