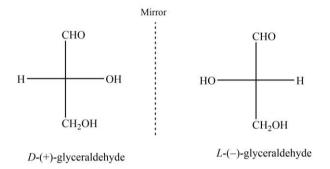
❖ Determination of Relative and Absolute Configuration (Octant Rule Excluded) with Special Reference to Lactic Acid, Alanine & Mandelic Acid

The three-dimensional character of organic molecules can be labeled absolutely or relative to some reference compound. In this section, we will study the relative and absolute configuration of various organic molecules with special reference to lactic acid, alanine & mandelic acid.

> Relative Configuration

The relative configuration of an organic stereoisomer may simply be defined as the correlation between two enantiomers even if the absolute configuration is unknown.

The elucidation of the absolute configuration of a chiral molecule was not possible before 1951 due to the absence of any such method. Therefore, the assignment of various groups in space was carried out relative to the groups of a standard reference compound.



One of the most popular reference compounds for the determination of stereochemical notation of chiral organic molecules is glyceraldehyde.

General route to assign D-L nomenclature: All the compounds that can be obtained or transformed to D-(+)-glyceraldehyde are said to belong to D-series, whereas all the compounds that can be obtained or transformed to L-(-)-glyceraldehyde are said to belong to L-series. These predictions find their base in the fact that if no bond breaking-formation occurs at the chiral center, the configuration is retained. For instance, consider the case of (-)-glyceric acid.

H OH
$$\frac{\text{COOH}}{\text{Oxidation}}$$
 OH $\frac{\text{Br}_2/\text{H}_2\text{O}}{\text{oxidation}}$ OH $\frac{\text{CH}_2\text{OH}}{\text{CH}_2\text{OH}}$ OH $\frac{D\text{-(+)-glyceraldehyde}}{D\text{-(-)-glyceric acid}}$

Since it can be obtained from D-(+)-glyceraldehyde, its name should be D-(-)-glyceric acid even though it is laevorotatory.



Determination of Relative Configuration Lactic Acid, Alanine & Mandelic Acid: The configuration of lactic acid, alanine & mandelic acid relative to glyceraldehyde (i.e., D-L configurations) can be obtained using the following chemical routes.

i) Determination of relative configuration of lactic acid:

As we know that lactic acid is optically active, and therefore, is bound to exist as enantiomeric pair. The configuration of one enantiomer relative to the glyceraldehyde can be obtained as given below.

It is obvious that, unlike D-(+)-glyceraldehyde, the D configuration of lactic acid is found to be levorotatory.

Since lactic acid is optically active, the configuration of mirror image isomer relative to the glyceraldehyde can be obtained as given below.

It is obvious that, unlike L-(-)-glyceraldehyde, the L configuration of lactic acid is found to be dextrorotatory.



ii) Determination of relative configuration of alanine:

As we know that alanine is optically active, and therefore, is bound to exist as enantiomeric pair. The configuration of one enantiomer relative to the glyceraldehyde can be obtained as given below.

It is obvious that, unlike L-(-)-glyceraldehyde, the L configuration of alanine is found to be dextrorotatory.

Since alanine is optically active, the configuration of mirror image isomer relative to the glyceraldehyde can be obtained as given below.

CHO

H

COOH

COOH

COOH

COOH

COOH

COOH

COOH

COOH

COOH

N3

SN2

H

CH3

CH3

D-(-)-2-bromo propanoic acid

$$Pt/H_2$$

COOH

 Pt/H_2
 $COOH$
 $COOH$
 $COOH$
 $COOH$
 $COOH$
 $COOH$
 CH_3
 CH_3
 CH_3
 $COOH$
 CH_3
 CH_3
 $COOH$
 CH_3
 CH_3
 $COOH$
 CH_3
 $COOH$
 CH_3
 CH_3
 $COOH$
 CH_3
 CH_3
 $COOH$
 OH
 OH

It is obvious that, unlike D-(+)-glyceraldehyde, the D configuration of alanine is found to be levorotatory.



iii) Determination of relative configuration of mandelic acid:

As we know that alanine is optically active, and therefore, is bound to exist as enantiomeric pair. The configuration of one enantiomer relative to the mandelic acid can be obtained as given below.

It is obvious that, unlike D-(+)-glyceraldehyde, the *D* configuration of mandelic acid is found to be levorotatory.

Since mandelic acid is optically active, the configuration of mirror image isomer relative to the glyceraldehyde can be obtained as given below.

HO
$$\longrightarrow$$
 H \longrightarrow COOH \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow Since \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow Since \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow Series of reactions \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow HO \longrightarrow Series of reactions

It is obvious that, unlike L-(–)-glyceraldehyde, the L configuration of mandelic acid is found to be dextrorotatory.

L-(+)-mandelic acid



> Absolute Configuration

The absolute configuration of a particular stereoisomer of an organic molecule may simply be defined as the actual arrangement of atoms or groups in space.

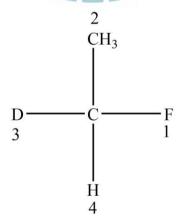
Since the D-L system of stereoisomeric nomenclature was relative and difficult to apply, a more simplistic and robust approach was needed. The problem was solved by R. S. Chan, C. K. Ingold and V. Prelog by developing a nomenclature method that was free from limitations posed by the relative approach. This nomenclature technique is generally called as Chan-Ingold-Prelog or R-S system. The whole procedure includes two steps; the first is the priority assignment of different groups and the second step involves the assignment of absolute configuration.

