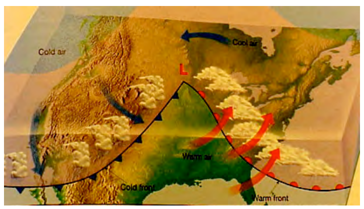
Midlatitude Cyclones

Equator-to-pole temperature gradient tilts pressure surfaces and produces westerly jets in midlatitudes

Waves in the jet induce divergence and convergence aloft, leading to surface highs and lows

Surface circulations amplify the wave by transporting heat to the north and south around the surface low



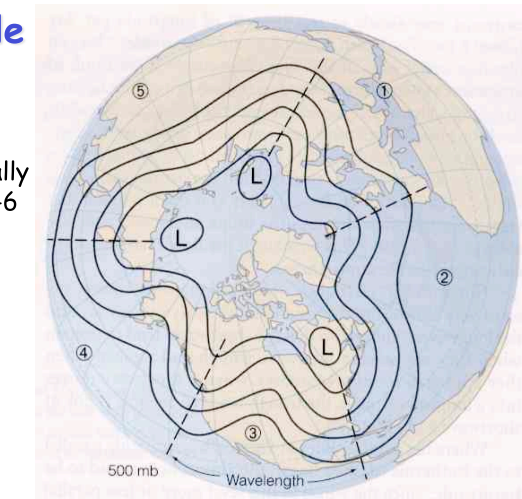
Resulting "cyclones" are crucial to the transport of energy through the middle latitudes

Lowers center of mass of atmosphere

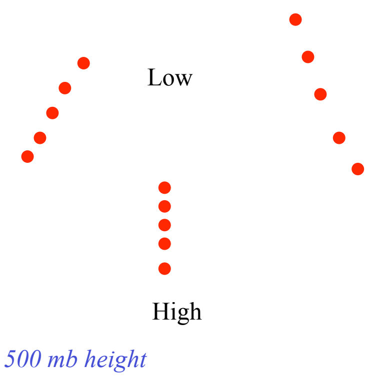
Large-Scale Setting

Hemispheric westerlies typically organized into 4-6 "long waves"

Where is upper level divergence most likely to occur?



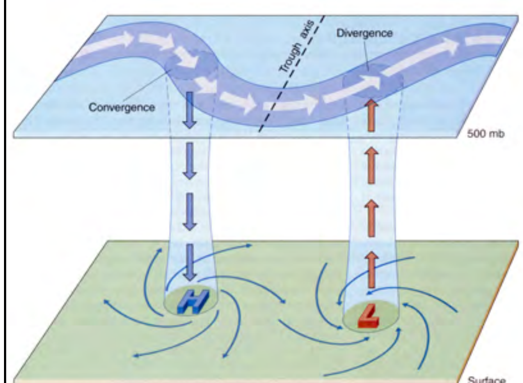
Convergence and Divergence



What initiates "cyclogenesis?"

*When upper-level **divergence** is stronger than lower-level **convergence**, more air is taken out at the top than is brought in at the bottom. Surface **pressure drops**, and the **low intensifies**, or "deepens."*

Divergence, Vorticity, and Tilt



- Maximum upper level convergence and divergence are *between* ridges and troughs
- Phase of developing wave "tilts" to the west with height

Initiation of a Cyclone

- Vertical cross-section looking North
- Imagine a short wave trough passes overhead
- Where will surface low develop?

Low DIV High

east

Initiation of a Cyclone

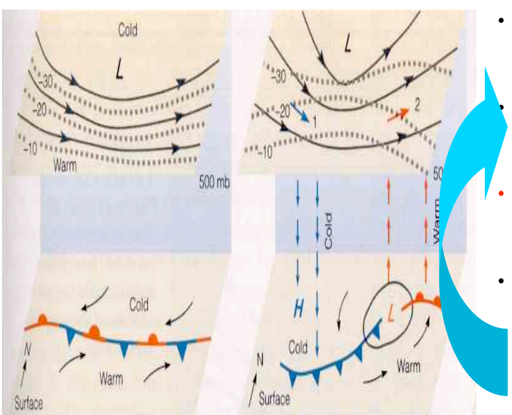
- Surface winds respond to surface pressure gradient … transport cold air southward behind the low and warm air northward ahead of low
- This amplifies the upper level trough and ridge
- Enhances upper-level divergence

Low DIV High

cool Low warm

east

Baroclinic Instability



- Upper level shortwave passes
- Upper level divergence -> sfc low
- Cold advection throughout lower troposphere
- Cold advection intensifies upper low
- Leads to more upper level divergence

Temperature advection is key!

