

## MINERALS ARE COMPOSED OF ELEMENTS

BRITT ARGOW: To understand minerals, we need to first understand what minerals are made of: elements. This is the periodic table of the elements, something many of us are familiar with. This table is an ordered list of the basic building blocks of the universe, including common elements like hydrogen, oxygen and carbon. Everything – the Sun, the Earth, the trees, people, everything – is made up of combinations of one or more chemical elements. Some elements, such as silicon, iron and calcium, may combine with oxygen to form inorganic crystal structures. So here we have something that has formed naturally. It's inorganic, which means it's not living, and it's got a specific chemical composition and a characteristic crystal structure. Forms like this are called minerals, the building blocks of rocks. Identifying the minerals in a rock can provide yet another clue to the conditions that were present on the Earth at the time the rock formed. Some minerals form underwater, some only in the presence of oxygen. Scientists use careful study of minerals to support different theories about the past.