

First, water contained in the seas, oceans and rivers gradually warms up, using heat from the sun. This water then evaporates – it turns into a gas in the earth's atmosphere. This is known as evaporation. The water changes state, from a liquid to a gas.

At the same time, plants and trees lose water vapour through their leaves, which also end up in the air. This is called transpiration.

All of this water vapour rises high into the sky, into the earth's atmosphere. The cold air then causes the water vapour to form clouds. This is called condensation. (You can also see condensation in action when you have a bath or a shower and your mirror or windows might mist up!)

Finally, when the clouds become too full or heavy, they lose their water as rain, snow or hail. This is called precipitation. The water falls back to earth and is collected in the oceans, rivers and streams – and the water cycle begins again.

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