

# Stack Exchange, a free, online Question & Answer platform:

## *Use guidelines for hydrological modellers*

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### Stack Exchange as a resource for hydrological modelling

Stack Exchange is a well-known, free, online question-and-answer (Q&A) website. It is a readily available resource that we can use as a support system for hydrological modelling. Anyone can create a log-in and ask or answer a question, tagging it for specific themes. Questions and answers on the site are easy to search for and find online. Researchers, students, and practitioners are encouraged to add and tag model-related questions to the platform and to answer each other's questions.

By using a platform such as Stack Exchange, we can strengthen hydrological modelling community by:

- (1) making support for hydrological modelling more accessible, open-access, and transparent,**
- (2) becoming more efficient in providing support,** by putting questions and answers on an easily searchable website so that advanced users do not need to answer questions multiple times.

*The more people using the site to ask and answer questions, the more useful it will become!*

### Lecturers, instructors, advanced users

Consider transitioning from answering questions via email to answering them on Stack Exchange. Request that the person asking put their question on the Stack Exchange and email you the link to it. You can enter your response on the site, where anyone can find it. You can even post common Q&A's onto the site yourself in advance and direct students to try looking there first.

### Students, newer model users

Try posting your questions on Stack Exchange. You can email a link to the post to lecturers or advanced users and ask them to please answer on the site so that it is available to all. Soon there will be more modelling Q&As on the site so you can search existing posts for help first, before asking.

### Everyone

If you've worked through a problem on your own, with a group, or with an instructor in person, do the community a favour and post it as a Q&A on Stack Exchange. One person can post the question and another can answer, or one can post both Q&A. This allows anyone in the world to find the Q&A and so you may even get suggestions of alternative efficient solutions from others online.

*Have you ever been stuck trying to get a hydrological model to work, not able to find the solution in a manual or from colleagues, and struggling to make contact an expert with the time to assist you?*

*Are you an advanced modeller who would like to help others more, but don't have much time for meetings or troubleshooting via email?*

*Are you an instructor who spends a lot of time answering the same modelling questions repeatedly?*

# How does Stack Exchange work?

## A brief overview



Stack Exchange is a network of question-and-answer (Q&A) websites, each with a different focus topic, such as computer programming or earth science (sites list: <https://stackexchange.com/sites>). The original site, called Stack Overflow, is a Q&A site for computer programming created by Jeff Atwood and Joel Spolsky in 2008.

The **Earth Science** site (<https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/>) hosts both hydrology and modelling questions. If there are enough users asking and answering hydrology and hydrological modelling questions, a more specific site could be launched in the future.

Stack Exchange sites have features that allow them to be moderated by their user community:

- **Anyone** can search for and view existing Q&A strings on the site, no log-in required.
- **Create an account/log-in to post:** One needs to create an account and log in to the site to post a new question or an answer or to add votes, edits, or comments.
- **Tags:** Tags are keywords, or search terms, that users assign to their questions to help others find them. If you want to find out if a question has already been addressed, Google searches often bring up Stack Exchange Q&A posts. You can also search within Stack Exchange sites using tags. Please use "hydrology" and "modelling" to tag your modelling questions.
- **Reputation points:** Users earn points for posting questions and answers and building up points allows you access to more advanced features. Users with more points can: 'upvote' posts, propose new keywords for tagging, put themselves up for election to be a moderator, etc. <https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/help/whats-reputation>
- **Upvoting:** Users with 15+ reputation points can 'upvote' questions and answers that they find useful. There can be many answers posted for one question. When an answer has been 'accepted' by the asker, this answer will be shown at the top of the list. Other answers are listed in order of the number of votes they received. The asker can change which one is their 'accepted' answer as new answers are posted and upvoted by others over time. <https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/help/privileges/vote-up>
- **Moderation & disputes:** Elected moderators are responsible for managing the site, through activities such as following up on flagged posts, locking and protecting posts, suspending users, and deleting the worst posts on the site. Stack Exchange sites have a "meta" section for users to ask questions about the site and settle disputes in a separate forum to the Q&A.

