



ROCK > field guide sheet

FIELD DESCRIPTION OF ROCK

SEQUENCE OF TERMS – weathering – colour – fabric – rock name – strength – discontinuities – additional

SCALE OF ROCK MASS WEATHERING

Term	Grade	Abbreviation	Description
Unweathered (fresh rock)	I	UW	Rock mass shows no loss of strength, discolouration or other effects due to weathering. There may be slight discolouration on major rock mass defect surfaces or on clasts.
Slightly Weathered	II	SW	The rock mass is not significantly weaker than when fresh. Rock may be discoloured along defects, some of which may have been opened slightly.
Moderately Weathered	III	MW	The rock mass is significantly weaker than the fresh rock and part of the rock mass may have been changed to a soil. Rock material may be discoloured and defect and clast surfaces will have a greater discolouration, which also penetrates slightly into the rock material. Increase in density of defects due to physical disintegration.
Highly Weathered	IV	HW	Most of the original rock mass strength is lost. Material is discoloured and more than half the mass is changed to a soil by chemical decomposition or disintegration (increase in density of defects/fractures). Decomposition adjacent to defects and at the surface of clasts penetrates deeply into the rock material. Lithorelicts or corestones of unweathered or slightly weathered rock may be present.
Completely Weathered	V	CW	Original rock strength is lost and the rock mass changed to a soil either by decomposition (with some rock fabric preserved) or by physical disintegration.
Residual Soil	VI	RS	Rock is completely changed to a soil with the original fabric destroyed (pedological soil).

ROCK STRENGTH TERMS

Term	Field Identification of Specimen	Unconfined uniaxial compressive strength q_u (MPa)	Point load strength $I_{S(50)}$ (MPa)
Extremely strong	Can only be chipped with geological hammer	> 250	>10
Very strong	Requires many blows of geological hammer to break it	100 – 250	5 – 10
Strong	Requires more than one blow of geological hammer to fracture it	50 – 100	2 – 5
Moderately strong	Cannot be scraped or peeled with a pocket knife. Can be fractured with single firm blow of geological hammer	20 – 50	1 – 2
Weak	Can be peeled by a pocket knife with difficulty. Shallow indentations made by firm blow with point of geological hammer	5 – 20	<1
Very weak	Crumbles under firm blows with point of geological hammer. Can be peeled by a pocket knife	1 – 5	
Extremely weak (soil description required)	Indented by thumb nail or other lesser strength terms used for soils	<1	

Note: • No correlation is implied between q_u and $I_{S(50)}$

SPACING OF DEFECTS/ DISCONTINUITIES

Term	Spacing
Very widely spaced	>2 m
Widely spaced	600 mm – 2 m
Moderately widely spaced	200 mm – 600 mm
Closely spaced	60 mm – 200 mm
Very closely spaced	20 mm – 60 mm
Extremely closely spaced	<20 mm

BEDDING THICKNESS TERMS

Term	Bed Thickness
Thinly laminated	< 2 mm
Laminated	2 mm - 6 mm
Very thin	6 mm - 20 mm
Thin	20 mm - 60 mm
Moderately thin	60 mm - 200 mm
Moderately thick	0.2 m - 0.6 m
Thick	0.6 m - 2 m
Very thick	> 2 m

ROUGHNESS AND APERTURE

I	rough	STEPPED
II	smooth	
III	slickensided	
IV	rough	UNDULATING
V	smooth	
VI	slickensided	
VII	rough	PLANAR
VIII	smooth	
IX	slickensided	

APERTURE OF DISCONTINUITY SURFACES

Term	Aperture (mm)	Description
Tight	Nil	Closed
Very Narrow	> 0 – 2	
Narrow	2 – 6	Gapped
Moderately Narrow	6 – 20	
Moderately Wide	20 – 60	
Wide	60 – 200	Open
Very Wide	> 200	

BEDDING INCLINATION TERMS

Term	Inclination (from horizontal)
Sub-horizontal	0° – 5°
Gently inclined	6° – 15°
Moderately inclined	16° – 30°
Steeply inclined	31° – 60°
Very steeply inclined	61° – 80°
Sub-vertical	81° – 90°





