

How to Succeed in Chemistry Class (<http://chemistry.about.com>)

Are you taking a chemistry class? Chemistry may be challenging, but there are many things you can do to help yourself succeed. Here are some tips to help you do well in chemistry.

Be Prepared for Class

Chemistry is a lot harder than it needs to be if you're learning essential math skills at the same time. You should be familiar with the following concepts before setting foot in the chemistry classroom.

- writing and solving algebraic equations
- exponents
- scientific notation
- negative numbers
- logarithms
- fractions

Get Your Head on Straight

Some people psych themselves out of doing well in chemistry. It's not impossibly hard... you can do this! However, you need to set reasonable expectations for yourself. This involves keeping up with class and building bit by bit on what you learned the previous day. Chemistry is not a class you cram for on the last day. Be prepared to study.

- Take responsibility for your learning. If you are confused, let your instructor know this. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- View chemistry class as an opportunity rather than a chore. Find something you like about chemistry and focus on that. Having a positive attitude can be a key to your success.

To Be Successful in Chemistry You Should Attend Class

Attendance is related to success. It's partly a matter of more exposure to the subject and it's partly about getting on your instructor's good side. Teachers are much more understanding if they feel you've put forth an honest effort. If your grade is borderline, you won't gain the benefit of the doubt by disrespecting the time and effort your instructor put into lectures and labs. Being there is a start, but there is more to attendance than simply showing up.

- Arrive on time. Many instructors review concepts at the beginning of class, often indicating likely test questions and going over problems that were difficult for most of the class.
- Take notes. If it's written on the board, copy it down. If your instructor says it, write it down. Examples given on the board often show a method of solving a chemistry problem that is different from what you have in your textbook.
- Sit near the front. It's a matter of attitude. Sitting near the front engages you with the lecture, which can enhance your learning. It's easier to slack if you sit in the back.

Work the Problem Sets

Working problems is the surest route to passing chemistry.

- Don't copy someone else's work. Do the problems yourself.
- Don't look at the answers to problems (if available) until you've gotten an answer yourself.
- You may understand how a problem is worked, but don't make the mistake of assuming that is a substitute for working through the problem on your own. Work through examples yourself. Consult the worked problem if you get stuck.
- Write down what you are trying to answer in a problem. Write down all the facts that you are given. Sometimes seeing what you know written down this way will help you recall the method for obtaining the solution.
- If you get the opportunity, help someone else work problems. If you can explain the problem to someone else, there's a good chance you truly understand it.

Read the Textbook

The easiest way to master chemistry concepts and problems is to see examples of those problems. You can pass some classes without opening or even having the text. Chemistry is not one of those classes. You'll use the text for example and most likely will have problem assignments in the book. The text will contain a periodic table, glossary, and helpful information regarding lab techniques and units. Have a text, read it, and bring it with you to class.

Be Smart on Tests

You need to know the information covered by tests, but it's also important to study for tests and take them the right way.

- Don't cram for a test. Don't put yourself in a position where you have to stay up all night studying. Keep up in class and study a little every day.
- Get sleep before a test. Eat breakfast. You'll perform better if you are energized.
- Read through the test before answering any questions. This will help you know what to expect and will allow you to identify the questions worth the most points.
- Be sure to answer the high-point questions. You may end up working the test backwards, but that's okay. This is especially important if you are afraid you might run out of time taking the test.
- Review returned tests. Make sure you understand what you did wrong and how to do it right. Expect to see these questions on the final exam! Even if you never see the questions again, understanding how to get the right answer will help you master the next section of the class.

Traps to Avoid So You Can Pass Chemistry

Let's start out with a list of common mistakes students make which can sabotage their success with chemistry. Engaging in one or two of these may not break you, but these are dangerous practices. Avoid them if you want to pass chemistry!

- Thinking you can learn the math prerequisites at the same time as chemistry.
- Procrastinating! Putting off studying for a test until the night before, writing up labs the night before they are due, working problems the same day they are due.
- Skipping class, missing class because of sports and/or field trips for other classes
- Relying on someone else to take notes.
- Expecting the teacher to offer extra credit or to drop a low grade.
- Copying the answers to the problems from someone else or from the text (for books that give the answers).
- Thinking a good grade early on means the class will remain the same level of difficulty or that you won't need to study later.