*For more information about how Stack Exchange and the Earth Science site works:*

<https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/tour>

<https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/help>

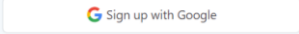
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stack\\_Exchange](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stack_Exchange)

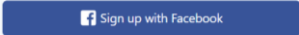
# Step by step guide to using Stack Exchange for hydrological modelling support – searching, asking, and answering

## Getting started - create an account

1. Go to the Earth Sciences Stack Exchange site: <https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/>
2. Create an account with a display name, email, password.
3. Go through the site tour (appears when you create your account): <https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/tour>
4. Access & edit your profile: Once your profile exists you can edit things like your display name, profile icon, and specify your email preferences (e.g., if you want be notified if someone answers your question, etc). When you are logged in, you can open your profile by clicking on your profile image on the top bar at the right. Here you can also see a log of your questions, answers, reputation points, etc.

Create your Earth Science Stack Exchange account. It's free and only takes a minute.

 Sign up with Google

 Sign up with Facebook

Display name

Email

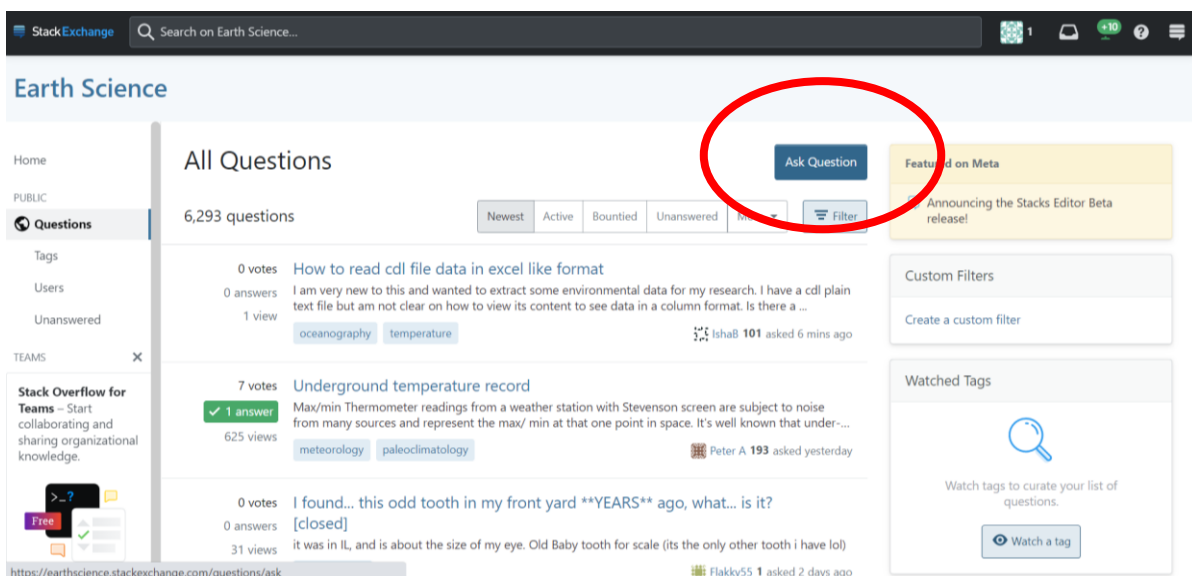
Password

Passwords must contain at least eight characters, including at least 1 letter and 1 number.

Opt-in to receive occasional product updates, user research invitations, company announcements, and digests.