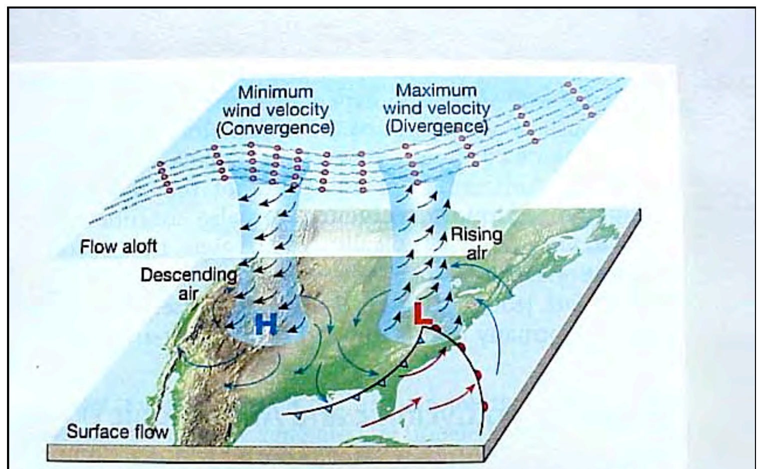


Figure 9–16 When air slows, the dots converge. When winds aloft are faster, the dots are farther apart.

Fronts

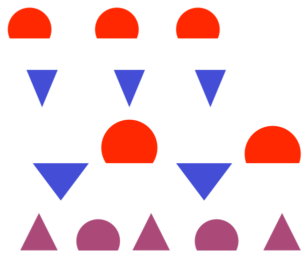
A Front - **is the boundary between air masses; normally refers to where this interface intersects the ground (in all cases except stationary fronts, the symbols are placed pointing to the direction of movement of the interface (front)**

Warm Front

Cold Front

Stationary Front

Occluded Front



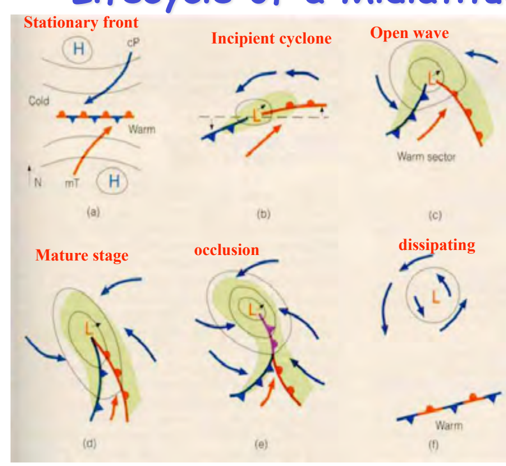
Characteristics of Fronts

- Across the front - look for one or more of the following:
  - Change of Temperature
  - Change of Moisture characteristic
    - RH, T_d
  - Change of Wind Direction
  - Change in direction of Pressure Gradient
  - Characteristic Precipitation Patterns

How do we decide what kind of front it is?

- **If warm air replaces colder air, the front is a warm front**
- **If cold air replaces warmer air, the front is a cold front**
- **If the front does not move, it is a stationary front**
- **Occluded fronts do not intersect the ground; the interface between the air masses is aloft**

Lifecycle of a Midlatitude Cyclone

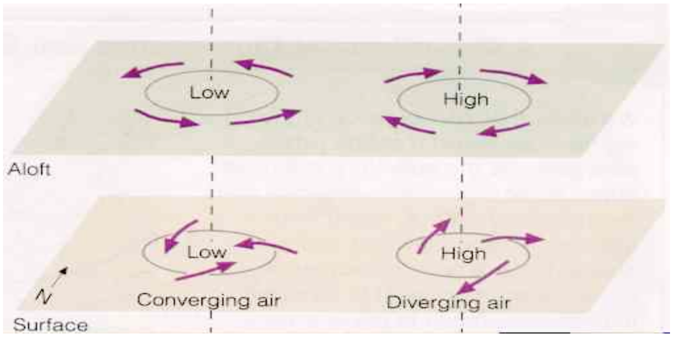


Green shading indicates precipitation

Takes several days to a week, and moves 1000's of km during lifecycle

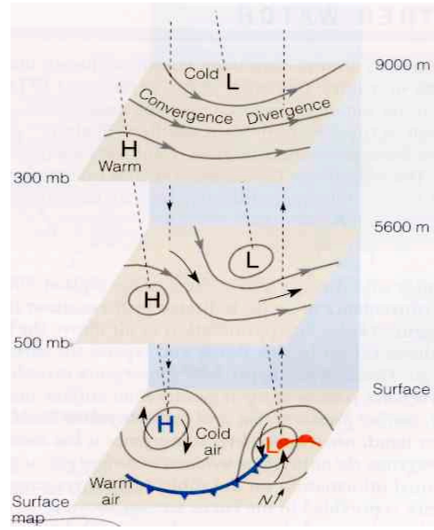
What maintains the surface low?

