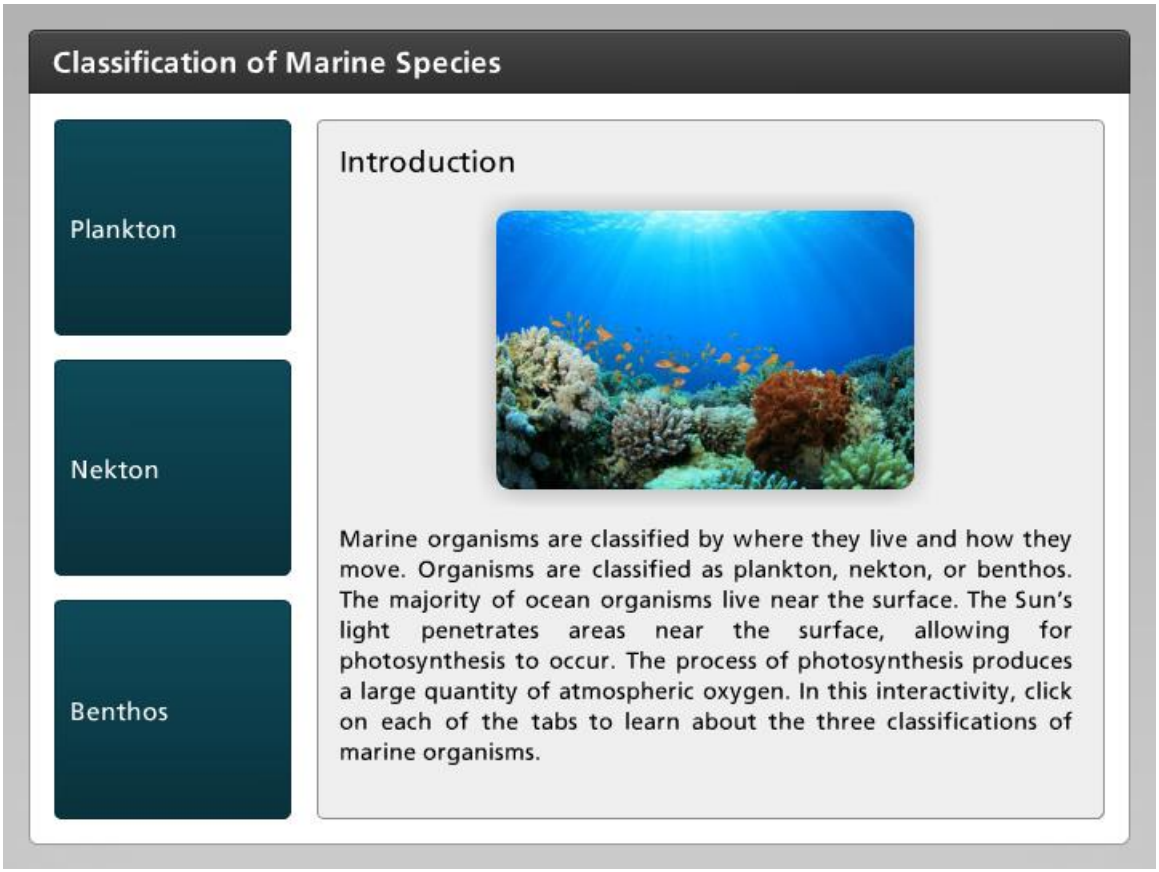
Module 12: Oceanography
Topic 5 Content: Classification of Marine Species Notes

