

How to Learn Organic Chemical Reactions

- **This is "Organic Chemistry for Dummies" on steroids.**
- **Fire your tutor, you won't need one.**
- **Reactions you can learn and do!**
- **You won't need your textbook.**
- **Get an 'A' in organic, I did.**
- **"Please help. I go class, read my book, and do the problems, but it doesn't help for the exams."**

This is "Organic Chemistry for Dummies" on steroids.

There are many books that have been written to make organic chemistry easy. I've looked at many of them. This is what I think they have in common. They are the "Reader's Digest" version of your textbook. They are like a math book that skips topics that are too hard or too lengthy to explain.

"A Guide to Organic Chemistry Mechanisms" is the opposite. It skips all of the simple parts of organic chemistry. They are already well covered by all of the textbooks and additional guides. Most students do not need my help to learn them.

I know there are students that struggle with stereochemistry, nomenclature, conformations, etc., but comparatively, reaction mechanisms are a still greater challenge. "A Guide to Organic Chemistry Mechanisms" makes learning reaction mechanisms a task that can be reasonably accomplished. I don't think "Organic Chemistry for Dummies" or any other guide books succeed as well.

Fire your tutor, you won't need one.

Ok, that may be an exaggeration. You could check my blog for "How to Learn Organic Chemistry" [here](#) or [here](#). You won't find that I suggest that someone else can do your studying for you. Reading about parallel parking won't help as much as doing it. You can't learn long division by memorization or getting wrong answers. There aren't any shortcuts. You learn through success. The chemistry problems are broken down so there is a level you CAN DO. This is the best way to learn, but if you wish to do it the hard way, see [flash cards](#).

Reactions you can learn and do!

Look at the examples, [here](#), [here](#), or [here](#). Start with [Part A](#). Can you figure out which electrons are moving? This is the logic of the reaction. You can do this example without looking at your textbook or any other notes. You may have to think at little, but many students find the problems fun to do.

You won't need your textbook.

How to

Go back to "Reactions you can learn and do". Did you need your textbook to do them? In class, I frequently found students were not using that expensive glossy, hard cover organic chemistry textbook. However, a ninety page organic chemistry mechanism workbook is not a substitute for a 1200 page complete textbook. You will be able to do the problems in *A Guide to Organic Chemistry Mechanisms*, but you should still use your textbook.

Get an 'A' in organic, I did.

This is a series of [messages](#) exchanged with someone that purchased "A Guide to Organic Chemistry Mechanisms". He used the book, did the problems, and oh, he got an A. Your mileage may vary, but if you can't do the problems in *A Guide to Organic Chemistry Mechanisms*, you won't be able to do the problems in your book or on a test. Similarly, I cannot guarantee that if you can do the problems in *A Guide to Organic Chemistry Mechanisms* that you will be able to solve the problems in your book or on a test. However, you will have the tools to solve the problems and at least statistically, it has improved my students' scores on the ACS organic chemistry exam by 20 percentile points.

"Please help. I go class, read my book, and do the problems, but it doesn't help for the exams."

I don't know the teaching philosophy of your professor. Some professors ask difficult questions as if to prove organic chemistry is difficult. Some professors are dedicated to terms, form, and format. If you like things to make logical sense, then I may be able to help you.

There are books like *Made Easy*, for Dummies, *Demystified*, etc., that are like a Reader's Digest version of organic chemistry. I have not found them to give a clearer explanation than you would find anywhere else, just shorter.

In my classes, I focussed far more on mechanisms than the introductory subjects that some students worry about. I found most students would be able to name compounds, draw the conformations, stereochemistry, Newman projections, etc. if I just gave them enough practice over the course. I did not pack it in early, but I just kept using examples throughout the course.

However, reactions are the 900 lb gorilla. For anyone really wishing to learn organic chemistry, I would suggest they learn the mechanisms (even if your professor does not emphasize them). I learned more chemistry from mechanisms than any other way (a mechanism is just a proposed explanation of how a reaction takes place). This is where many students find the exam problems are different. If you are using flash cards or pattern matching for solutions, the exam problems may look quite different. If you solve them mechanistically, they are the same.

If you wish to learn reaction mechanisms, I suggest you look at the book, "A Guide to Organic Chemistry Mechanisms". I can't say it would be for you or not, but my classes have had [excellent results](#) with using it.
