



Exploring Measurement—Ruler

Try this!

1. Take a paper ruler. It's 20 centimeters long—a fifth of a meter. Do you think you can cut it down to a nanometer in size?
2. Cut it in half so you have a piece that's 10 centimeters long.
3. Keep cutting the ruler in half as many times as you can. How small a piece can you get before you can't cut it any more?



What's going on?

You probably didn't manage to cut the paper ruler down to a nanometer. A nanometer is a billionth of a meter. That's really small!

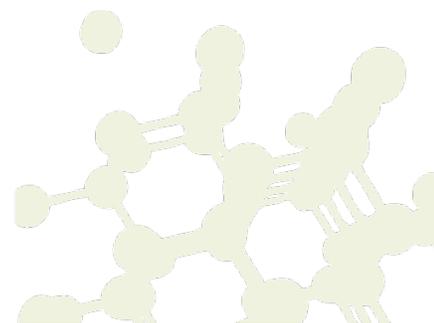
Most people can't cut the paper smaller than about a millimeter. (The lines on the ruler mark millimeters.) A nanometer is a million times smaller than that!

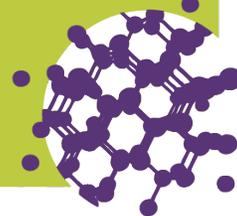
How is this nano?

A nanometer is a billionth of a meter. That's way too small to see, and definitely smaller than you can cut a piece of paper!

Nanoscale science focuses on things that are measured in nanometers, including atoms and molecules, the basic building blocks of our world. Scientists need special tools and equipment to work on the nanoscale. Regular tools like scissors are too big!

In the field of nanotechnology, scientists and engineers study the world of the nanometer and make new materials and tiny devices. Nanotechnology allows them to make things like smaller, faster computer chips and new medicines to treat diseases like cancer.





Exploring Measurement—Ruler

Learning objective

A nanometer is a billionth of a meter.

Materials

- Paper rulers
- Safety scissors
- Photocopy master for rulers

Credits and rights

This activity was adapted from: “Education and Outreach: Cutting It Down to Nano,” developed by the National Science Foundation-supported Internships in Public Science Education (IPSE) Educator Resources, Materials Research Science and Engineering Center on Nanostructured Materials and Interfaces at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The original activity is available at mrsec.wisc.edu/Edetc/IPSE/educators/activities/supplements/cuttingNano-Handout.pdf



This project was supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. ESI-0532536.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

Copyright 2008, Sciencenter, Ithaca, NY.

