

How Far Away Was That Lightning Strike? Why Divide by Five Works.



Speed of Light



Speed of Sound

When you see a flash of lightning, start counting seconds until you hear the thunder. If you divide the number of seconds by five that will tell you approximately how many miles away the lightning strike was.

So, how does that work? Think about it this way.

The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second - not per hour - per SECOND! Now that's pretty darn fast! In fact, for the distances we are talking about we can consider it instant. In other words, the lightning occurred at the time you saw it.

But sound is really slow compared to light. The speed of sound is 768 miles per hour. If you divide 768 mph by 3600 (the number of seconds in an hour) you get about .2 miles per second. So, how long would it take for sound to travel a whole mile? About 5 seconds.