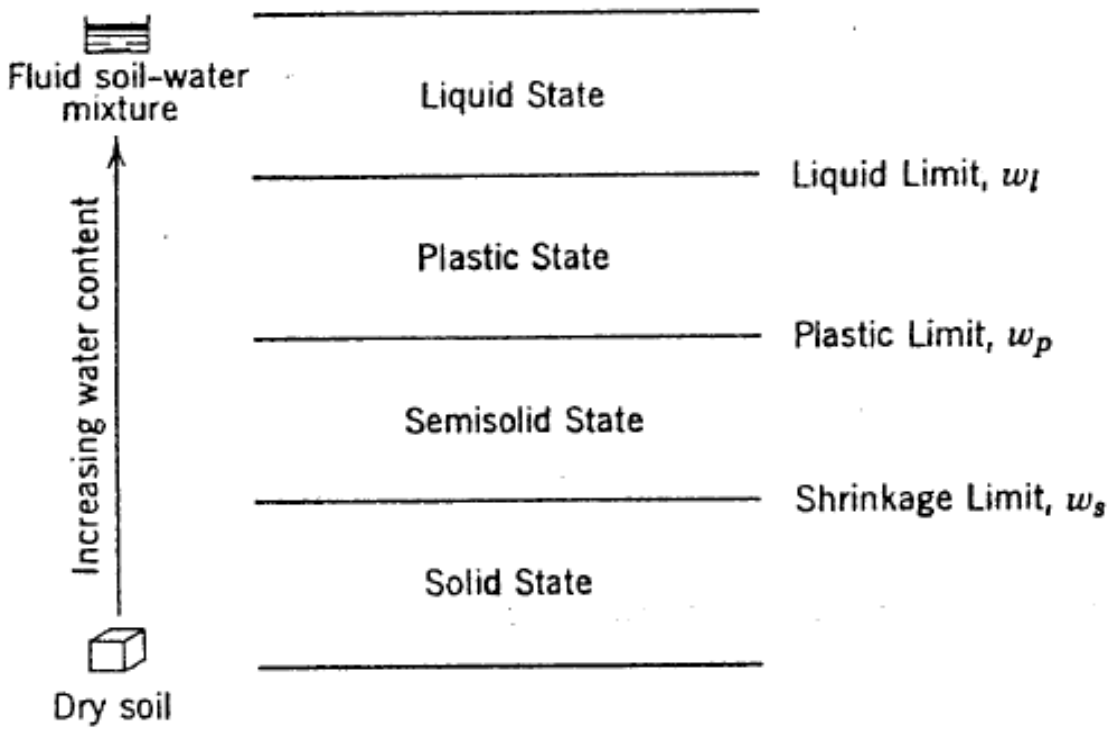
Atterberg limits

1. Liquid limit (LL)
2. Plastic limit (PL)
3. Shrinkage limit (SL)



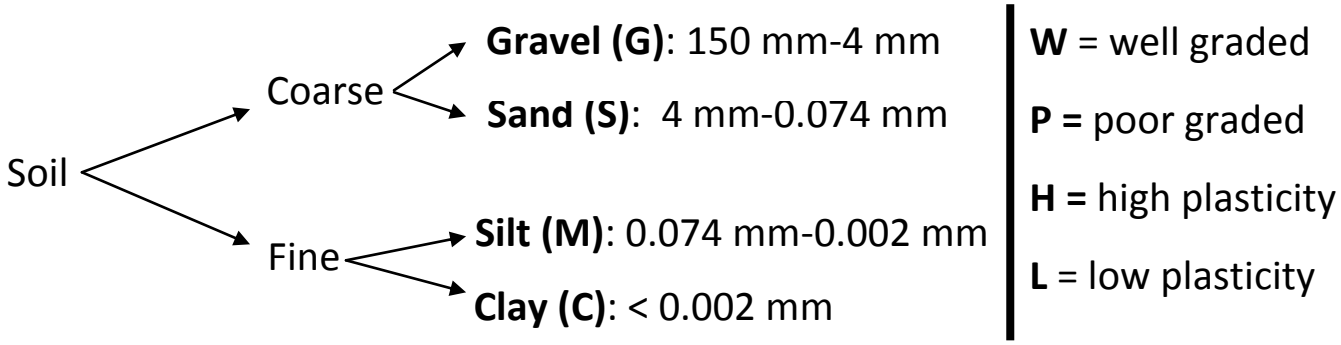
Atterberg limits and related indices.

