

Rivers – Physical Features

Rivers are dynamic systems that continuously erode, transport, and deposit material, reshaping the landscape over thousands of years. A river's journey is divided into three main stages: the **upper**, **middle**, and **lower course**.

The river begins at its **source** – often a spring or mountain lake fed by rainfall or snowmelt. Here, in the **upper course**, the gradient is steep and the river flows with great energy. It cuts downwards powerfully, forming narrow **V-shaped valleys**, **gorges**, and **waterfalls** where it tumbles over bands of hard rock.

In the **middle course**, the gradient eases and the river widens. It begins to erode its banks sideways rather than downwards, creating **meanders** – sweeping bends that migrate gradually across the valley floor. Occasionally, a meander loop is cut off, leaving behind a crescent-shaped **ox-bow lake**.

As the river enters its **lower course**, it crosses a broad, flat **floodplain**. The river's energy is low, so it deposits **sediment** – sand, silt, and clay carried from upstream. During floods, this sediment is spread across the floodplain, creating highly fertile soil.

At the river's **mouth**, where it meets the sea, the remaining sediment may be deposited to form a **delta** or, where tidal currents are strong, a wide funnel-shaped **estuary**.

Throughout history, rivers have been central to human settlement, trade, and agriculture, making them among the most important features on Earth.

Questions

1. What are the three main stages of a river's journey called?
2. What feeds the source of a river?
3. What three landforms are typically found in the upper course of a river?
4. What does the river do in its upper course that creates V-shaped valleys?
5. What happens to the direction of erosion in the middle course?
6. How is an ox-bow lake formed?
7. What is a floodplain and why is it flat?
8. Name the three types of sediment a river carries in its lower course.
9. What is the difference between a delta and an estuary?
10. The article says rivers have been central to human settlement throughout history. Using what you know about rivers' physical features, suggest two specific reasons why the lower course of a river would be a more attractive place to settle than the upper course.



Text D Quiz



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