

Success in AP Chemistry

In this adventure of AP Chemistry that you have elected to embark on, it is important for you to know that the college level material you will have to tackle will be much more sophisticated than any material you have previously covered in your academic career. In addition, the amount of material that you will face and the pace will be more than that of any other course you have previously experienced. These two facts require you to operate on a very high level of maturity if you want to be successful.

In the section that follows, you will find a list of behaviors that have helped AP Chemistry students to be successful.

1. **Read assignments thoroughly.** Pretend, when reading, that your book is your only teacher. Much of the learning process occurs outside of class. Readings outside of class will often be the sole source of material you are expected to know and understand. If you expect the teacher to repeat the contents of the book in class, you are in the wrong level. In the earlier years of your education, every fact you needed to know was said in class. In an AP class, class discussion will direct your learning, give you an opportunity to ask questions, and help provide connections to ideas not covered in the text.
2. **Read ahead of schedule as much as possible.** Given the large amount of material, the teacher chooses what to discuss in class with great care. But the teacher may not choose to discuss what you, being who you are, would not understand from the book. If you do not at least keep up with the reading schedule, you will miss the best, and perhaps only, opportunity to identify and to address the things that you did not understand in the readings.
3. **Do the outside assignments in advance of deadlines.** Homework serves several purposes. In an AP course the homework assignments outside of class must be looked at as a self test. Doing work early gives you a chance to discover what you are struggling with and to ask questions about those topics. Also, if you know early on what the assignments are asking of you, then you can listen more effectively in class to understand what you need to know for the assignment. You know and I know this is not a matter of doing more work; it is just a matter of discipline in planning and scheduling.
4. **Take notes and ask questions in class.** With more material to choose from, you can be sure what your teacher chooses to do and to say in class is truly critical. And you can trust that what your teacher is doing is giving you an experience, information, or insights that you WILL NOT get from working with the book. Do not trust that you can figure out things you missed in class by looking at the book later. Take notes and ask questions in class.
5. **Make your old work part of your studying.** Another major purpose of your homework is to prepare you for the challenges of the test. At any point in the course you should be able to go back and look at old work and say, "I know exactly why I got that grade. I know what I did right. I know what not to do again." If you can't, ask your teacher. You need to do this. In the early years of your education, the teachers drilled you, assessed your mistakes, and steered you in class. As you mature as a learner, you must take up more of this work yourself and become a reflective learner.
6. **Use your classmates wisely and appropriately.** Study groups are a great thing. There is so much material in this course that you are sure to miss something. Discussion of the material with other students will not only give you another perspective, but will also make sure you do not miss something. It also lets you check that you are reaching the same level of understanding as other students.

However, doing work with other students, versus simply discussing the work, is dangerous territory. The obvious danger is the potential for cheating, or just taking someone else's work for your own. If you find yourself leaning over another person's work to copy their words or pictures, or you hear yourself saying "Repeat that (or 'Slow down') so I can write it down," you have probably crossed the line of academic integrity. The other danger here is that, without knowing it, you have cheated yourself of a learning experience by slipping into a pattern of "follow the leader." Remember to regard your fellow students as equals. Everyone has something to bring to the table. But do not trust any fellow student as an infallible expert.

7. **Do extra reading and work.** Every AP student finds, at some time, that he/she still doubts his/her understanding of the material. In this case, extra work is an excellent self test, confidence booster, and source of additional questions.