Soil Classification

4. The unified soil classification system
5. The triangular method
6. AASHTO method

1-The unified soil classification system (USCS)

According to the USCS the soil is divided either coarse-soil: Gravel (**G**) or Sand (**S**) or fine-soils: Silt (**M**) or Clay (**C**). The coarse-soils sub divide to well graded (**W**) or poor graded (**P**), and the fine-soils sub divide to high plasticity (**H**) for LL> 50% and low plasticity (**L**) for LL< 50%.



Procedure

The USCS needs the following values:

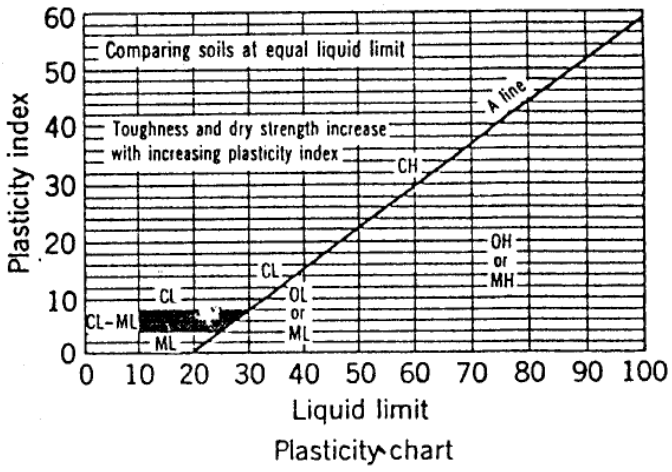
- Passing Sieve # 200 (Dia. 0.075 mm)-------- sieve analysis
- Cu = D60/ D10 ---------- sieve analysis
- Cc = D302/ (D60 – D10) ---------- sieve analysis
- LL & PL ---------- LL & PL tests

The unified classification system (USCS)

Passing sieve # 200 %
(Dia. 0.075 mm)

> 50 %	< 50 % = A
Fine soils (Silt, Clay or Organic)	**Coarse** soils (Gravel or Sand)
Plasticity Chart **CL** **CH** **OL, ML** **OH, MH** **CL-ML**	Passing sieve # 7 % = B (Dia. 4 mm)
	Gravel % = D = 100 - B Sand % = E = B - A

Sand D < E		Gravel D > E
- Cu > 6, 1 < Cc < 3 **SW** - **SP**	**A< 5%**	- Cu > 4, 1 < Cc < 3 **GW** - **GP**
Plasticity Chart **SC** **SM**	**A> 12%**	Plasticity Chart **GC** **GM**
Mix of above two cases: **SW-SC** **SW-SM** **SP-SC**	**5% < A < 12%**	Mix of above two cases: **GW-GC** **GW-GM** **GP-GC**



