

Types of Plate Boundary

Plates pull apart, push together or slide past each other. Here is what each kind of boundary builds, with a real place to remember it by.



Divergent: ocean ridge

Plates move apart under the sea and rising magma makes new oceanic crust. Example: the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, spreading about 2.5 cm a year, with Iceland on top.



Divergent: rift valley

A continent starts to split, opening a long rift valley with faults and volcanoes. Example: the East African Rift, over 3,000 km long.



Ocean meets continent

Convergent. Dense oceanic plate sinks under a continent, making a trench, volcanoes and mountains. Example: the Nazca Plate sinking under South America, building the Andes.



Ocean meets ocean

Convergent. One oceanic plate sinks under another, forming a deep trench and an arc of volcanic islands. Example: the Mariana Trench, nearly 11,000 m deep.



Continents collide

Convergent. Neither plate sinks, so the crust crumples and stacks up into huge mountains. Example: India pushing into Asia for about 50 million years, raising the Himalayas.



Transform fault

Plates grind sideways past each other: no crust is made or destroyed, but the locked fault causes earthquakes. Example: the San Andreas Fault, moving about 5 cm a year.



Same boundaries, different names

Divergent = constructive, convergent = destructive, transform = conservative. Use whichever set of words your course or exam uses.

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3. How an Earthquake Happens, Step by Step