

LC Geography – Key Definitions

Continental shelf

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The edge of a continent that lies under relatively shallow water. The shelf descends towards the ocean floor by the continental slope.

Continental drift

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The process in which plate tectonics drift from one another, causing the continents on them to also move.

Fold

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A bend or curve in the stratified rocks of the Earth's crust.

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Fault

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A crack or fracture in the Earth's crust.

Deformation

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Any change in the shape or size of rock as a result of stress. The solid rocks of the Earth's crust are deformed when force is applied during tectonic activity.

Forces of
deformation:
Compression

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Compression squeezes and shortens the rock. It is associated with convergent plate movement. It results in folding and/or faulting of the rock.

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Tension



Tension stretches the body of rock. It is associated with divergent plate movement. It results in faulting in the rock.

Shearing



Shearing fractures the rock and pushes sections past one another. It is associated with both convergent and transform plate movement. It results in faulting in the rock.

The lithosphere



The solid, outer part of the Earth. It is composed of the crust and upper section of the mantle. It forms a solid and relatively rigid shell, averaging about 100 km in thickness.

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The asthenosphere



The section of the mantle that is found just below the lithosphere. The rocks here are hotter and have partially melted. As a result, they are able to flow, setting the lithosphere floating on them into motion.

Transform plate boundary



Occurs when two plates slide or grind past one another. Since rock is neither formed nor destroyed, these are passive boundaries. An example is the boundary between the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate in California.

Divergent plate boundary



Occurs when one plate breaks up or when two plates separate from one another. Since new rock is formed, these are constructive boundaries. An example is the new boundary as the African Plate breaks up.

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Convergent plate boundary

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Occurs when two plates collide with one another. Since rock is destroyed, these are destructive boundaries. An example is the boundary between the Eurasian Plate and Pacific Plate.

Orogeny

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The term used to describe a period of mountain building.

Subduction

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The process where the heavier plate slides beneath the lighter plate and slips down into the mantle.