What does the Moon look like tonight? How to read it with a child

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Peabody's Moon calendar draws tonight's Moon, names its shape and says how much is lit. How the page works, what the numbers mean, and where to look.

To see what the Moon looks like tonight, open Peabody's Moon calendar. The top of the page draws tonight's Moon, names its shape (one of eight, from new Moon to waning crescent), says how much of it is lit as a percentage, and gives one line a child can read about it. For where and when to look from your own street, Sky Tonight adds the direction and the time from a ZIP that never leaves your phone. This post explains what each part of those pages means, so you can read them together.

What the top of the page says

There are three things on the first panel.

- A drawing. The disc is shaded the way the Moon looks from the United States: lit on the right while it is growing, lit on the left while it is shrinking.
- A name and a number. For example "Waxing gibbous, 87% lit". The name is one of the eight phases; the number is how much of the face we see is sunlit.
- One line about it. For a waxing crescent, "A thin smile of light on the right. It grows a little every night." For a last quarter, "Half lit, the left half. It rises around midnight."

The numbers are worked out for 10 pm Mountain Time each night, from Peabody's own sky table. The shape is the same across the country on a given night; only the clock times change with where you are.

Reading the month below it

Under tonight's Moon is the current month, with the four dates that matter: new Moon, first quarter, full Moon and last quarter. Those dates are Mountain Time days, so on the coasts a quarter that falls late at night can land on the next date. Every month from November 2026 to December 2027 has its own page; November 2026 is the first and December 2027 the last.

The Moon calendar also prints a Moon journal: thirty blank Moons, one a night, for a child to colour in the part they see. By the end of the month they have drawn the whole trip themselves.

Where to look

The Moon calendar tells you the shape. Sky Tonight tells you where it is. Type a ZIP, tap the Moon, and the card says which way to face in compass words and how many fists up to look, or when it rises if it isn't up yet. One fist held at arm's length covers about ten degrees of sky.

A rough rule a child can learn from the shape alone:

- A crescent lit on the right is low in the west after sunset.
- A half lit on the right (first quarter) is high in the south at dusk, and up in the afternoon too.
- A full Moon rises in the east as the Sun sets and is up all night.
- A half lit on the left (last quarter) rises around midnight and is still up in the morning.

Three things to try tonight

1. Name the shape before you check. Then open the page and see if you were right. The Moon shapes quiz is the same game, ten Moons at a time.
2. Cover it with a thumbnail. At arm's length, a thumbnail hides the whole Moon, even when it looks huge near the ground.
3. Look again tomorrow, at the same time. The Moon will be in a different place and a different shape. That's the whole idea of a month.

Why the shape changes

The Sun always lights half of the Moon. As the Moon travels around Earth, about once every 29 and a half days, we see more or less of that lit half. The eight phases page draws them all, and our post on Moon phases for kids has a lamp-and-orange model you can make in a dark room.

Three questions grown-ups ask

Why doesn't the page say the time the Moon rises? The Moon calendar is the same for everyone, so it gives the shape. Rising and setting times depend on where you live, so they are on Sky Tonight, which knows your area from the first three digits of your ZIP.

Why does the percentage change during the night? The Moon moves all the time. Peabody's number is for 10 pm Mountain Time; by morning it is a little different, which is why the page says "about".

Does the page work in the Southern Hemisphere? The shapes and dates do, but the drawing is the wrong way round: south of the equator a growing Moon is lit on the left.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up. When the Moon is behind clouds, the library has stories at your child's reading level.

Sources

- The Moon's phase, its lit percentage and the quarter dates come from Peabody's own sky table, worked out with astronomy-engine (MIT license).
- NASA, Moon phases.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/what-does-the-moon-look-like-tonight