TERMINOLOGY

**Neat line:** A line or border that encloses the geographic detail of a map.

**Compass rose:** Indicates which way is north. Not all maps orient north at the top.

**Scale bar:** A way to visually show the scale (the ratio of distance on the map to the corresponding distance in real life) of a map. A chart of some common conversions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Yards</th>
<th>Feet</th>
<th>Inches</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chain</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>League</td>
<td>5,280</td>
<td>15,840</td>
<td>190,080</td>
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<td>Natural Mile (British)</td>
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<td>6,080.27</td>
<td>72,963.24</td>
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<td>Natural Mile (International)</td>
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<td>6,076.1</td>
<td>72,913.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mile</td>
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<td>5,280</td>
<td>63,360</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perch, pole, rod, lug</td>
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<td>16.5</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilometer</td>
<td>1093.61</td>
<td>3280.84</td>
<td>39370.1</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Inset:** A smaller map located within the neat line of a larger map. Insets can include detail of a location shown on the larger map. For example, a map of New York State could have an inset of New York City that shows NYC in more detail.

**Cartouche:** Panels on a map which enclose parts of the map such as the title, legend, scale bar, etc. Cartouches are often decorated and are very common on early maps.

**Relief:** Indicates landscape or underwater elevation. Common types of relief include:

![Relief Types](images)

Visscher, Nicolaes. Novi Belgii Novaeque Angliae nec non partis Virginiae tabula: multis in locis
SOME TYPES OF MAPS

Cadastral maps

A fancy way of saying “property map.” These may show property boundaries as well as lots, buildings, names of landowners, etc.

Historical maps

Depicts an earlier time period, for example a map published in 1995 showing Flatbush as it was in 1873. These often include modern references (such as a street grid) on top of historic information.

Nautical charts

Created to help people navigate waterways. These often show bathymetric (underwater) relief, such as soundings or isolines.

Pictorial maps

Also known as illustrated maps, pictorial maps are more artistic than technical. They are often designed for children.

Political maps

These show administrative and political divisions, like countries, states, or wards.

Road maps

These show roads, highways, etc. They are often made by gas companies or motor clubs.

Topographical maps

These show landscape details and relief. Common examples include hiking maps or state/national park maps.

Manuscript maps

A map that is created by hand (as opposed to printed maps).
HOW TO READ MAPS

Sometimes it is difficult to extract information from maps. The following strategies can help you interpret a map.

Examine the map (don’t forget to look at both sides of the map!)

• What does it show? What type of map is it? (cadastral, topographic, etc.)
• How is it oriented?
• What year is depicted? In what year was the map made?
• What map elements can you find on the piece? (cartouche? inset? relief?)
• What is strange, interesting, or confusing about it?
• Is the map accurate? How do you know, or how could you find out?

Compare and contrast maps from the same time period

• Do the maps share any significant details?
• How do the maps differ?
• How have names changed or stayed the same? (streets, islands, churches, etc.)

Compare and contrast maps from different time periods

• What features of the area depicted have changed?
• Which have stayed the same?
• How are the maps stylistically similar or different?

Make inferences

• In what ways did the mapmaker intend people to use/appreciate/read the map?
• What can you learn from this map that may not have been part of its intended use?
  • What does the map tell you about the time period that it was made in?
  • How does the map illustrate historical movements or trends (shipping, industrialization, immigration, racism, etc.)