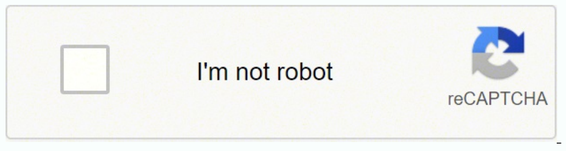

Next

What are divergent plate boundaries characterized by

There are three kinds of plate tectonic boundaries: divergent, convergent, and transform plate boundaries. This image shows the three main types of plate boundaries: divergent, convergent, and transform. Image courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey. Download image (jpg, 76 KB). The Earth’s lithosphere, which includes the crust and upper mantle, is made up of a series of pieces, or tectonic plates, that move slowly over time. A divergent boundary occurs when two tectonic plates move away from each other. Along these boundaries, earthquakes are common and magma (molten rock) rises from the Earth’s mantle to the surface, solidifying to create new oceanic crust. The Mid-Atlantic Ridge is an example of divergent plate boundaries. When two plates come together, it is known as a convergent boundary. The impact of the colliding plates can cause the edges of one or both plates to buckle up into a mountain ranges or one of the plates may bend down into a deep seafloor trench. A chain of volcanoes often forms parallel to convergent plate boundaries and powerful earthquakes are common along these boundaries. The Pacific Ring of Fire is an example of a convergent plate boundary. At convergent plate boundaries, oceanic crust is often forced down into the mantle where it begins to melt. Magma rises into and through the other plate, solidifying into granite, the rock that makes up the continents. Thus, at convergent boundaries, continental crust is created and oceanic crust is destroyed. Two plates sliding past each other forms a transform plate boundary. One of the most famous transform plate boundaries occurs at the San Andreas fault zone, which extends underwater. Natural or human-made structures that cross a transform boundary are offset—split into pieces and carried in opposite directions. Rocks that line the boundary are pulverized as the plates grind along, creating a linear fault valley or undersea canyon. Earthquakes are common along these faults. In contrast to convergent and divergent boundaries, crust is cracked and broken at transform margins, but is not created or destroyed. A convergent plate boundary is a location where two tectonic plates are moving toward each other, often causing one plate to slide below the other (in a process known as subduction). The collision of tectonic plates can result in earthquakes, volcanoes, the formation of mountains, and other geological events. • When two tectonic plates move toward each other and collide, they form a convergent plate boundary.• There are three types of convergent plate boundaries: oceanic-oceanic boundaries, oceanic-continental boundaries, and continental-continental boundaries. Each one is unique because of the density of the plates involved.• Convergent plate boundaries are often the sites of earthquakes, volcanoes, and other significant geological activity. Earth's surface is made up of two types of lithospheric plates: continental and oceanic. The crust that makes up continental plates is thicker yet less dense than oceanic crust because of the lighter rocks and minerals that compose it. Oceanic plates are made up of heavier basalt, the result of magma flows from mid-ocean ridges. When plates converge, they do so in one of three settings: oceanic plates collide with each other (forming oceanic-oceanic boundaries), oceanic plates collide with continental plates (forming oceanic-continental boundaries), or continental plates collide with each other (forming continental-continental boundaries). Earthquakes are common any time large slabs of Earth come into contact with each other, and convergent boundaries are no exception. In fact, most of the Earth's most powerful quakes have occurred at or near these boundaries. James Stevenson / Getty Images The surface of the Earth is made up of nine major tectonic plates, 10 minor plates, and a much larger number of microplates. These plates float on top of the viscous asthenosphere, the upper layer of Earth's mantle. Because of thermal changes in the mantle, tectonic plates are always moving—through the fastest-moving plate, the Nazca, only travels about 160 millimeters per year. Where plates meet, they form a variety of different boundaries depending on the direction of their motion. Transform boundaries, for example, are formed where two plates grind against each other as they move in opposite directions. Divergent boundaries are formed where two plates pull apart from each other (the most famous example is the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, where the North American and Eurasian plates diverge). Convergent boundaries are formed wherever two plates move toward each other. In the collision, the denser plate is typically subducted, meaning it slides below the other. Domdomegg / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY 4.0 (Text labels added by Brooks Mitchell) When