## Asking questions

1. **Log in to your profile** on the Earth Sciences Stack Exchange site: <https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/>
2. Before posting a question, **do a search** to see if the question has already been asked. If it has been asked and answered, and you find the posts helpful and you have 15+ reputation points, you can 'upvote' questions and answers using the arrows at the side of the posts.
3. To post a new question: **Click on "Ask Question"**



The screenshot shows the Earth Science Stack Exchange website. The top navigation bar includes the site name and a search bar. The main content area is titled 'All Questions' and displays a list of questions. The 'Ask Question' button is highlighted with a red circle. The left sidebar contains navigation options like 'Home', 'PUBLIC', 'Questions', 'Tags', 'Users', and 'Unanswered'. The right sidebar features 'Featured on Meta', 'Custom Filters', and 'Watched Tags'.

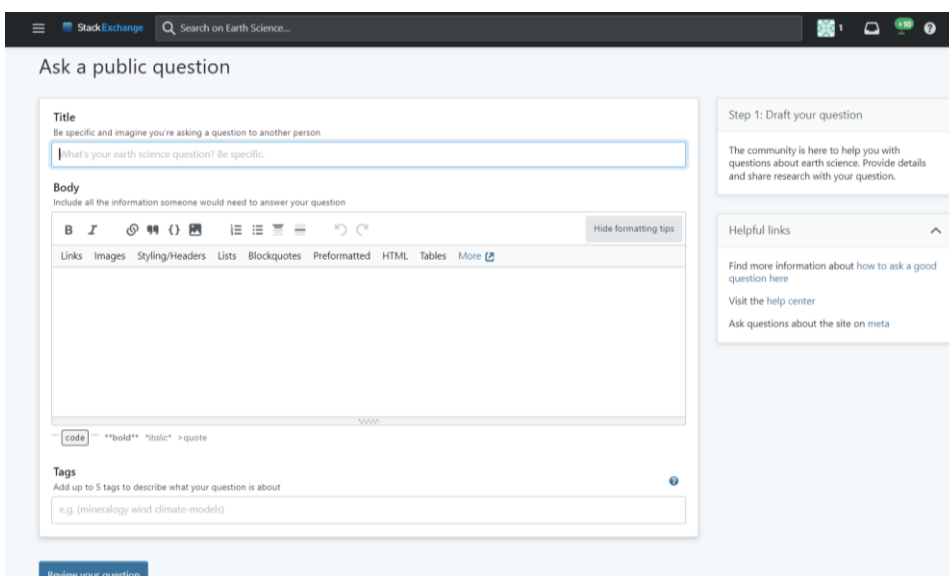
4. **Add a title, body text and tags for your question.** Tips for writing questions for Stack Exchange are given at the end of this guide, and on the Stack Exchange website.

Use the name of the modelling software tool in your question title and also give the tool name and version in the body of your question (e.g., ACRU4, SWAT+ or SWAT2012, etc).

Tag the question with “**hydrology**” and “**modelling**,” plus any other relevant tags of your choice.

Tags must come from the list of tags for the Earth Sciences site. Other potentially relevant tags available include: hydrogeology, water, groundwater, water-vapour, water-table, watershed (Users with 150 reputation points or more can propose new tags.)

Full tags list: <https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/tags>

The image shows a screenshot of the 'Ask a public question' page on Stack Exchange. The page has a dark header with the Stack Exchange logo and a search bar. The main content area is light blue and contains a form for creating a question. The form has three main sections: 'Title', 'Body', and 'Tags'. The 'Title' section has a text input field with the placeholder text 'What's your earth science question? Be specific.' The 'Body' section has a rich text editor with various formatting options (bold, italic, link, image, list, blockquote, preformatted, HTML, tables) and a 'Hide formatting tips' button. The 'Tags' section has a text input field with the placeholder text 'Add up to 5 tags to describe what your question is about' and an example 'e.g. (mineralogy wind climate-models)'. To the right of the form, there is a 'Step 1: Draft your question' section with a message: 'The community is here to help you with questions about earth science. Provide details and share research with your question.' Below this is a 'Helpful links' section with three links: 'Find more information about how to ask a good question here', 'Visit the help center', and 'Ask questions about the site on meta'. At the bottom of the form, there is a blue button labeled 'Review your question'.

