

Nova's Guide to Classification Keys

Become a master taxonomist: Discover how to sort the natural world with Nova!

- **How do we define a classification key?** It is a logical tool used to identify organisms by asking a series of 'yes' or 'no' questions about their physical characteristics.
- **What is the primary difference between a vertebrate and an invertebrate?** Vertebrates possess a backbone or spinal column, whereas invertebrates lack one entirely.
- **Why must a question in a key be 'dichotomous'?** The term 'dichotomous' means 'divided into two parts'. Every question must result in only two possible paths to ensure clarity.
- **How do we group plants?** Plants are often classified by features such as whether they produce flowers, their leaf shape, or the type of seeds they disperse.
- **What happens at the end of a branch in a key?** Each path concludes at a terminal point, where the specific species or group is correctly identified.

Did you know? Did you know? Scientists have described over 1.2 million species on Earth, but they estimate there could be as many as 8.7 million! Using classification keys helps researchers organise this vast variety of life into manageable groups based on their unique traits.

Key vocabulary: Classification · Key · Organism · Characteristic · Vertebrate · Invertebrate · Dichotomous · Taxonomy