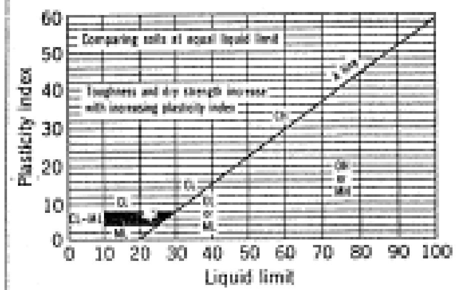
Plasticity chart

Table 3.5 Unified Soil Classification

Major divisions		Field Identification Procedures (Excluding particles larger than 3 in. and basing fractions on estimated weights)	Group Symbols[a]	Typical Names	Information Required for Describing Soils	Laboratory Classification Criteria	
Coarse-grained soils: More than half of material is *larger* than No. 200 sieve size[b] (The No. 200 sieve size is about the smallest particle visible to naked eye). Gravels: More than half of coarse fraction is larger than No. 4 sieve size (For visual classification, the ¼ in. size may be used as equivalent to the No. 4 sieve size)	Clean gravels (little or no fines)	Wide range in grain size and substantial amounts of all intermediate particle sizes	*GW*	Well graded gravels, gravel-sand mixtures, little or no fines	Give typical name: indicate approximate percentages of sand and gravel; maximum size; angularity, surface condition, and hardness of the coarse grains; local or geologic name and other pertinent descriptive information; and symbols in parentheses	$C_U = \frac{D_{60}}{D_{10}}$ Greater than 4; $C_C = \frac{(D_{30})^2}{D_{10} \times D_{60}}$ Between 1 and 3	
		Predominantly one size or a range of sizes with some intermediate sizes missing	*GP*	Poorly graded gravels, gravel-sand mixtures, little or no fines		Not meeting all gradation requirements for *GW*	
	Gravels with fines (appreciable amount of fines)	Nonplastic fines (for identification procedures see *ML* below)	*GM*	Silty gravels, poorly graded gravel-sand-silt mixtures	For undisturbed soils add information on stratification, degree of compactness, cementation, moisture conditions and drainage characteristics	Atterberg limits below "A" line, or *PI* less than 4	Above "A" line with *PI* between 4 and 7 are *borderline* cases requiring use of dual symbols
		Plastic fines (for identification procedures, see *CL* below)	*GC*	Clayey gravels, poorly graded gravel-sand-clay mixtures		Atterberg limits above "A" line, with *PI* greater than 7	
Sands: More than half of coarse fraction is smaller than No. 4 sieve size	Clean sands (little or no fines)	Wide range in grain sizes and substantial amounts of all intermediate particle sizes	*SW*	Well graded sands, gravelly sands, little or no fines	Example: *Silty sand, gravelly;* about 20% hard, angular gravel particles ½-in. maximum size; rounded and subangular sand grains coarse to fine, about 15% nonplastic fines with low dry strength; well compacted and moist in place; alluvial sand; (*SM*)	$C_U = \frac{D_{60}}{D_{10}}$ Greater than 6; $C_C = \frac{(D_{30})^2}{D_{10} \times D_{60}}$ Between 1 and 3	
		Predominantly one size or a range of sizes with some intermediate sizes missing	*SP*	Poorly graded sands, gravelly sands, little or no fines		Not meeting all gradation requirements for *SW*	
	Sands with fines (appreciable amount of fines)	Nonplastic fines (for identification procedures, see *ML* below)	*SM*	Silty sands, poorly graded sand-silt mixtures		Atterberg limits below "A" line or *PI* less than 5	Above "A" line with *PI* between 4 and 7 are *borderline* cases requiring use of dual symbols
		Plastic fines (for identification procedures, see *CL* below)	*SC*	Clayey sands, poorly graded sand-clay mixtures		Atterberg limits below "A" line with *PI* greater than 7	

Laboratory classification criteria for coarse-grained soils: Use the grain size curve in identifying the fractions as given under field identification. Determine percentages of gravel and sand from grain size curve. Depending on percentage of fines (fraction smaller than No. 200 sieve size) coarse grained soils are classified as follows: Less than 5% *GW*, *GP*, *SW*, *SP*; More than 12% *GM*, *GC*, *SM*, *SC*; 5% to 12% *Borderline* cases requiring use of dual symbols.

Major divisions	Identification Procedures on Fraction Smaller than No. 40 Sieve Size: Dry Strength (crushing characteristics)	Dilatancy (reaction to shaking)	Toughness (consistency near plastic limit)	Group Symbols[a]	Typical Names	Information Required for Describing Soils
Fine-grained soils: More than half of material is *smaller* than No. 200 sieve size. Silts and clays liquid limit less than 50	None to slight	Quick to slow	None	*ML*	Inorganic silts and very fine sands, rock flour, silty or clayey fine sands with slight plasticity	Give typical name: indicate degree and character of plasticity, amount and maximum size of coarse grains; colour in wet condition, odour if any, local or geologic name, and other pertinent descriptive information, and symbol in parentheses
	Medium to high	None to very slow	Medium	*CL*	Inorganic clays of low to medium plasticity, gravelly clays, sandy clays, silty clays, lean clays	
	Slight to medium	Slow	Slight	*OL*	Organic silts and organic silt-clays of low plasticity	For undisturbed soils add information on structure, stratification, consistency in undisturbed and remoulded states, moisture and drainage conditions
Silts and clays liquid limit greater than 50	Slight to medium	Slow to none	Slight to medium	*MH*	Inorganic silts, micaceous or diatomaceous fine sandy or silty soils, elastic silts	
	High to very high	None	High	*CH*	Inorganic clays of high plasticity, fat clays	Example: *Clayey silt,* brown; slightly plastic; small percentage of fine sand; numerous vertical root holes; firm and dry in place; loess; (*ML*)
	Medium to high	None to very slow	Slight to medium	*OH*	Organic clays of medium to high plasticity	
Highly Organic Soils	Readily identified by colour, odour, spongy feel and frequently by fibrous texture			*Pt*	Peat and other highly organic soils	



