

Average Chemical Composition of Earth's Crust, Hydrosphere, and Troposphere

ELEMENT (symbol)	CRUST		HYDROSPHERE	TROPOSPHERE
	Percent by mass	Percent by volume	Percent by volume	Percent by volume
Oxygen (O)	46.10	94.04	33.0	21.0
Silicon (Si)	28.20	0.88		
Aluminum (Al)	8.23	0.48		
Iron (Fe)	5.63	0.49		
Calcium (Ca)	4.15	1.18		
Sodium (Na)	2.36	1.11		
Magnesium (Mg)	2.33	0.33		
Potassium (K)	2.09	1.42		
Nitrogen (N)				78.0
Hydrogen (H)			66.0	
Other	0.91	0.07	1.0	1.0

Overview:

Take a breath of air, and 99% of it is composed of nitrogen and oxygen. Dive into a lake, and you have slid by millions of water molecules consisting of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen (H_2O). But take a shovel full of dirt, part of the Earth's crust, and you are holding hundreds of different compounds chemically made from the combination of less than 10 elements. Surprisingly, the crust's most abundant element is oxygen, and it readily combines with the Earth's crust second most abundant element, silicon, producing the compound silicone dioxide (SiO_2). This compound is the mineral quartz. Other elements, pure or chemically combined, produce minerals that make up the crust. Without these minerals, our planet would not be able to sustain life.

The Chart:

The crust is the only sphere that is divided into a mass and volume column. Oxygen has the greatest percentage in both mass and volume. Notice that the chart shows that eight elements make up over 99% of the total mass and volume of the crust. The hydrosphere, representing the water sphere, consists of 33% oxygen and 66% hydrogen, chemically combined to form the molecule H_2O . The troposphere is the first layer of our atmosphere, which we live in (see the Selected Properties of Earth's Atmosphere chart, page 161). This layer contains over 90% of all the gases of the total atmosphere, almost all of it being nitrogen and oxygen.

Additional Information:

- SiO_2 is the composition for quartz, the main component of sand. It is used in the production of glass, jewelry, and in electronic components. (See Quartz in the Properties of Common Minerals chart, page 191.)
- The other 1% of gases in the troposphere are mostly: water vapor, argon, and carbon dioxide.

Average Chemical Composition

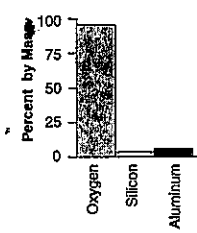
— Set 1 —

1. Earth's hydrosphere is best described as the
 - (1) solid outer layer of Earth
 - (2) liquid outer layer of Earth
 - (3) magma layer located below Earth's stiffer mantle
 - (4) gaseous layer extending several hundred kilometers from Earth into space1 _____

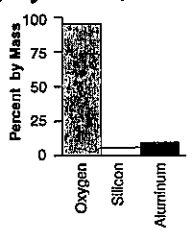
2. What are the two most abundant elements by mass found in Earth's crust?
 - (1) aluminum and iron
 - (2) sodium and chlorine
 - (3) calcium and carbon
 - (4) oxygen and silicon2 _____

3. Earth's troposphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere contain relatively large amounts of which element?
 - (1) iron
 - (2) oxygen
 - (3) hydrogen
 - (4) potassium3 _____

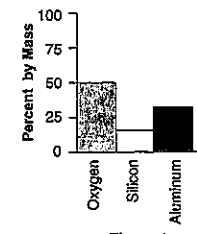
4. Which graph correctly represents the 3 most abundant elements, by mass, in Earth's crust?



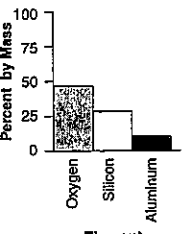
(1)



(3)



(2)



(4)

4 _____

— Set 2 —

5. The most abundant element by volume in the hydrosphere is
 - (1) potassium
 - (2) hydrogen
 - (3) nitrogen
 - (4) silicon5 _____

6. Which metal is most abundant by mass in the crust?
 - (1) iron
 - (2) aluminum
 - (3) magnesium
 - (4) copper6 _____

7. In which sphere would one find more total oxygen by volume?
 - (1) the crust
 - (2) the atmosphere
 - (3) the hydrosphere
 - (4) the mesosphere7 _____

8. Which two elements would equal almost 75% of the total mass of the crust?
 - (1) O and Si
 - (2) O and Al
 - (3) Si and Al
 - (4) Si and Fe8 _____

9. Which sphere would be the densest?

10. Which sphere would be the least dense?
