



# The Quark: " A Fundamental Constituent of Matter "

*Edited by Paul F. Kisak*

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A quark is an elementary particle and a fundamental constituent of matter. Quarks combine to form composite particles called hadrons, the most stable of which are protons and neutrons, the components of atomic nuclei. Due to a phenomenon known as color confinement, quarks are never directly observed or found in isolation; they can be found only within hadrons, such as baryons (of which protons and neutrons are examples), and mesons. For this reason, much of what is known about quarks has been drawn from observations of the hadrons themselves. Quarks have various intrinsic properties, including electric charge, mass, color charge and spin. Quarks are the only elementary particles in the Standard Model of particle physics to experience all four fundamental interactions, also known as fundamental forces (electromagnetism, gravitation, strong interaction, and weak interaction), as well as the only known particles whose electric charges are not integer multiples of the elementary charge. There are six types of quarks, known as flavors: up, down, strange, charm, top, and bottom. Up and down quarks have the lowest masses of all quarks. The heavier quarks rapidly change into up and down quarks through a process of particle decay: the transformation from a higher mass state to a lower mass state. Because of this, up and down quarks are generally stable and the most common in the universe, whereas strange, charm, bottom, and top quarks can only be produced in high energy collisions (such as those involving cosmic rays and in particle accelerators). For every quark flavor there is a corresponding type of antiparticle, known as an antiquark, that differs from the quark only in that some of its properties have equal magnitude but opposite sign. This book gives a comprehensive overview of the quark.

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