

**Module 9: Classification – The Basics**  
**Topic 2 Content: Dichotomous Keys**

**Introduction**

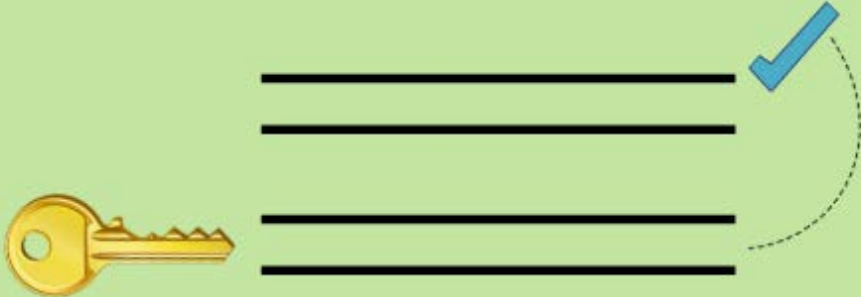


Click the **NEXT** button to learn how to use dichotomous keys.

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## Dichotomous Key

a classification tool used to identify and classify organisms according to defining characteristics




The diagram illustrates the structure of a dichotomous key. On the left is a golden key. To its right are four horizontal black lines representing the steps of the key. A blue checkmark is positioned at the end of the top line, and a dashed blue arrow points from the checkmark down to the bottom line, indicating a path through the key.

A dichotomous key is a classification tool used to identify and classify organisms according to defining characteristics. To identify organisms using a dichotomous key, simply read a series of statements that describe traits and then determine whether the organism has the trait or not.

## Module 9: Classification – The Basics


### Topic 2 Content: Dichotomous Keys

**Dichotomous Key**




1a - It has arms. (Go to 2)  
1b - It has no arms. (Go to 3)

**Arms**



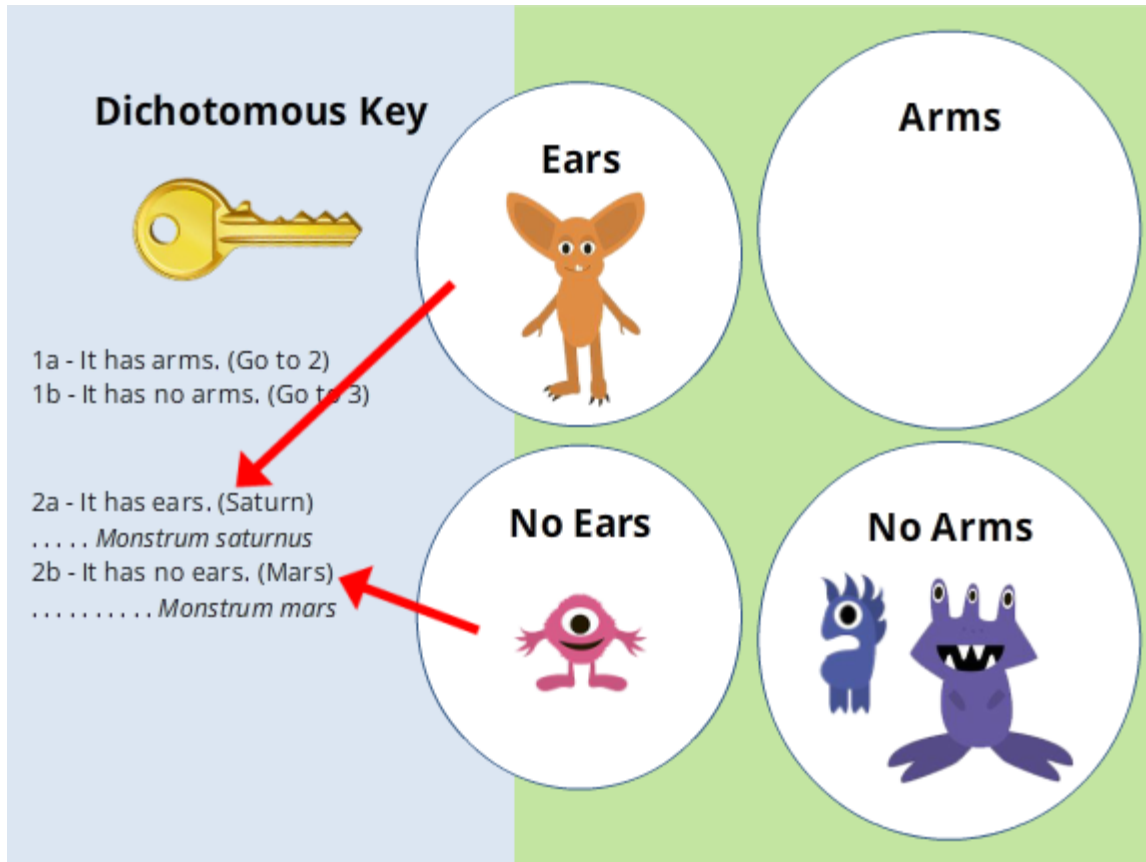
**No Arms**



To learn how to make a dichotomous key, imagine that you need to classify four organisms, such as these monsters. First, divide the organisms into two groups based on one trait. For example, you might divide these organisms based on the presence of arms.

Once you have divided your organisms into two groups, you now have the first part of your dichotomous key.

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Next, further divide these groups into subgroups based on other traits. For example, the organisms in the first group have arms. You might further divide them into subgroups based on the presence of ears.

Now you have the second part of your dichotomous key. Because the pink monster has arms but no ears, you know that the organism is called Mars according to the dichotomous key. And because the orange monster has arms and ears, you have narrowed down its identification as an organism called Saturn.

