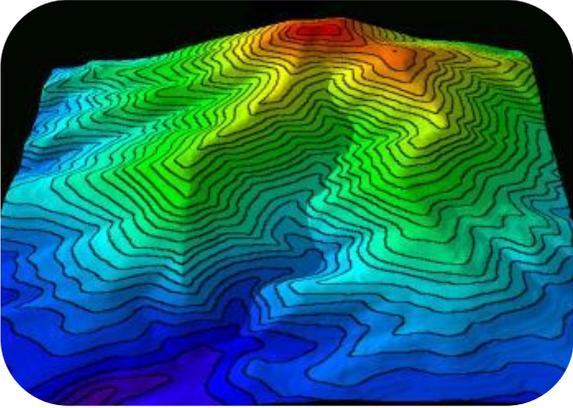


Mapping Earth's Surface

Section I: Exploring Earth's Surface



Topography is the arrangement of both the natural and artificial physical features of a particular region. In other words, it is the shape of land. Words like flat, sloping, hilly, or mountainous might all be used to describe the topography of a particular area.

Topographic maps include an area's elevation, relief, and landform. The topography of a particular area is often described by its elevation. **Elevation** refers to the height a point on Earth's surface is above sea level.

The **relief** is the difference in elevation between the highest and lowest parts of an area. A **landform** is a feature of topography, such as a hill or a valley, formed by the processes that shape the earth's surface. A **landform region** is a large area of land where the topography is made up of mostly one type of landform such as uplands, lowlands, or a basin.

Landforms are the basic features of the earth, and they vary greatly in shape and size. There are three main types of landforms. The **plains** are landforms that are made up of nearly flat or gently rolling land with a low relief. A **coastal plain** is a plain that lies along a seacoast with low elevation and low relief. An **interior plain** is a plain that lies away from a coast with low relief and elevation that varies.

A **mountain** is a landform with high elevation and high relief, and it usually occurs as part of a mountain range. A **mountain range** is a group of mountains that are closely related in shape, structure, and age. A **mountain system** includes the different mountains in a region. For example, the Bitterroot Mountains are a mountain range in the Rocky Mountains. A **mountain belt** is a larger unit of mountain ranges and mountain systems in a long, connected chain. Finally, **plateaus** are a type of landform with a high elevation and a more or less level surface.

