

Phylogenetic Trees

Biology

How to read a tree, and the mistakes readers make.

The vocabulary of a phylogeny.

Term	Means
Node	A common ancestor
Branch	A lineage over time
Clade	An ancestor and all its descendants
Sister taxa	Sharing the most recent common ancestor
Outgroup	A distant relative, to root the tree
Polytomy	Unresolved branching order

Tips can be rotated at any node without changing meaning. Two tips drawn adjacent may be distantly related.