SOIL

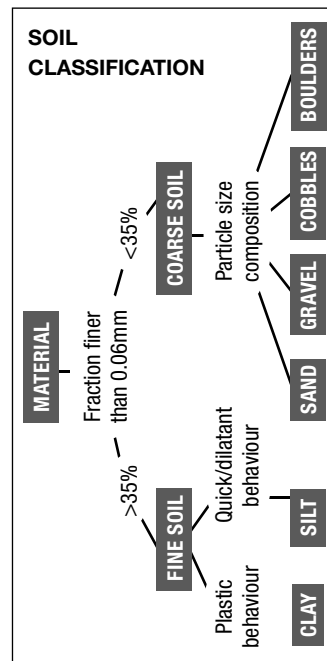
> field guide sheet

FIELD DESCRIPTION OF SOIL

SEQUENCE OF TERMS – fraction – colour – structure – strength – moisture – bedding – plasticity – sensitivity – additional

GRAIN SIZE CRITERIA

TYPE	COARSE									FINE		ORGANIC
	Boulders	Cobbles	Gravel			Sand			Silt	Clay	Organic Soil	
Size Range (mm)	200	60	20	6	2	0.6	0.2	0.06	0.002			
Graphic Symbol												



PROPORTIONAL TERMS DEFINITION (COARSE SOILS)

Fraction	Term	% of Soil Mass	Example
Major	(...) [UPPER CASE]	≥ 50 [major constituent]	GRAVEL
Subordinate	(...) y [lower case]	20 – 50	Sandy
Minor	with some ... with minor ...	12 – 20 5 – 12	with some sand with minor sand
	with trace of (or slightly)...	< 5	with trace of sand (slightly sandy)

DENSITY INDEX (RELATIVE DENSITY) TERMS

Descriptive Term	Density Index (R _D)	SPT "N" value (blows / 300 mm)	Dynamic Cone (blows / 100 mm)
Very dense	> 85	> 50	> 17
Dense	65 – 85	30 – 50	7 – 17
Medium dense	35 – 65	10 – 30	3 – 7
Loose	15 – 35	4 – 10	1 – 3
Very loose	< 15	< 4	0 – 2

Note: • No correlation is implied between Standard Penetration Test (SPT) and Dynamic Cone Test values.
• SPT "N" values are uncorrected. • Dynamic Cone Penetrometer (Scala)

CONSISTENCY TERMS FOR COHESIVE SOILS

Descriptive Term	Undrained Shear Strength (kPa)	Diagnostic Features
Very soft	< 12	Easily exudes between fingers when squeezed
Soft	12 – 25	Easily indented by fingers
Firm	25 – 50	Indented by strong finger pressure and can be indented by thumb pressure
Stiff	50 – 100	Cannot be indented by thumb pressure
Very stiff	100 – 200	Can be indented by thumb nail
Hard	200 – 500	Difficult to indent by thumb nail

ORGANIC SOILS/ DESCRIPTORS

Term	Description
Topsoil	Surficial organic soil layer that may contain living matter. However topsoil may occur at greater depth, having been buried by geological processes or man-made fill, and should then be termed a buried topsoil.
Organic clay, silt or sand	Contains finely divided organic matter; may have distinctive smell; may stain; may oxidise rapidly. Describe as for inorganic soils.
Peat	Consists predominantly of plant remains. Firm: Fibres already compressed together Spongy: Very compressible and open structure Plastic: Can be moulded in hand and smears in fingers Fibrous: Plant remains recognisable and retain some strength Amorphous: No recognisable plant remains
Roolets	Fine, partly decomposed roots, normally found in the upper part of a soil profile or in a redeposited soil (e.g. colluvium or fill)
Carbonaceous	Discrete particles of hardened (carbonised) plant material.

PLASTICITY (CLAYS & SILTS)

Term	Description
High plasticity	Can be moulded or deformed over a wide range of moisture contents without cracking or showing any tendency to volume change
Low plasticity	When moulded can be crumbled in the fingers; may show quick or dilatant behaviour

MOISTURE CONDITION

Condition	Description	Granular Soils	Cohesive Soils
Dry	Looks and feels dry	Run freely through hands	Hard, powdery or friable
Moist	Feels cool, darkened in colour	Tend to cohere	Weakened by moisture, but no free water on hands when remoulding
Wet			Weakened by moisture, free water forms on hands when handling
Saturated	Feels cool, darkened in colour and free water is present on the sample		

GRADING (GRAVELS & SANDS)

Term	Description	
Well graded	Good representation of all particle sizes from largest to smallest	
Poorly graded	Limited representation of grain sizes - further divided into:	
	Uniformly graded	Most particles about the same size
	Gap graded	Absence of one or more intermediate sizes

NZ GEOTECHNICAL SOCIETY INC

This field sheet has been taken from and should be used and read with reference to the document FIELD DESCRIPTION OF SOIL AND ROCK. Guideline For the Field Classification and Description of Soil and Rock for Engineering Purposes. NZ Geotechnical Society Inc, December 2005. www.nzgeotechsoc.org.nz