

Spatial Skills Vocabulary

Aerial photos – a photograph of part of Earth’s surface usually taken from an airplane. (National Geography Standards, 2012)

Cardinal directions – the four main points of the compass: north, east, south, west. (National Geography Standards, 2012)

Cartogram – representation of a region depicting the size of an object in relation to an attribute rather than land area. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Choropleth maps – representation of statistical data, such as population, over a specific area using colors or patterns to represent types of intensity of data. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Digital globe – digital model of Earth using advancements in technology for representing the planet more accurately with images that keep changing to meet the user’s requirements. (National Geography Standards, 2012)

Flow map – a map with arrows and lines showing how something moves. (National Geography Standards, 2012)

Geographic or spatial perspective – a way to understand a topic or area using spatial features and relationships. (National Geography Standards, 2012)

Geospatial data – information that identifies the geographic location and characteristics of natural or constructed features and boundaries on Earth; information that describes the distribution of physical and human phenomena on Earth’s surface. (National Geography Standards, 2012)

Geospatial technologies – computer hardware and software with which users analyze and represent geographic data at infinitely varied levels; includes technologies related to mapping and interpreting physical and human features on Earth’s surface (i.e., global positioning systems (GPS), geographic information systems (GIS), remote sensing (RS), and geospatial visualization). (National Geography Standards, 2012)

GIS – geographic information system; any system for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on the Earth’s surface. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

GPS – global positioning system; system of satellites and receiving devices used to determine the location of something on Earth. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Grid – horizontal and vertical lines used to locate objects in relation to one another on a map. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Intermediate directions – points on a compass that fall between north, east, south, and west. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Isopleth maps – a map using lines joining points of equal value to show variations in that value (e.g., contour lines showing areas with the same elevation or isobars on a weather map connecting points having the same atmospheric conditions) (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Legend – explanation of symbols and abbreviations used on a map, also known as a key. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Mental map – an internal representation of a person’s personal perceptions, knowledge, and thoughts about a geographic area. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Meridian – line of longitude, dividing the Earth by north-south. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Parallel – line of latitude, dividing the Earth by east-west. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Perspective – representation of volume or depth on a flat surface. Also a point of view or way of looking at a situation. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Reference maps – map displaying selected features of the natural and human-made environment. Reference maps use symbols to locate and identify important geographic features. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Remote sensing – methods of information-gathering about the Earth’s surface from a distance. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Scale – the relationship or ratio between a linear measurement on a map and the corresponding distance on Earth’s surface; also refers to the size of places or regions being studied. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Sketch map – rough, hand-drawn representation of spatial information. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Spatial – pertains to space on Earth’s surface. (National Geography Standards, 2012)

Spatial distributions – how people, places, things, or events are arranged across the Earth. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Thematic maps – a map representing a specific spatial distribution, theme, or topic. (NatGeo Education, 2014)

Topographic map – map showing natural and human-made features of the land, and marked by contour lines showing elevation. (NatGeo Education, 2014)