

Reading: What Is Air?

The air around us is a mixture of different types of gases. The molecules that make up those gases are too small for us to see. But there are other pieces of matter in the air that are bigger than a single molecule. These include things like dust, ash, spores, pollen, and pollution.

Most of the gas in the air is either oxygen or nitrogen. A smaller amount of it is carbon dioxide, water, and argon. Water in gas form is often called *water vapor*. The amount of water vapor in the air is referred to as *humidity*.

Humidity probes can help us measure changes in the amount of water vapor in the air. They often report the amount of water vapor in the air as something called *relative humidity*. Relative humidity is reported as a percentage from 0 to 100 percent. A relative humidity reading of 100 percent means the air has reached the maximum amount of water vapor it can hold. It doesn't mean that the air is only made of water vapor molecules.

The humidity probe to the right is shown measuring a relative humidity of 39 percent in air that is 19.5°C. This shows that the water vapor in the air is about halfway between the minimum and maximum amounts that air can possibly hold at this temperature.

Substance	Gas by volume
Nitrogen	Around 78%
Oxygen	Around 21%
Argon	About 1%
Carbon dioxide	Less than 1%
Water	From 0% to around 6%
Other substances	Less than 1%

