Dear Mr A. N. Other

Clouds form when humid air cools enough for water vapor to condense into droplets or ice crystals. The altitude at which this happens depends on the humidity and the rate at which temperature drops with elevation.

Normally, water vapor can only condense onto condensation nuclei—tiny particles that serve as kernels around which drops can form.

Condensation nuclei are often nothing but natural dust. But soot particles from automobile exhaust or other types of pollution can also serve the purpose. One study has found that changing levels of air pollution cause different rates of cloud formation (and rain) on weekends and weekdays, at least in humid climates with lots of cities.

Clouds are classified into four basic categories, depending largely on the height of their bases above the ground.

High-level clouds, called cirrus clouds, can reach heights of 20,000 feet (6,000 meters) and are typically thin. They do not produce rain and often indicate fair weather. They are usually made up of ice.

Midlevel clouds form between 6,500 feet (2,000 meters) and cirrus level. They are referred to as "alto" clouds and bear such names as altostratus or altocumulus, depending on their shape. (Altostratus clouds are flat; altocumulus clouds are puffy.) They frequently indicate an approaching storm. They themselves sometimes produce virga, which is rain or snow that does not reach the ground.

Low-level clouds lie below 6,500 feet (2,000 meters). Meteorologists refer to them as stratus clouds. They're often dense, dark, and rainy (or snowy) though they can also be cottony white clumps interspersed with blue sky.

The most dramatic types of clouds are cumulus and cumulonimbus, or thunderheads. Rather than spreading out in bands at a fairly narrow range of elevations, like other clouds, they rise to dramatic heights, sometimes well above the level of transcontinental jetliner flights.

Cumulus clouds are fair-weather clouds. When they get big enough to produce thunderstorms, they are called cumulonimbus. These clouds are formed by upwelling plumes of hot air, which produce visible turbulence on their upper surfaces, making them look as though they are boiling.

Just as it takes heat to evaporate water from the surface of the Earth, heat is released when water condenses to form clouds. In thunderheads, this energy can produce hail, damaging winds, lightning, torrential rain, and sometimes tornadoes.

As thunderheads reach high elevations, their tops encounter high winds that cause them to spread out sideways, earning them the nickname "anvil tops." They can reach elevations of 50,000 feet (15,000 meters).

Cloud computing is a type of computing that relies on sharing computing resources rather than having local servers or personal devices to handle applications.

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In cloud computing, the word cloud (also phrased as "the cloud") is used as a metaphor for the Internet, so the phrase cloud computing means "a type of Internet-based computing" where different services - such as servers, storage and applications - are delivered to an organization's computers and devices through the Internet.

Cloud computing is comparable to grid computing, a type of computing where unused processing cycles of all computers in a network are harnesses to solve problems too intensive for any stand-alone machine.

The goal of cloud computing is to apply traditional supercomputing, or high-performance computing power, normally used by military and research facilities, to perform tens of trillions of computations per second, in consumer-oriented applications such as financial portfolios, to deliver personalized information, to provide data storage or to power large, immersive computer games. To do this, cloud computing uses networks of large groups of servers typically running low-cost consumer PC technology with specialized connections to spread data-processing chores across them. This shared IT infrastructure contains large pools of systems that are linked together. Often, virtualization techniques are used to maximize the power of cloud computing.

The standards for connecting the computer systems and the software needed to make cloud computing work are not fully defined at present time, leaving many companies to define their own cloud computing technologies. Cloud computing systems offered by companies, like IBM's "Blue Cloud" technologies for example, are based on open standards and open source software which link together computers that are used to to deliver Web 2.0 capabilities like mash-ups or mobile commerce.

Cloud computing has started to obtain mass appeal in corporate data centers as it enables the data center to operate like the Internet through the process of enabling computing resources to be accessed and shared as virtual resources in a secure and scalable manner. For a small and medium size business (SMB), the benefits of cloud computing is currently driving adoption. In the SMB sector there is often a lack of time and financial resources to purchase, deploy and maintain an infrastructure (e.g. the software, server and storage). In cloud computing, small businesses can access these resources and expand or shrink services as business needs change. The common pay-as-you-go subscription model is designed to let SMBs easily add or remove services and you typically will only pay for what you do use.

Yours faithfully,

Negotiator
Agency

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