# Cartographic Activities: California Map

## Welcome to California!

The state of California is located on the west coast of the United States of America. California is bordered to the north by the state of Oregon and to the east by the states of Nevada and Arizona. California shares it southern boundary with the country of Mexico. To the west lies the Pacific Ocean. In terms of land area, California follows Alaska and Texas as the third largest state. California stretches for almost 800 miles from north to south and about 400 miles wide at its widest point. After the most recent 1990 census, California continued to have the highest population of any state in the USA.

This big state has a variety of different land types as well as climates. There are mountain ranges, valleys, low-lying grasslands and deserts. Generally speaking, the northern part of the state is moist and cool, with much rainfall. Moving south, the land gets drier and hotter, and there is less rain. In the very south, much of the land is hot desert, with little rainfall.

## Earthworm’s Tips on Cartography

As Student Cartographer, you will be finishing this map. Here are some hints to help you along the way!

1. Resources: Refer to an atlas, encyclopedia or other books about California to help complete the map.
2. Tools: Colored pencils are better than crayons or markers when adding symbols and shading. Use a regular pencil with eraser for labeling place names.
3. Lettering: Different map features require different lettering. Use capital letters for large or important features like neighboring countries and states, oceans, mountain ranges or state capitals. Use lower case letters for city names and other geographic details likes rivers, lakes, towns, etc. (The first letter should always be a capital letter.)
4. Symbols: Symbols are small picture or lines that stand for different features on the map. For instance, a small triangle represents a mountain. Many triangles, grouped together, represent a mountain range. On this map, the Cascade Range has been drawn in as an example. See the Map Key for other symbols.
5. Choosing Colors: Colors help represent features of a map. Use blue for water. Use green for areas with vegetation, like forests or farmland. Brown and green together help make mountains stand out. Use tan, or light brown with yellow, to show desert areas. To highlight an unusual detail like the San Andreas Fault, use a bold color like orange or red.
6. Shading: This technique lends color without coloring up details or letterring. After defining an area on the map, such as a valley or desert, shade it in with a colored pencil. Use a colored pencil that is not too sharp. Make short, light strokes. To show ocean, shade along the coastline with a narrow band of blue: ½ inch. Shad in bays and shade over river lines.

## Map Key (Description of symbols used in tactile Map Key)

Mountains: 4 carets (upside down “V”)

Valley: 4 curved lines in a row

Capital: Star

City: solid small circle

Town: Outlined small circle

Desert: 4x5 grid of dots

Fault Line: line with 3 humps, line 3 humps, line

Highway: line on both sides of an outlined triangle

Railroad: curvy line with tick marks

Airport: solid plane

## Cartographic Activities

By drawing physical features on this map, you’ll begin to see the geography of the state. See Earthworm’s Cartographic Tips to help complete the map.

### Borders

Label neighboring states along their boundary lines.

### Mountains

The Cascade Mountains extend from Oregon and Washington into northern California, as drawn on this map.

Draw and label other California ranges. The Coast Range, also extending from the north, runs along the California coastline from north to south. The Sierra Nevada Range runs along the eastern border of the state. Locate Mt. Whitney (14,495 ft. above sea level) the highest point in the lower forty-eight states.

### Deserts

Shade and label the Mohave and Colorado Deserts, located in southeast California.

### Valleys

Shade and label these lower areas between mountains and ranges. The fertile Central Valley, between the Coast Range and Sierra Nevada Range, is well suited to agriculture. There are smaller fertile valleys within the northern Coast and Cascade Mountains, such as the Napa Valley.

In contrast, there are rocky or desert valleys where little or nothing can be grown. Locate and label the Yosemite Valley to the west of the Sierra Nevada mountains: here there are deep river canyons. Locate and label Death Valley, the lowest point in the United States (282 feet below sea level).

### Bodies of Water

Label the Pacific Ocean. Label the two major bays that indent the coastline: San Francisco Bay and San Diego Bay.

Many rivers are already drawn in on this map: Locate, label and shade with blue. Sacramento, san Joaquin, Klamath, Trinity, Eel, Pit, Rubicon, Salinas, Santa Clara, Santa Ynez, Alamo, and Mohave Rivers. The Colorado River forms a natural border between California and Arizona: shade and label along this line.

Locate and label the large lakes drawn in on the map: Lake Tahoe, Clear Lake, Goose Lake and Lake Shasta. Label the Salton Sea, an inland body of salt water. Add others.

### Cities

Sacramento is the capital and has a different symbol than the other cities. Label these cities marked on the map: Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Fresno and Oakland. Add others, including your own.

### San Andreas Fault

This is a long crack or break in the earth’s crust, along the coast, which sometimes shifts or moves, causing earthquakes. Using the symbol in the Map key, draw in the San Andreas Fault.

### Infrastructure

Some man-made physical structures such as airports, railroads and highways can be added to the map. See the Map Key Symbols.

## Boundary Lines

Why are they drawn differently? A solid line shows a coast or shoreline. Political boundaries between states and countries are usually shown with broken lines. On this map, a long line with two dashes shows state boundaries. A long line with three dashes shows the border between the USA and Mexico.