5. **Review & post:** After drafting your question you get to review it; see how it will appear on the site and proofread it one more time. When satisfied, hit “Post.”
6. **Send the link to an expert:** Any Stack Exchange user could see and answer your question. However, if you already know an expert or advanced model user who is likely to be able to answer your question, you may wish to contact them directly with a link to your question on Stack Exchange and encourage them to answer it on the site so everyone can access it. This can prevent them from having to answer the same question again for someone else.
7. **Editing after posting:** After you’ve posted a question, if you realise that you want to change the phrasing or add a clarifying detail (perhaps prompted by the answers and comments coming in response to your post), you can edit your question if you are logged in.
8. **Review the answers, accept, vote:** Once people have posted answers, and you’ve tried some of them out, you can “accept” an answer that has worked for you. If you have 15+ reputation points you can also “upvote” other useful answers.

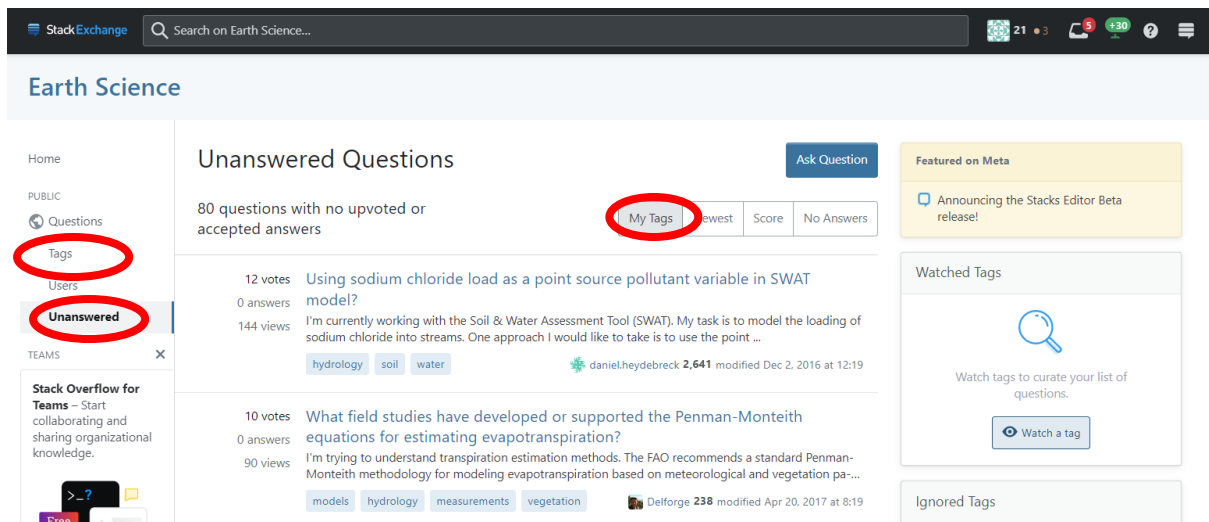
## Answering questions

1. **Log in to your profile** on the Earth Sciences Stack Exchange site:  
<https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/>
2. **Find a question:** Someone may have contacted you to answer a question that they've asked on the site and sent a link.

You can search for questions using keywords of your choice in the search bar (top of page) or you can use the panel on the left to find questions with one or more specified tags (e.g., "hydrology" and "modelling"). Using this panel, you can also choose to look for questions from specific users and for unanswered questions only (note: you can add new answers to ones that have answers already).

Using "My tags" will find posts related to tags that you have elected to follow (in your account profile settings) and tags you have used previously when posting.

