

H 159 Planet Formation Glossary

accretion	The gradual accumulation of matter in one location, typically due to the action of gravity.
average density	The mass of an object divided by its volume.
condensation temperature	The temperature at which a particular substance in a low-pressure gas condenses into a solid.
conservation of angular momentum	A law of physics stating that in an isolated system, the total amount of angular momentum—a measure of the amount of rotation—remains constant.
impact crater	A circular depression on a planet or satellite caused by the impact of a meteoroid.
interstellar medium	Gas and dust in interstellar space.
Jovian planet	Low-density planets composed primarily of hydrogen and helium, including Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.
liquid metallic hydrogen	Hydrogen compressed to such a density that it behaves like a liquid metal.
planetesimal	One of many small bodies of primordial dust and ice that combined to form the planets.
protoplanet	A Moon-sized object formed by the coalescence of planetesimals.
terrestrial planet	High-density worlds with solid surfaces, including Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars.
ices	Solid materials with low condensation temperatures, including ices of water, methane, and ammonia.
solar nebula	The cloud of gas and dust from which the Sun and solar system formed.
frost line	The nearest distance to a protostar beyond which ices can condense.
Kelvin-Helmholtz contraction	The contraction of a gaseous body, such as a star or nebula, during which gravitational energy is transformed into thermal energy.
meteoroid	A small rock in interplanetary space orbiting our Sun.