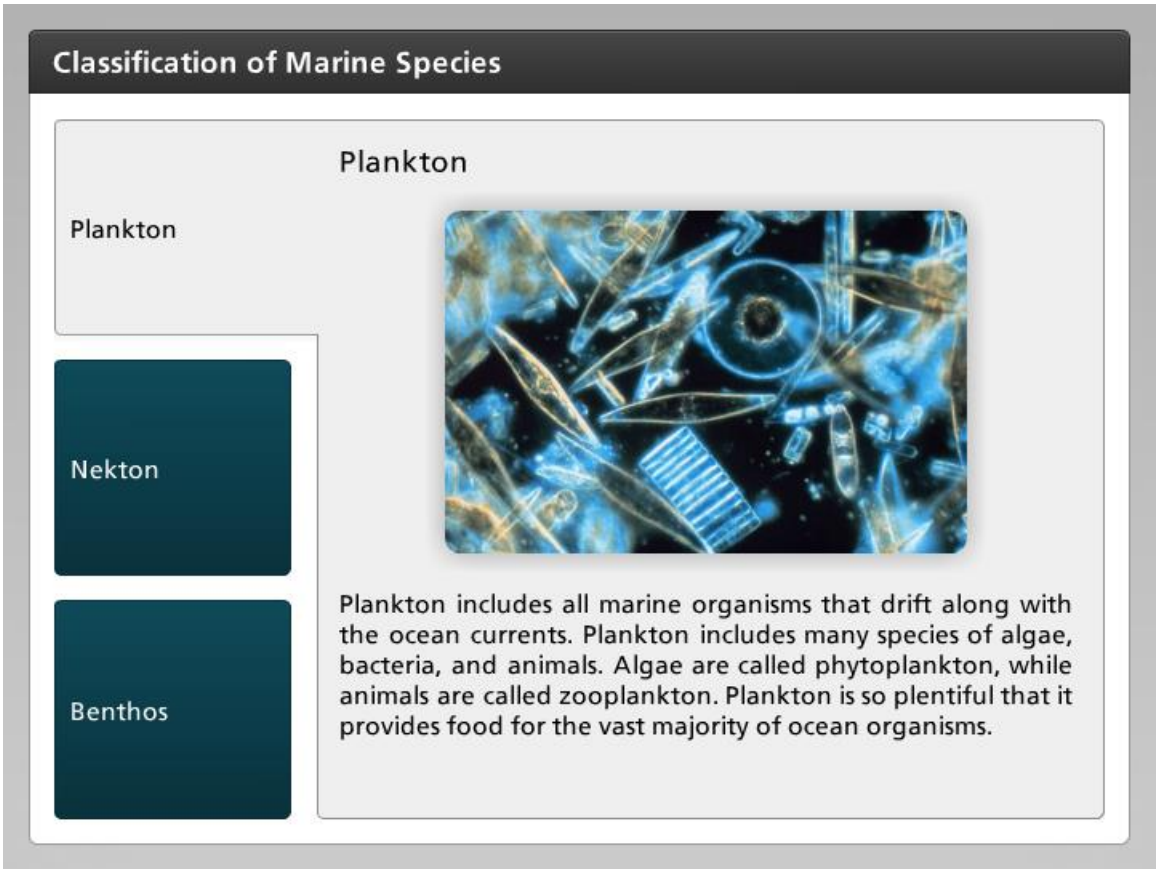
Introduction



Marine organisms are classified by where they live and how they move. Organisms are classified as plankton, nekton, or benthos. The majority of ocean organisms live near the surface. The Sun's light penetrates areas near the surface, allowing for photosynthesis to occur. The process of photosynthesis produces a large quantity of atmospheric oxygen. In this interactivity, click on each of the tabs to learn about the three classifications of marine organisms.