*Click on the title of a question (blue font) to open the post fully.*



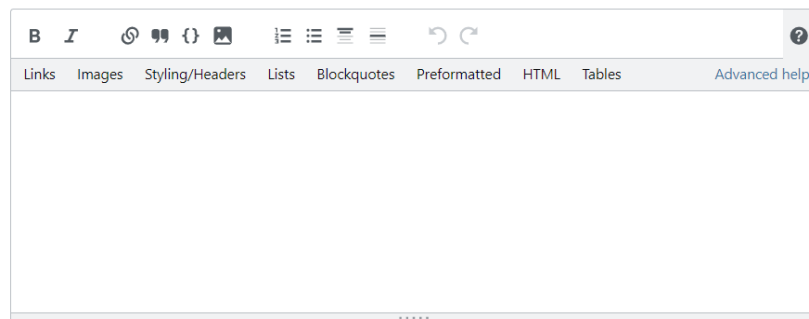
The screenshot shows the Earth Science Stack Exchange website. The main content area is titled "Unanswered Questions" and displays 80 questions with no upvoted or accepted answers. A filter menu is visible, with "My Tags" highlighted by a red circle. Below the filter, two questions are listed:

- Question 1: "Using sodium chloride load as a point source pollutant variable in SWAT model?" (12 votes, 0 answers, 144 views). The question text is: "I'm currently working with the Soil & Water Assessment Tool (SWAT). My task is to model the loading of sodium chloride into streams. One approach I would like to take is to use the point ...". Tags: hydrology, soil, water. User: daniel.heydebreck (2,641 reputation), modified Dec 2, 2016 at 12:19.
- Question 2: "What field studies have developed or supported the Penman-Monteith equations for estimating evapotranspiration?" (10 votes, 0 answers, 90 views). The question text is: "I'm trying to understand transpiration estimation methods. The FAO recommends a standard Penman-Monteith methodology for modeling evapotranspiration based on meteorological and vegetation pa...". Tags: models, hydrology, measurements, vegetation. User: Delforge (238 reputation), modified Apr 20, 2017 at 8:19.

On the left sidebar, the "Unanswered" filter is also highlighted with a red circle. The right sidebar contains sections for "Featured on Meta", "Watched Tags", and "Ignored Tags".

3. **Post an answer:** At the very bottom of every question post you will find a box titled "Your Answer" where you can enter your answer and post it (if you are logged in). This will be located below any previously posted answers to the question.

Your Answer



The screenshot shows the "Your Answer" input field. The field is empty and has a rich text editor toolbar above it. The toolbar includes buttons for bold (B), italic (I), link, unlink, list, blockquote, preformatted, HTML, and tables. Below the toolbar, there are tabs for "Links", "Images", "Styling/Headers", "Lists", "Blockquotes", "Preformatted", "HTML", and "Tables". An "Advanced help" link is also visible.

[Post Your Answer](#)

*Answering your own question:* You can post an answer to your own question. You just will not receive any reputation points for your answer, or for it being upvoted.

## Tips to asking a good question

Before you post a new question, do a search on the site to make sure your question hasn't been answered already.

When you decide to post a new question:

- **Summarize the problem:** State the problem as clearly and straightforwardly as possible at the very beginning of the post. Add necessary details afterwards.
- **Be specific:**
  - Avoid very broad or open-ended questions that are likely to have many answers or primarily illicit opinions.
  - If the question is specific to a modelling software tool, provide the name of the tool in the title of the question and provide the name and version number in the body of the tool. It may also help to specify the type of computer and operating system you are using.
  - If necessary, break up your query into multiple, more specific questions. These can be linked to one another (you can include a weblink to a previous question in the body of a new question when it is a follow-on issue).
- **Describe what you've tried already:** When appropriate, describe what you've already tried in an effort to solve a problem on your own, and what happened when you did so. This can include describing research you've already done to try to find the answer (you can include citations, links, etc) and why this was insufficient to resolve the issue.

More guidance:

<https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/help/asking>

Example post:

<https://earthscience.stackexchange.com/questions/24081/cannot-initialize-mike-1d-failed-when-solving-for-a-steady-state-solution-wat/24084#24084>