

Vocabulary: Dichotomous Keys



Vocabulary

- Dichotomous key – a series of question or statement sets that is used to identify *organisms* or objects.
 - Dichotomous keys are used during field or lab investigations to identify unfamiliar organisms.
- Genus – a classification subdivision of a family of organisms.
 - Biologists classify organism into several different groups. The largest group is a domain. Domains are subdivided into kingdoms, which are further subdivided into phyla, classes, orders, families, genera, and, finally, *species*.
- Organism – a living thing.
 - Individual bacteria, fungi, plants, and animals are all examples of organisms.
- Scientific name – a name used by scientists that consists of an organism’s genus and species.
 - For example, the name *Ranunculus aquatilis* is made up of the genus name “Ranunculus” and the species name “aquatilis.”
 - Scientific names are traditionally italicized. The genus name is capitalized, while the species name is kept lowercase.
- Species – a group of organisms sharing similar *traits* that are capable of breeding fertile offspring.
- Trait – a distinguishing characteristic or quality.
 - Traits can be physical, such as hair color or height. Traits can also be behavioral, such as the tendency to hibernate or migrate.