

## Vocabulary: Solar System



### Vocabulary

- Atmosphere – the layers of gases surrounding a planet, moon, or sun.
  - The visible part of the atmosphere of gas giants is considered part of the planet itself.
- Ellipse – a flattened circle.
  - The orbits of all planets are in the shape of ellipses. These orbits are only slightly elliptical, so they appear to be circles to the naked eye.
  - Many comets have orbits that are very elongated.
- Gas giant – a large planet composed mainly of gas.
- Gravity – the force of attraction between all objects in the universe.
  - Gravity is only significant when one of the objects is very large, like the Earth. There is very, very little gravitational attraction between you and your couch – but there is some!
  - Gravity causes planets to orbit the Sun, the Moon to orbit Earth, and objects to fall to the ground.
- Inner planet – any of the four planets closest to the Sun (Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars).
  - The distinction between “inner” and “outer” is due to the very large gap between Mars’ orbit and Jupiter’s orbit.
  - There is a large asteroid belt between the inner planets and the outer planets.
- Orbit – the path of one body around another body, such as the path of Earth around the Sun.
- Outer planet – any of the four planets farthest from the Sun (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune).
- Planet – an object orbiting a star that is round, not itself a star, and large enough to have cleared the area around it of small objects.
  - There are eight known planets in our solar system: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.
  - There are three “dwarf planets” in our solar system: Ceres, Pluto, and Eris.
  - This definition was agreed on by the International Astronomical Union in 2006. It remains controversial.
- Rocky planet – a planet having a rocky surface like Earth’s.
  - Also called “terrestrial planet.”

- Solar system – a star and the objects that orbit it.
  - Our solar system includes the Sun (known to scientists as “Sol”), the eight planets, and their moons.
  - Our solar system also includes asteroids, comets, dwarf planets, and planetoids.
- Year – the period of time that it takes a planet to complete one revolution around its star.

