

Vocabulary



cleavage the way a mineral breaks along flat surfaces

Some minerals have obvious cleavage. They break along flat surfaces in predictable ways. For example, mica always peels into thin, flat sheets. Halite (rock salt) always breaks into cubes.

color a property that can help identify a mineral

Color is often the first thing you notice in a mineral. However, some minerals can have more than one color, and more than one mineral can have the same color. So color should not be the only property used to identify a mineral.

hardness how hard or soft a mineral is compared to other minerals and materials

Hardness is tested by scratching one mineral against another mineral, or against another substance. If the mineral scratches the other substance, it is harder than that substance. If it is scratched by the other substance, it is softer.

luster how the surface of a mineral reflects light

Some minerals have a metallic luster. This means a mineral reflects light the way a metal does. A mineral with glassy luster reflects light the way glass does. Other words that describe luster are dull, earthy, pearly, greasy, and waxy.

mineral a solid substance that occurs in nature, was not formed by anything alive, is made of only one kind of material, and has a crystal structure

A mineral has atoms of certain elements that every sample of that mineral shares. Those elements are arranged in a certain pattern, forming a crystal structure. The crystal structure is there even if the mineral does not form a crystal shape that you can see.

property a characteristic, such as hardness or luster, that helps tell one mineral from another

A property is part of the description of a mineral. Several properties are used to identify a mineral. Color, hardness, streak, luster, and cleavage are all mineral properties.

streak the color of the powder of a mineral

Streak is a better way to identify a mineral than color. That is because a mineral that comes in different colors will always have the same color streak. Also, two minerals that are the same color can be recognized if they have different streaks. To test for streak, rub a mineral against an unglazed tile.