Plasticity chart
for laboratory classification of fine grained soils

From Wagner, 1957.
[a] *Boundary classifications.* Soils possessing characteristics of two groups are designated by combinations of group symbols. For example *GW–GC*, well graded gravel-sand mixture with clay binder.
[b] All sieve sizes on this chart are U.S. standard.

Field Identification Procedure for Fine Grained Soils or Fractions

These procedures are to be performed on the minus No. 40 sieve size particles, approximately $\frac{1}{64}$ in. For field classification purposes, screening is not intended, simply remove by hand the coarse particles that interfere with the tests.

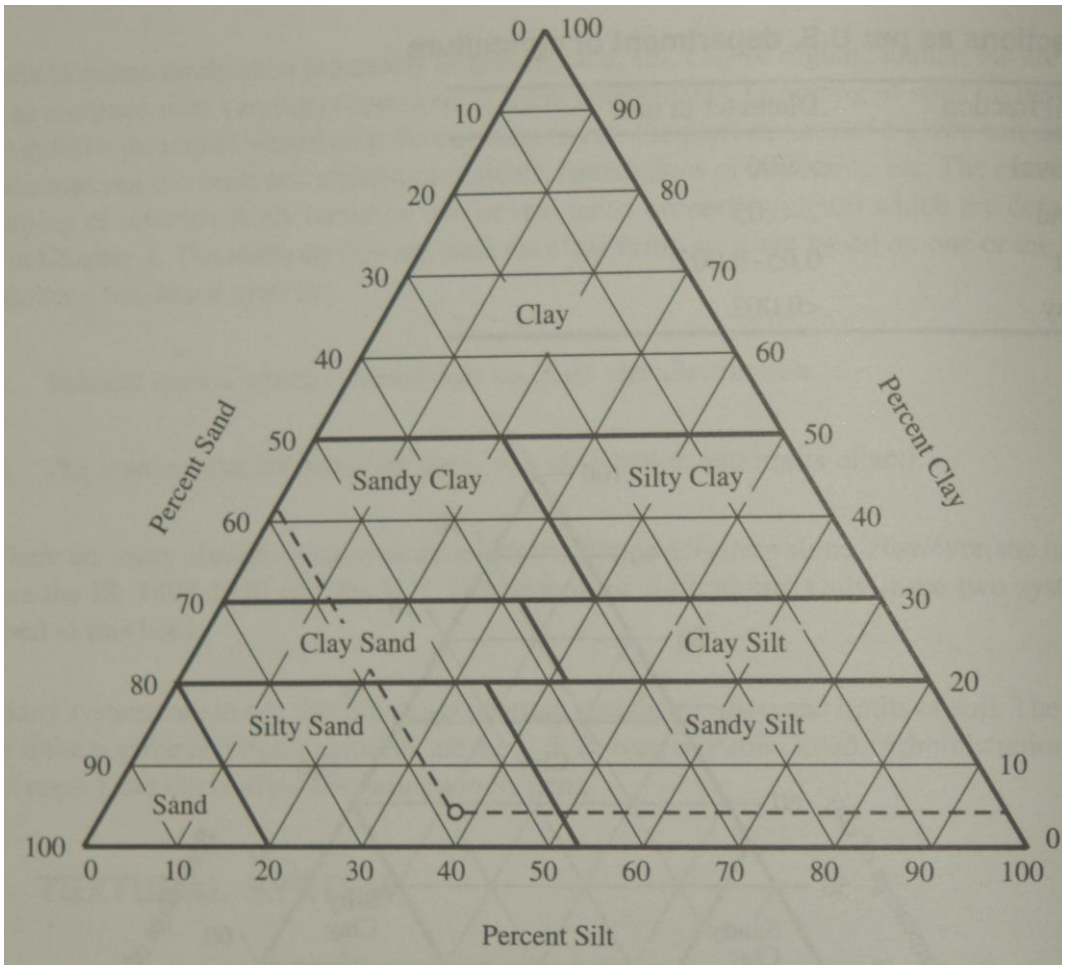
Dilatancy (Reaction to shaking):
After removing particles larger than No. 40 sieve size, prepare a pat of moist soil with a volume of about one-half cubic inch. Add enough water if necessary to make the soil soft but not sticky.
Place the pat in the open palm of one hand and shake horizontally, striking vigorously against the other hand several times. A positive reaction consists of the appearance of water on the surface of the pat which changes to a livery consistency and becomes glossy. When the sample is squeezed between the fingers, the water and gloss disappear from the surface, the pat stiffens and finally it cracks or crumbles. The rapidity of appearance of water during shaking and of its disappearance during squeezing assist in identifying the character of the fines in a soil.
Very fine clean sands give the quickest and most distinct reaction whereas a plastic clay has no reaction. Inorganic silts, such as a typical rock flour, show a moderately quick reaction.

