

Felsic Encyclopedia Article

Felsic

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Contents

[Felsic Encyclopedia Article.....](#) [1](#)

[Contents.....](#) [2](#)

[Felsic.....](#) [3](#)



Felsic

Geologists sometimes find it useful to classify **igneous rocks** based on color. Because color is sensitive to minor chemical differences it is not a very reliable index to the history or composition of any given **rock**; however, it has the merit of being obvious at a glance, making color classification an indispensable aid to describing rocks in the field. **Minerals** are classed in two general color groups: felsic (light) and **mafic** (dark). Rocks may contain a mixture of mafic and felsic minerals, and are termed felsic if felsic minerals predominate, mafic otherwise. Alternatively, a numerical color index can be assigned to a rock based on visual estimation of the percentage of mafic or felsic minerals it contains.

Felsic minerals are usually higher in silica (SiO_2) and **aluminum** and of lower density than mafic minerals. Common felsic minerals are **quartz**, **feldspar**, and the feldspathoids, and common felsic rocks (i.e., rocks high in felsic minerals) are **granite** and **rhyolite**. Mafic minerals are usually higher high in **iron** and magnesium than felsic minerals; common mafic minerals are pyroxene, amphibole, **olivine**, mica, and biotite, and common mafic rocks are **basalt** and gabbro.

The term mafic is also used in a precise chemical sense, that is, to denote rocks consisting of 45–52% silica regardless of color. Since the non-silica fraction of a rock often consists largely of iron and magnesium compounds, rocks that are mafic in the chemical sense are usually also mafic in the color sense.

See Also

Silicic