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qua·ter·nar·y  (kwŏt ə-nĕr'ē, kwə-tŭr nə-rē)

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adj.

1. Consisting of four; in fours.
2. **Quaternary** Of, relating to, or being the period of geologic time from about 2.6 million years ago to the present, the more recent of the two periods of the Cenozoic Era. It is characterized by the appearance and development of humans and includes the Pleistocene and Holocene Epochs. See Table at [geologic time](#).
3. **Chemistry** Relating to a nonhydrogen atom bonded to four other nonhydrogen atoms, especially to four carbon atoms: *a quaternary nitrogen atom*.

n. pl. **qua·ter·nar·ies**

1. The number four.
2. The member of a group that is fourth in order.
3. **Quaternary** The Quaternary Period.

[Latin *quaternārius*, from *quaternī*, by fours, from *quater*, four times; see **k^wetwer-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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