Dry Strength (Crushing characteristics):
After removing particles larger than No. 40 sieve size, mould a pat of soil to the consistency of putty, adding water if necessary. Allow the pat to dry completely by oven, sun or air drying, and then test its strength by breaking and crumbling between the fingers. This strength is a measure of the character and quantity of the colloidal fraction contained in the soil. The dry strength increases with increasing plasticity.
High dry strength is characteristic for clays of the CH group. A typical inorganic silt possesses only very slight dry strength. Silty fine sands and silts have about the same slight dry strength, but can be distinguished by the feel when powdering the dried specimen. Fine sand feels gritty whereas a typical silt has the smooth feel of flour.

Toughness (Consistency near plastic limit):
After removing particles larger than the No. 40 sieve size, a specimen of soil about one-half inch cube in size, is moulded to the consistency of putty. If too dry, water must be added and if sticky, the specimen should be spread out in a thin layer and allowed to lose some moisture by evaporation. Then the specimen is rolled out by hand on a smooth surface or between the palms into a thread about one-eighth inch in diameter. The thread is then folded and re-rolled repeatedly. During this manipulation the moisture content is gradually reduced and the specimen stiffens, finally loses its plasticity, and crumbles when the plastic limit is reached.
After the thread crumbles, the pieces should be lumped together and a slight kneading action continued until the lump crumbles.
The tougher the thread near the plastic limit and the stiffer the lump when it finally crumbles, the more potent is the colloidal clay fraction in the soil. Weakness of the thread at the plastic limit and quick loss of coherence of the lump below the plastic limit indicate either inorganic clay of low plasticity, or materials such as kaolin-type clays and organic clays which occur below the A-line.

2-The triangular method

Soil fraction	Diameter in mm
Gravel	> 2.00
Sand	2 – 0.05
Silt	0.05 – 0.002
Clay	< 0.002



Triangular Classification chart of the Mississippi River commission, USA

(After Murthy, 2009)

Table 3.3 Classification of Highway Subgrade Materials

General classification	Granular materials (35% or less of total sample passing No. 200)						
	A-1			A-2			
Group classification	A-1-a	A-1-b	A-3	A-2-4	A-2-5	A-2-6	A-2-7
Sieve analysis (percentage passing)							
No. 10	50 max.						
No. 40	30 max.	50 max.	51 min.				
No. 200	15 max.	25 max.	10 max.	35 max.	35 max.	35 max.	35 max.
Characteristics of fraction passing No. 40							
Liquid limit				40 max.	41 min.	40 max.	41 min.
Plasticity index	6 max.		NP	10 max.	10 max.	11 min.	11 min.
Usual types of significant constituent materials	Stone fragments, gravel, and sand		Fine sand	Silty or clayey gravel and sand			
General subgrade rating	Excellent to good						

General classification	Silt-clay materials (more than 35% of total sample passing No. 200)			
Group classification	A-4	A-5	A-6	A-7 A-7-5[a] A-7-6[b]
Sieve analysis (percentage passing)				
No. 10				
No. 40				
No. 200	36 min.	36 min.	36 min.	36 min.
Characteristics of fraction passing No. 40				
Liquid limit	40 max.	41 min.	40 max.	41 min.
Plasticity index	10 max.	10 max.	11 min.	11 min.
Usual types of significant constituent materials	Silty soils		Clayey soils	
General subgrade rating	Fair to poor			

[a]For A-7-5, $PI \leq LL - 30$
[b]For A-7-6, $PI > LL - 30$