

**Read this before you begin!** Sharks have several rows of teeth called denticles. Generally, only the single row along the outer edge of the jaws is functional at any one time. The others are reserves, constantly moving forward to replace worn out or missing teeth lost during feeding. Each shark species has teeth specially adapted to bite, tear, and/or crush its prey. Sharks that crush shellfish, crabs, and lobsters have flat teeth, while those that cut or tear fish and squid have sharp teeth with saw-like edges. Sharks that grab fish and swallow them whole have spear-like teeth. Scientists and fishermen can use the shape and features of the teeth along with other characteristics of a shark to determine its species.

**To identify these shark teeth:** Sharks lose a lot of teeth, many of which can be found on beaches.

Identification of shark teeth without the shark they came from can be difficult, but, with the help of shark biologists, we've assembled a few common shark teeth into a classification key for quick identification.

- Select a tooth to identify.
- Start in box "A" and compare the features of the tooth with the description.
- Choose the answer that is most accurate and proceed to the box indicated.
- Continue until the tooth matches one of the identified teeth. If your selection has been accurate, the shark species has been identified. To verify your identification, refer one of these online resources:

[https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/sharks/fossils/fossil\\_modernsharkteeth.html](https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/sharks/fossils/fossil_modernsharkteeth.html)

[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/species/sharks/rec\\_shark\\_id\\_placard.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/species/sharks/rec_shark_id_placard.pdf)

***Our actions can save or threaten sharks.***

*Today, human activities have reduced worldwide shark populations an estimated 70-90% because of overfishing, bycatch, habitat alteration, marine debris, and climate change.*

***What can you do for sharks?***

*Take a pass on shark Products of any kind, fish responsibly, consume only Gulf of Mexico seafood, and learn and teach all you can!*

***And don't forget to track Gulf of Mexico sharks at [www.OCEARCH.org](http://www.OCEARCH.org)!***



