WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION
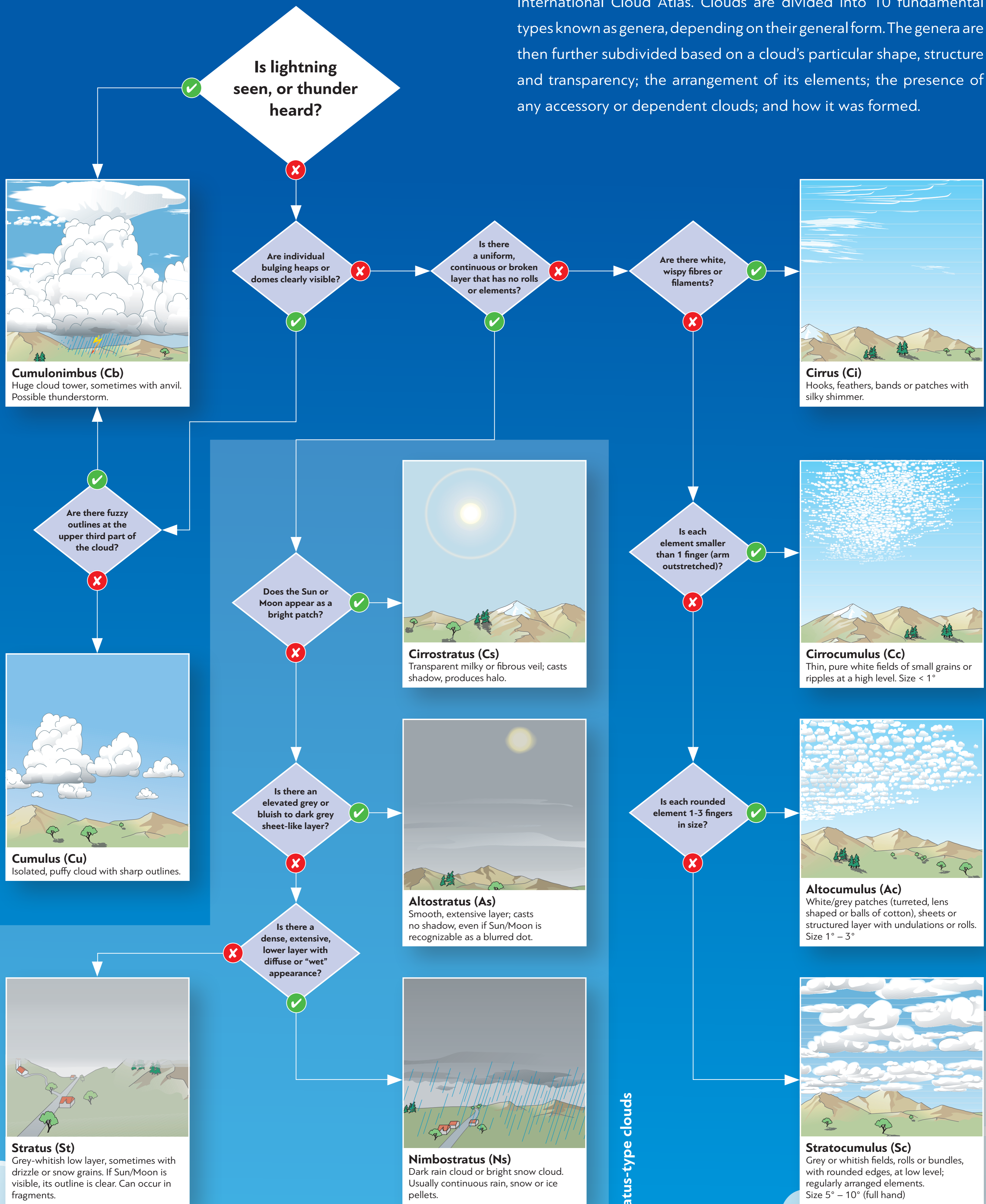
WEATHER CLIMATE WATER

CLOUD IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

START HERE

Learn how to identify cloud types by using this flow chart from the International Cloud Atlas. Clouds are divided into 10 fundamental types known as genera, depending on their general form. The genera are then further subdivided based on a cloud's particular shape, structure and transparency; the arrangement of its elements; the presence of any accessory or dependent clouds; and how it was formed.

Is lightning seen, or thunder heard?

Are individual bulging heaps or domes clearly visible?

Is there a uniform, continuous or broken layer that has no rolls or elements?

Are there white, wispy fibres or filaments?

Cumulonimbus (Cb)
Huge cloud tower, sometimes with anvil. Possible thunderstorm.

Cirrus (Ci)
Hooks, feathers, bands or patches with silky shimmer.

Are there fuzzy outlines at the upper third part of the cloud?

Does the Sun or Moon appear as a bright patch?

Is each element smaller than 1 finger (arm outstretched)?

Cumulus (Cu)
Isolated, puffy cloud with sharp outlines.

Cirrostratus (Cs)
Transparent milky or fibrous veil; casts shadow, produces halo.

Cirrocumulus (Cc)
Thin, pure white fields of small grains or ripples at a high level. Size < 1°

Is there an elevated grey or bluish to dark grey sheet-like layer?

Is each rounded element 1-3 fingers in size?

Altostratus (As)
Smooth, extensive layer; casts no shadow, even if Sun/Moon is recognizable as a blurred dot.

Altocumulus (Ac)
White/grey patches (turreted, lens shaped or balls of cotton), sheets or structured layer with undulations or rolls. Size 1° – 3°

Is there a dense, extensive, lower layer with diffuse or "wet" appearance?

Stratus-type clouds

Stratus (St)
Grey-whitish low layer, sometimes with drizzle or snow grains. If Sun/Moon is visible, its outline is clear. Can occur in fragments.

Nimbostratus (Ns)
Dark rain cloud or bright snow cloud. Usually continuous rain, snow or ice pellets.

Stratocumulus (Sc)
Grey or whitish fields, rolls or bundles, with rounded edges, at low level; regularly arranged elements. Size 5° – 10° (full hand)

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