

Clouds and Characteristics and Weather

1. Cirrus - Ci

a. Characteristics

High white delicate cloud. Composed of ice crystals. Always white (except possibly after sunset or before sunrise). Often a sign of a change in the weather.

b. Weather prediction

Small amounts of cirrus are OK but lots of dense cirrus is often a sign of storms to come.

c. Precipitation

None.

2. Cirrocumulus - Cc

a. Characteristics

Very small, white clouds. Sometimes a 'mackerel sky' but this is more often formed with altocumulus.

b. Weather prediction

Real cirrocumulus is a sign of storms on the way.

c. Precipitation

None.

3. Cirrostratus - Cs

a. Characteristics

Thin white clouds, very high in the atmosphere. Can be difficult to see at first - a 'halo' around the sun is often a giveaway.

b. Weather prediction

Almost certain predictor of a warm front. Continuous rain in a few hours, but not generally stormy.

c. Precipitation

None.

4. Altocumulus - Ac

a. Characteristics

Medium level 'lumps' of cloud. Great for sunset photography. Often forms a 'mackerel sky.'

b. Weather prediction

Altocumulus means unsettled and possibly stormy weather to come.

c. Precipitation

Very rare.

5. Altostratus - As

a. Characteristics

Light gray formless sheet of medium level cloud. The sun will sometimes appear as through ground glass. The loss of the halo signifies altostratus has replaced cirrostratus as the warm front approaches yet nearer.....

b. Weather prediction

Approach of warm front imminent. Get the umbrella ready.

c. Precipitation

Precipitation sometimes in the form of continuous light rain.

6. Nimbostratus - Ns

a. Characteristics

Dense gray-blue cloud.

b. Weather prediction

Too late for predictions - sorry.

c. Precipitation

Heavy continuous rain associated with passing warm front

7. Stratocumulus - Sc

a. Characteristics

Low level, almost continuous layer of cloud, but 'lumpy'. Can be formed as cumulus or sometimes cumulonimbus fades away (usually in the evening).

b. Weather prediction

Normally a dull period. There are different forms of stratocumulus which makes forecasting difficult without a lot of knowledge. It can accompany 'high pressure' in the winter, but instead of weak winter sunshine, can give an extensive cover of cloud for days on end.

c. Precipitation (rain/snow etc.)

Not normally rain - but drizzle sometimes (a word of warning - drizzle relates to the size of droplet). Heavy drizzle (lots of small diameter bits of precipitation) can get you wet on occasion.

8. Stratus - St

a. Characteristics

Fog and mist are examples of this low level cloud - no form.

b. Weather prediction

Cold if it persists in Winter - Otherwise not a reliable predictor.

c. Precipitation (rain/snow etc.)

None. (but beware - there may be something else above!).

9. Cumulus - Cu

a. Characteristics

Low level 'lumpy' cloud.

b. Weather prediction

Small cumulus (with a height to width ratio less than 1:3 is sometimes called 'fair-weather' cloud.

c. Precipitation (rain/snow etc.)

Showers sometimes (but more extensive rainfall in the tropics).

10. Cumulonimbus - Cb

a. Characteristics

Large towering cloud, often with an 'anvil'. Other characteristics: Thunder, lightning, rainbows.

b. Weather prediction

Time to get indoors

c. Precipitation (rain/snow etc.)

Rain, hail etc.