

# Week 9: Natural Disasters

## 1. The Importance of Natural Disasters in Geography

Natural disasters are a central topic in geography because of their powerful impact on both the physical environment and human societies. Understanding natural hazards allows geographers and planners to assess risks, develop safer urban planning strategies, and support disaster preparedness and mitigation. In today's globalized world, English is the primary language used in international disaster research, communication between experts, and the publication of scientific findings. Therefore, acquiring the vocabulary and communication skills related to this field in English is essential for geography students.

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), disaster risk awareness and early warning systems are key to reducing vulnerability and building resilience. Being able to access and contribute to global knowledge in English gives students the tools to participate in international dialogues on disaster management, policy-making, and climate-related risks.

## 2. Key Vocabulary: Natural Disasters

Five key natural disaster terms are introduced in this session: **earthquake**, **flood**, **landslide**, **tsunami**, and **wildfire**.

An **earthquake** is a sudden and violent shaking of the ground caused by movements within the Earth's crust or along fault lines. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines it as "a sudden shaking of the ground, often causing great destruction, as a result of movements within the earth's crust." According to the *United States Geological Survey (USGS)*, it is "the sudden release of energy in the Earth's lithosphere that causes seismic waves."



A **flood** is when water overflows onto land that is normally dry. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines a flood as “a large amount of water covering an area that is usually dry.” *National Geographic* adds that floods are “among the most frequent and costly natural disasters, often resulting from heavy rainfall or rapid snowmelt.”



A **landslide** refers to the movement of rock, soil, or debris down a slope due to gravity. *Collins Dictionary* describes it as “a mass of earth or rock that falls down a hill or slope.”



*Geology.com* adds that landslides are “a type of mass wasting, which denotes any down-slope movement of soil and rock under the influence of gravity.”



A **tsunami** is a large, powerful sea wave caused by underwater earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. According to *NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)*, a tsunami is “a series of ocean waves caused by large displacements of water due to undersea disturbances.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “a long high sea wave caused by an earthquake or other disturbance.”





Finally, a **wildfire** is an uncontrolled fire that rapidly spreads in forests or grasslands. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a wildfire as “a sweeping and destructive conflagration that spreads quickly over woodland or brush.” The *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)* notes that wildfires are “unplanned fires that burn in natural areas such as forests, grasslands, and shrublands.”



Each of these terms is introduced with definitions, pronunciation practice, and example sentences to help students incorporate them into their academic vocabulary.

### 3. Grammar Focus: Past Simple Tense (Describing Past Events)

This week's grammar topic focuses on the **past simple tense**, which is commonly used to describe events that happened in the past — such as natural disasters. The structure involves using the base form of regular verbs with –ed endings (e.g., “occurred”, “destroyed”, “evacuated”) and memorizing the forms of irregular verbs (e.g., “strike” → “struck”, “go” → “went”).

Example sentences include:

- “A strong earthquake **struck** the region in 2021.”
- “The wildfire **destroyed** over 500 hectares of forest.”
- “Emergency teams **responded** immediately.”
- “Thousands of people **lost** their homes and were evacuated.”

### 4. Reading Comprehension: Case Study – The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami

The reading passage for this week is based on a real disaster:

“On December 26, 2004, a powerful earthquake occurred off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. Measuring 9.1 on the Richter scale, the earthquake generated massive tsunami waves that struck 14 countries. Over 230,000 people died, and entire coastal communities were wiped out. In response to the catastrophe, many countries improved their early warning systems and emergency preparedness.”

Comprehension questions:

1. What caused the tsunami?
2. How many countries were affected?
3. What measures were taken after the disaster?

### 5. Speaking Practice: Discussing Local Disaster Events

In pairs or small groups, students discuss the following:

- Have you ever experienced a natural disaster?
- What types of natural disasters are common in your region?
- How do local communities prepare for such events?

## 6. Writing Task: Report on a Natural Disaster

write a short paragraph (10–12 sentences) about a natural disaster they have read about or experienced. They are instructed to include:

- What type of disaster occurred
- Where and when it happened
- Its causes and consequences
- How people or governments responded
- What lessons were learned

Example paragraph:

“In 2021, a wildfire broke out in the Kabylie region of Algeria. The fire was caused by extreme heat and dry winds. It quickly spread through forests and villages, destroying homes and killing several people. Firefighters, soldiers, and local volunteers worked together to put out the flames. The government promised to rebuild the affected areas and support the victims’ families. The event showed the importance of early warning systems and climate adaptation strategies.”

## 9. References

- Oxford Learner’s Dictionary. (2023). *Flood, Earthquake, Landslide*.
- USGS – United States Geological Survey. ([www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov))
- NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. ([www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov))
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com))
- National Geographic Society. ([www.nationalgeographic.org](http://www.nationalgeographic.org))
- Oxford English for Careers: Geography. Oxford University Press.
- UNDRR – United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. ([www.undrr.org](http://www.undrr.org))