

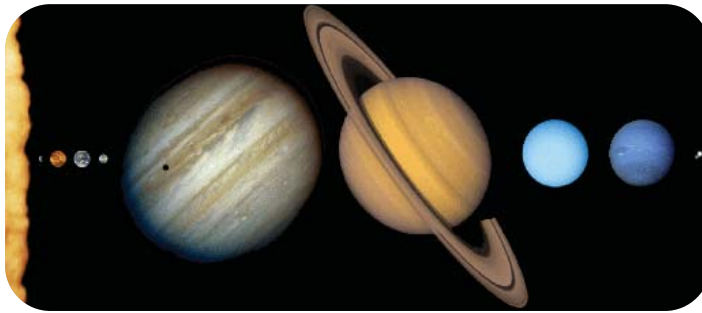
Criteria for deciding what is a planet

If you look up the word 'planet' in a dictionary you might see a definition like this:

planet : a body in space that is in orbit around the Sun or another star and which is too small to become a star itself. A planet does not shine by its own light but shines by reflecting light from the star around which it moves. Planets may be solid rocky or metallic objects or mainly gaseous with a solid core.

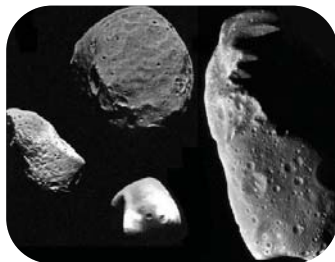
planet definition : From the Greek planetes meaning 'wanderer'.

Other useful information



The paths of the planets in the Solar System lie in the same oval 'ring' around the Sun. They all lie in approximately the same flat region of space as Earth, except for Pluto which orbits at an angle to the other planets.

Sometimes a planet has longer days than its year. This is not a problem for astronomers.



Asteroids, which can be thought of as minor planets, are large chunks of rock of all sorts of shapes. They are too small to be called planets.

The Kuiper Belt lies on the very edge of the Solar System far beyond Neptune. Here there are many small, icy, mini-planets which orbit the Sun. Comets are frozen chunks of dust and ice that orbit the Sun. They come from a region known as the Oort Cloud, which is far beyond the Solar System.