

What Is a Mineral?

KEY IDEAS

As you read this section, keep these questions in mind:

- What is a mineral?
- What are the two main groups of minerals?
- What are the six types of silicate crystal structures?
- What are three nonsilicate crystal structures?

What Is a Mineral?

A gold nugget, a grain of road salt, and a ruby may seem very different, but they have one thing in common: they are all minerals. A **mineral** has these properties:

- It forms naturally.
- It is not made by living things.
- It is solid.
- Its atoms and molecules are arranged in a pattern.
- It is made up of certain elements combined in specific ratios.
- It has specific physical properties.

All minerals form naturally. In other words, people do not make them. Therefore, steel is not a mineral, because people make it. 

Organic matter is matter that is found in living things, or that is made by living things. *Inorganic matter* is matter that is not made by living things. All minerals are inorganic. For example, coal is not a mineral, because it forms from the remains of plants.

The atoms and molecules in a solid mineral are arranged in a pattern. This arrangement causes the mineral to form crystals. A **crystal** is a solid with a regular arrangement of atoms or molecules. Crystals generally have geometric shapes, such as cubes.

Every sample of a mineral is made up of the same elements. For example, every sample of the mineral quartz is made up mainly of the elements silicon and oxygen. Those elements are combined in a ratio of 1:2 (SiO_2). Scientists describe this property of minerals by saying that minerals have a *consistent chemical composition*.

READING TOOLBOX

Make Connections As you read, make flash cards for the highlighted terms in this section. Add any other terms you think are important. After you read, work with a partner to practice using each term correctly in a sentence.



READING CHECK

1. **Explain** Why is steel not a mineral?

Critical Thinking

2. **Apply Concepts** Glass is made up of silicon and oxygen atoms in a 1:2 ratio. The SiO_2 molecules in glass are arranged in a random way. Is glass a mineral? Explain your answer.

Holt Earth Science Directed Answers Minerals

RC Schank



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