Imagine a surface low forming ***directly below*** upper level low



Surface convergence "fills in" the low

Surface divergence "undermines" the high

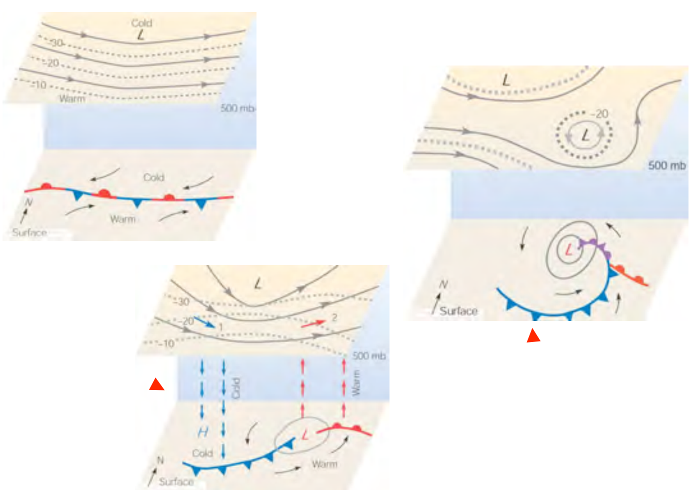


Actual vertical structure

Upper level low is ***tilted westward with height*** with respect to the surface.

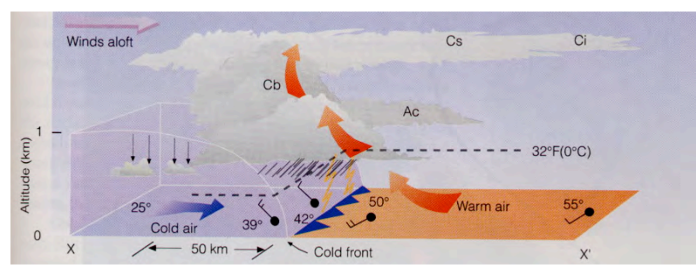
UPPER LEVEL DIVERGENCE INITIATES AND MAINTAINS A SURFACE LOW.

Cyclone Development



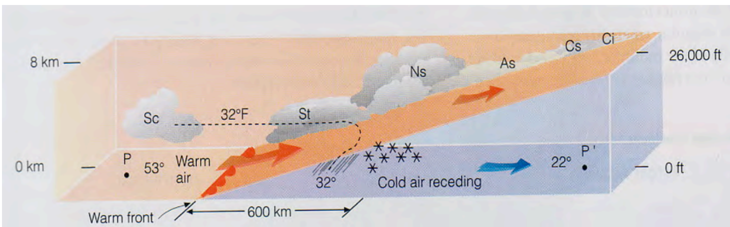
Typical Cold Front Structure

- Cold air replaces warm; leading edge is steeper due to friction at the ground
- Strong vertical motion and unstable air forms cumule clouds (thunderstorms!)
- Upper level winds blow ice crystals downwind creating cirrus and cirrostratus



Typical Warm Front Structure

- In an advancing warm front, warm air rides up over colder air at the surface; slope is not usually very steep
- Lifting of the warm air produces stratus clouds and precipitation well in advance of boundary
- At different points along the warm/cold air interface, the precipitation will experience different temperature histories as it falls to the ground



Summary of Cyclone Weather

Roles of convergence and divergence aloft

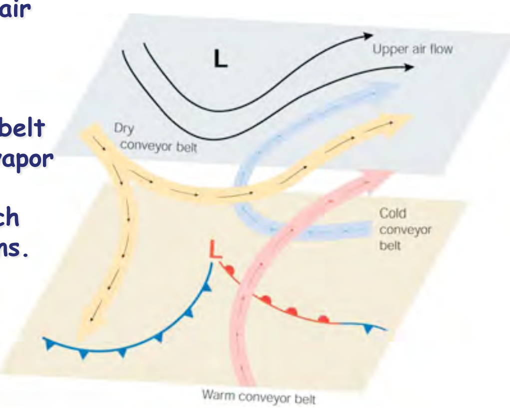
Pattern of clouds, precipitation, and temperatures on the ground

Conveyor Belt Model

This model describes rising and sinking air along three "conveyor belts"

A warm conveyor belt rises with water vapor above the cold conveyor belt which also rises and turns.

