

A decorative border of black umbrellas surrounds the text. There are 18 umbrellas in each of the four corners, and a horizontal row of 18 umbrellas at the top and bottom.

The Water Cycle

Our very existence is dependent on the availability of water. We drink it, cook with it, clean with it and even swim in it. We couldn't live without it! But the water we use today is basically the same water that existed billions of years ago. Imagine you may take a bath in the same water that flowed down the Amazon River.

To understand this mystery, you must realize that water flows in a continuous cycle known as the water cycle. The four most important words to remember are:

1. **Evaporation** : which is the changing of liquid water into a gas or vapor
2. **Condensation** : which is the changing of water vapor back to a liquid form
3. **Precipitation** : which is the deposition of water in any form from the air upon the surface of the earth
4. **Collection**: is where the rain water soaks into the ground, through the soil and underlying rock layers.

In nature, heat from the sun causes water to evaporate into the air from lakes, oceans, streams, the earth's soil and even puddles. The water vapor is carried up into the atmosphere by air currents. There the water vapor is cooled. The vapor hits specks of dust and condenses on them. Water drops accumulate on the dust particles and form clouds. These clouds become very heavy with water and the water will eventually fall to the earth's surface as some form of precipitation – rain, snow, sleet, or hail. The water once more returns to the soil to nurture the plants and fill our streams and oceans. Soon, evaporation begins again and the cycle repeats itself over and over. Consequently, this never ending cycle keeps our water in motion through the centuries.