



How Rivers Form and Where They Flow

KS2 GEOGRAPHY

KS3 GEOGRAPHY

Ages 10-14 ⌚ 3 min read

How Do Rivers Start?

Rivers begin their journey high in the **mountains** or **highlands**, where **rainwater** and **melting snow** collect on steep slopes. This water doesn't stay still—gravity pulls it downhill, and as more water joins, tiny streams form. These small streams merge together, getting bigger and bigger, until they become powerful rivers flowing toward the sea.

Think of it like lots of small friends joining one big group—each friend adds to the crowd, making it larger and stronger as they move along together.

The River's Journey Downhill

Once a river forms, it follows a very predictable path. Water always flows **downhill** because of gravity, so rivers carve channels through the landscape as they travel. In the **upper course** (near the mountains), rivers are narrow, fast, and rocky. As the river moves into **middle and lower courses**, it slows down, becomes wider, and picks up more water from **tributaries**—smaller rivers and streams that flow into the main river.

Over time, flowing water can shape the landscape dramatically, carving out deep **valleys** and **gorges** as it erodes rock and soil. The river also carries sediment—tiny pieces of rock and soil—which gives water its brownish colour during heavy rainfall.

Think of it like a pencil drawing on paper—the water gradually wears away the ground just as a pencil slowly marks paper.

Where Do Rivers Flow To?

Almost all rivers eventually reach the **sea** or **ocean**. Some rivers flow into **lakes** instead, which act as natural reservoirs. The place where a river meets the sea is called the **mouth** of the river. At the mouth, rivers often form **deltas**—wide, flat areas where the river splits into many channels before emptying into the sea.

A few rivers flow into deserts and dry areas, where they disappear into the ground or dry up completely. But most rivers follow the same basic pattern: they start in mountains, flow downhill gathering water, and end in the sea. This endless cycle keeps repeating as new rainwater falls and continues the journey all over again.

Think of it like water sliding down a playground slide—it starts at the top and always ends at the bottom, no matter what path it takes.