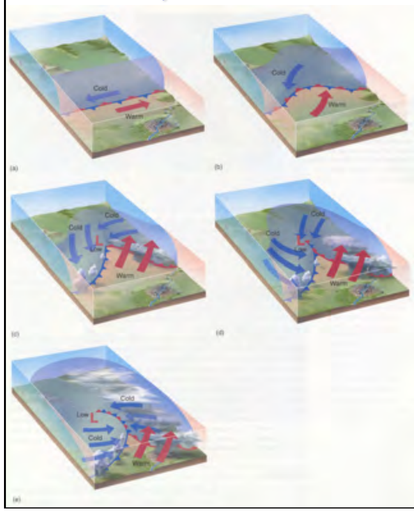
Finally the dry conveyor belt descends bringing clearer weather behind the storm.



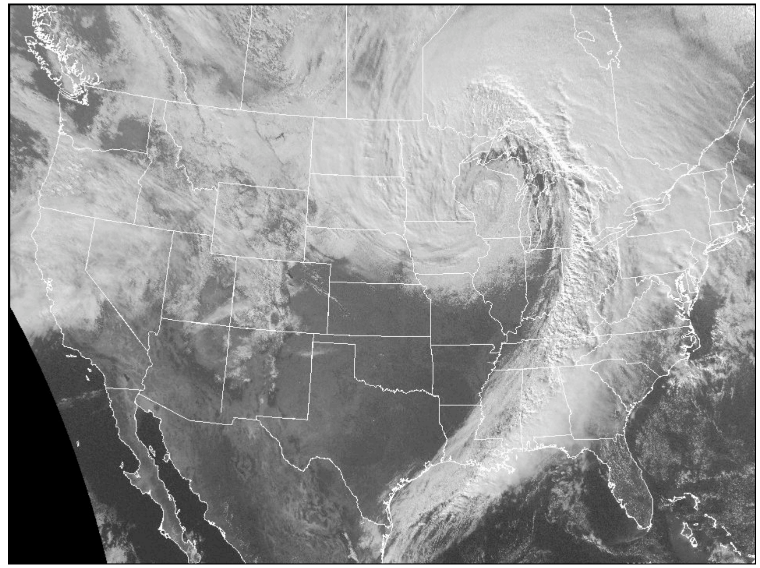
Follow the Energy!

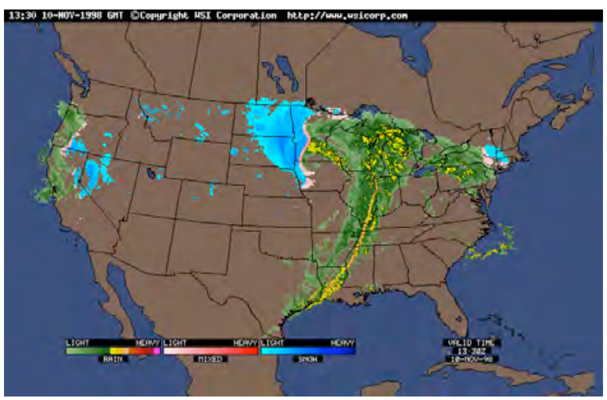
- Midlatitude storms release gravitational potential energy arising from the temperature differences found in the different air masses north and south of the polar front
- Cold, dense air pushes warmer, less dense air up and out of the way
- "Up warm, down cold"
- These storms let the atmosphere lower its center of mass … "air falling down"

Lifecycle of a Midlatitude Cyclone



- Pressure surfaces tilt because of N-S temperature contrast
- Passing wave initiates divergence and cyclonic vorticity
- Cold air undercuts warm, and flows south
- Cold air advection undermines upper trough, deepening it
- N-S mixing in cyclone eventually consumes the available potential energy, and cyclone dies





The "Big Picture"

- We've emphasized horizontal transport of energy to balance the planetary energy budget:
  - Hadley Cell
  - Subtropical divergence
  - Midlatitude cyclones and conveyor belts
- What about vertical motion?
  - "Up-warm, down cold"
  - "Up moist, down-dry"
- Severe weather is all about vertical motion, and represents local release of energy that contributes to planetary energy balance