two oceanic plates collide, the denser plate sinks below the lighter plate and eventually forms dark, heavy, basaltic volcanic islands. The western half of the Pacific Ring of Fire is full of these volcanic island arcs, including the Aleutian, Japanese, Ryukyu, Philippine, Mariana, Solomon, and Tonga-Kermadec. The Caribbean and South Sandwich island arcs are found in the Atlantic, while the Indonesian archipelago is a collection of volcanic arcs in the Indian Ocean. When oceanic plates are subducted, they often bend, resulting in the formation of oceanic trenches. These often run parallel to volcanic arcs and extend deep beneath the surrounding terrain. The deepest oceanic trench, the Mariana Trench, is more than 35,000 feet below sea level. It is the result of the Pacific Plate moving beneath the Mariana Plate. Domdomegg / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY 4.0 (Text labels added by Brooks Mitchell) When oceanic and continental plates collide, the oceanic plate undergoes subduction and volcanic arcs arise on land. These volcanoes release lava with chemical traces of the continental crust they rise through. The Cascade Mountains of western North America and the Andes of western South America feature such active volcanoes. So do Italy, Greece, Kamchatka, and New Guinea. Oceanic plates are denser than continental plates, which means they have a higher subduction potential. They are constantly being pulled into the mantle, where they are melted and recycled into new magma. The oldest oceanic plates are also the coldest, as they have moved away from heat sources such as divergent boundaries and hot spots. This makes them denser and more likely to subduct. Domdomegg / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY 4.0 (Text labels added by Brooks Mitchell) Continental-continental convergent boundaries pit large slabs of crust against each other. This results in very little subduction, as most of the rock is too light to be carried very far down into the dense mantle. Instead, the continental crust at these convergent boundaries gets folded, faulted, and thickened, forming great mountain chains of uplifted rock. Magma cannot penetrate this thick crust; instead, it cools intrusively and forms granite. Highly metamorphosed rock, like gneiss, is also common. The Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, the result of 50 million years of collision between the Indian and Eurasian plates, are the most spectacular manifestation of this type of boundary. The jagged peaks of the Himalayas are the highest in the world, with Mount Everest reaching 29,029 feet and more than 35 other mountains exceeding 25,000 feet. The Tibetan Plateau, which encompasses approximately 1,000 square miles of land north of the Himalayas, averages around 15,000 feet in elevation. Movement in narrow zones along plate boundaries causes most earthquakes. Most seismic activity occurs at three types of plate boundaries—divergent, convergent, and transform. As the plates move past each other, they sometimes get caught and pressure builds up. When the plates finally give and slip due to the increased pressure, energy is released as seismic waves, causing the ground to shake. This is an earthquake. Some of the plates have ocean water above them. Other plates include continents, and some plates include both continents and ocean. The movements of the plates help shape the geological features of our planet. The three main types of plate movements include: Divergent (Spreading):This is where two plates move away from each other. Molten rock from the mantle erupts along the opening, forming new crust. The earthquakes that occur along these zones, called spreading centers, are relatively small. The Great Rift Valley in Africa, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden all formed as a result of divergent plate motion. Convergent (Colliding): This occurs when plates move towards each other and collide. When a continental plate meets an oceanic plate, the thinner, denser, and more flexible oceanic plate sinks beneath the thicker, more rigid continental plate. This is called subduction. Subduction causes deep ocean trenches to form, such as the one along the west coast of South America. The rocks pulled down under the continent begin to melt. Sometimes the molten rock rises to the surface, through the continent, forming a line of volcanoes. About 80% of earthquakes occur where plates are pushed together, called convergent boundaries. Another form of convergent boundary is a collision where two continental plates meet head-on. Since neither plate is stronger than the other, they crumple and are pushed up. This can lead to the formation of huge, high mountain ranges such as the Himalayas. When two tectonic plates slide past each other, the place where they meet is a transform or lateral fault. The San Andreas Fault is one of the best examples of lateral plate motion.

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