Module 12: Oceanography
Topic 5 Content: Classification of Marine Species Notes

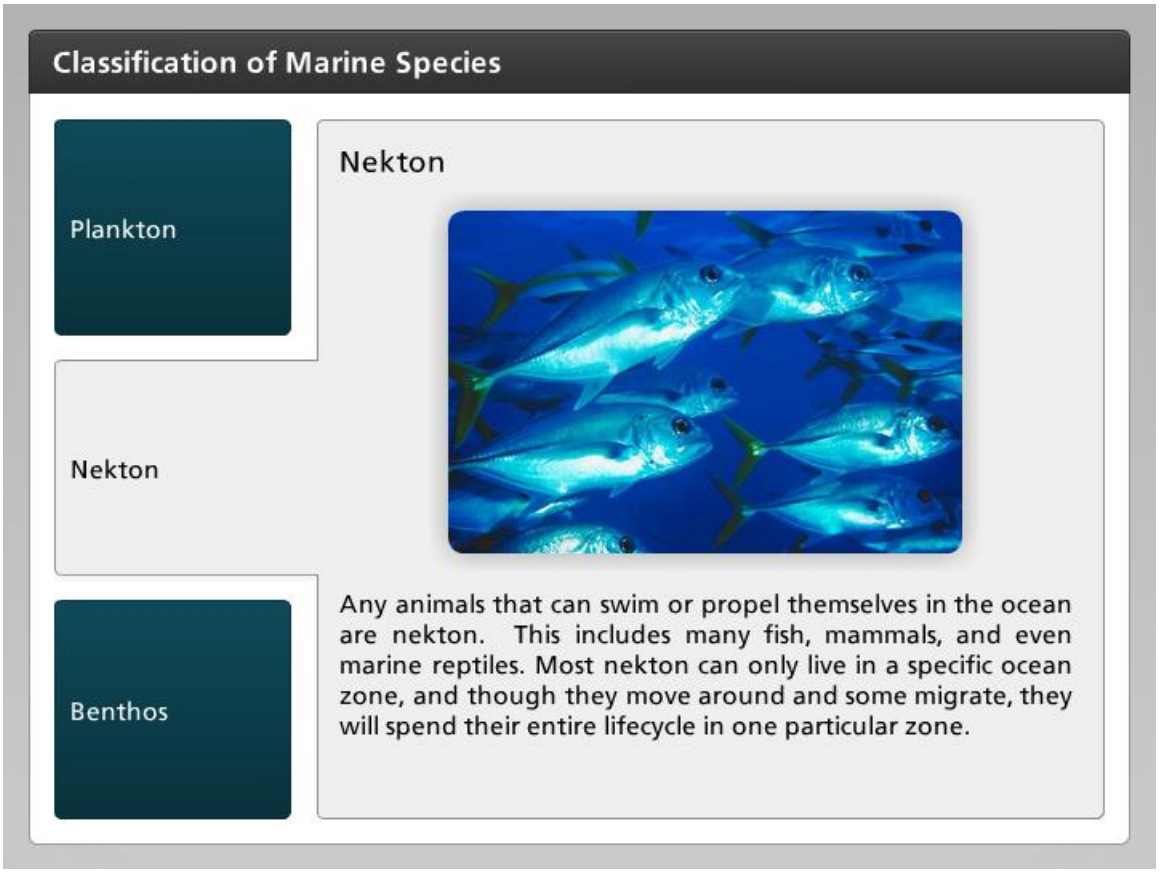
Plankton



Plankton includes all marine organisms that drift along with the ocean currents. Plankton includes many species of algae, bacteria, and animals. Algae are called phytoplankton, while animals are called zooplankton. Plankton is so plentiful that it provides food for the vast majority of ocean organisms.

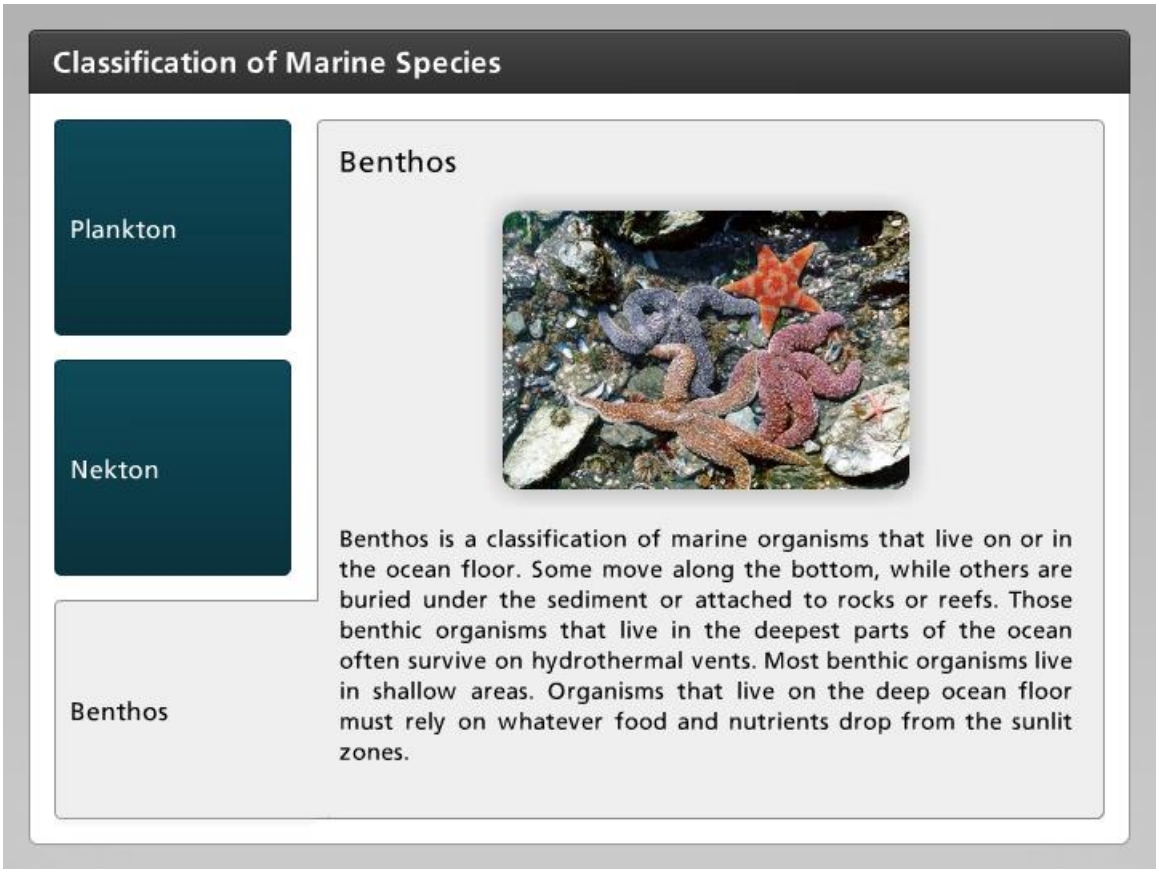
Module 12: Oceanography
Topic 5 Content: Classification of Marine Species Notes

Nekton



Any animals that can swim or propel themselves in the ocean are nekton. This includes many fish, mammals, and even marine reptiles. Most nekton can only live in a specific ocean zone, and though they move around and some migrate, they will spend their entire lifecycle in one particular zone.

Benthos



Benthos is a classification of marine organisms that live on or in the ocean floor. Some move along the bottom, while others are buried under the sediment or attached to rocks or reefs. Those benthic organisms that live in the deepest parts of the ocean often survive on hydrothermal vents. Most benthic organisms live in shallow areas. Organisms that live on the deep ocean floor must rely on whatever food and nutrients drop from the sunlit zones.