Why classify?

Geographers frequently utilise classifications, e.g. types of climate, soil and vegetation, forms and hierarchy of settlement, and types of landform. This is done to try to create a sense of order by grouping together into classes features that have similar, if not identical, characteristics into identifiable categories.

How to classify

When determining the basis for any classification, care must be taken to ensure that:

- only meaningful data and measures are used
- within each group or category, there is the maximum number of similarities
- between each group, there is the maximum number of differences
- there are no exceptions, i.e. all the features should fit into one group or another, and
- there is no duplication, i.e. each feature should fit into one category only.

As classifications are used for convenience and to assist understanding, they should be easy to use. They should not be oversimplified (too generalised), or too complex (unwieldy); but they should be appropriate to the purpose for which they are to be used.

No classification is likely to be perfect, and several approaches may be possible.