COMMON CLOUDS

Cloud Name	Cloud Family	Cloud Description
Cirrus	High	High, thin, wispy clouds blown by high winds into long streamers. Cirrus clouds usually move across the sky from west to east. They generally indicate pleasant weather.
Cirrocumulus	High	Appears as small, round white puffs. The small ripples in the cirrocumulus sometimes resemble the scales of a fish. A sky with cirrocumulus clouds is sometimes referred to as a “mackerel sky”.
Altocumulus	Middle	Appear as grey, puffy masses, sometimes in parallel waves or bands. The appearance of these clouds on a warm, humid summer morning often means thunderstorms will occur by late afternoon.
Altostratus	Middle	A grey or blue-grey layer cloud that typically covers the entire sky. In the thinner areas of the cloud, the sun may be dimly visible as a round disk. This cloud appears lighter than stratus clouds.
Stratus	Low	Uniform grey layer cloud that often covers the entire sky. They resemble fog that does not reach the ground. Usually no precipitation falls from stratus clouds, but sometimes they may drizzle.
Nimbostratus	Low	Dark grey layer clouds associated with continuously falling rain or snow. They often produce precipitation that is usually light to moderate.
Stratocumulus	Low	A series of round mass that form a layer cloud. This type of cloud is usually thin enough for the sky to be seen through breaks.
Cumulus	Vertical Development	Puffy clouds, which are thick, round, and lumpy. They sometimes look like pieces of floating cotton. They usually have flat bases and round tops.
Cumulonimbus	Vertical Development	Thunderstorm clouds that form if cumulus clouds continue to build. Violent vertical air currents, hail, lightning, and thunder are associated with the cumulonimbus clouds.

Director Cadets 3, 2007, Ottawa, ON: Department of National Defence

Figure D-1 Common Clouds

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