Rules for priority assignment of different groups: A priority sequence of (1), (2), (3), and (4) is assigned to all the four groups attached to the chiral center using the following set of rules.

i) If the substituents attached with the chiral center are simply atoms, substituents with a higher atomic number of bonded atoms are given higher priority and vice-versa.



ii) If the bonded atoms of two groups are isotopes of the same element, a higher priority will be given to the group with a higher atomic mass.





iii) Atoms next to the bonded atoms must be considered if the two above-mentioned rules are not able to distinguish the groups concerned.

iv) For priority assignment, multiple bonds must be considered as multiple numbers of single bonds, i.e., double and triple bonds must be treated as two single and three single bonds, respectively.



Now using all these rules, let us try to determine the priority sequence of phenyl and acetylenic groups.

$$-C = CH \quad \text{or} \quad -\frac{C}{C} - \frac{C}{C} - H$$

Phenyl group Vinyl group

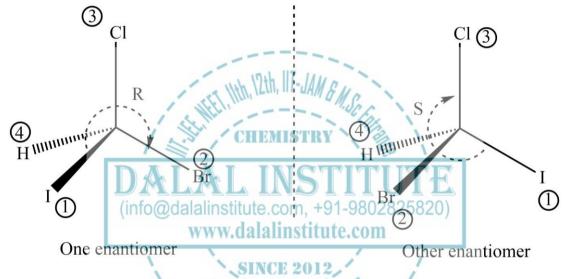
According to the sequence rule, phenyl and should be prioritized over acetylenic; which can be attributed to the fact that the carbon in the former pair is attached with three other carbons whereas in the latter pair it binds with only two carbons. However, only one carbon has successive bonds in acetylenic (2C and 1H); whereas in the phenyl group, two carbons have successive bonds (2C and 1H) allotting it a higher priority.



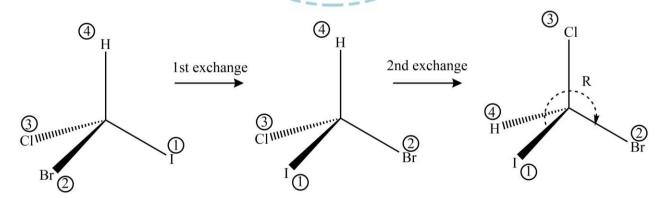
Assignment of absolute configuration: Since two of the most popular depiction of three-dimensional molecules on two-dimensional paper are Flying-Wedge and Fischer projection, we will study the determination of absolute configuration for both.

i) Assignment of absolute configuration in Flying-Wedge representation:

After assigning priorities to different groups the molecule is oriented in space such that the group of lowest priority goes away from the observer. Now if the tracking of decreasing priority of the remaining three groups comes gives rise to clockwise flight, the molecules should be labeled as R. However, if the tracking of decreasing priority of the remaining three groups comes gives rise to anticlockwise flight, the molecules should be labeled as S.



Furthermore, if the group with the lowest priority is toward the observer or in the plane of the paper, carry out an even number of exchanges to through the lowest-priority-group away from the observer before the R-S labeling.

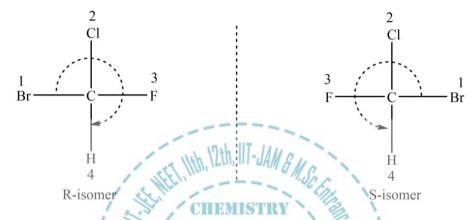


It is also worthy to note that the actual stereochemical notation can also be found by reverting the answer directly if the group with the lowest priority is toward the observer.

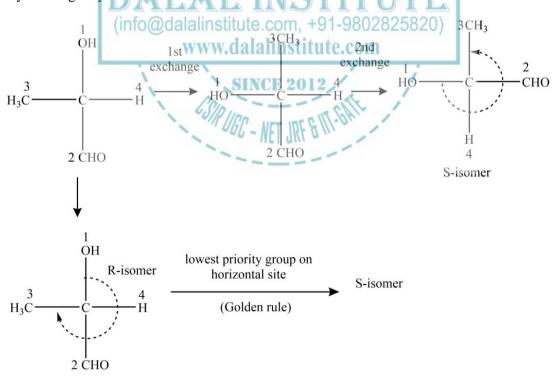


ii) Assignment of absolute configuration in Fischer representation:

After assigning priorities to different groups the Fischer projection of the molecule is transformed to an identical one by an even number of exchanges so that the group of lowest priority is at the vertical position. Now if the tracking of decreasing priority of the remaining three groups comes gives rise to clockwise flight, the molecules should be labeled as R. However, if the tracking of decreasing priority of the remaining three groups comes gives rise to anticlockwise flight, the molecules should be labeled as S.



Furthermore, if the group with the lowest priority is already located at the vertical position, nothing is needed but priority tracking only.



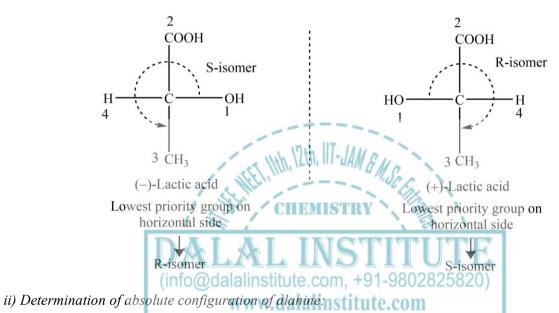
It is worthy to note that the actual stereochemical notation can also be found by reverting the answer directly if the group with the lowest priority is at the horizontal position, which is also called as the golden rule.



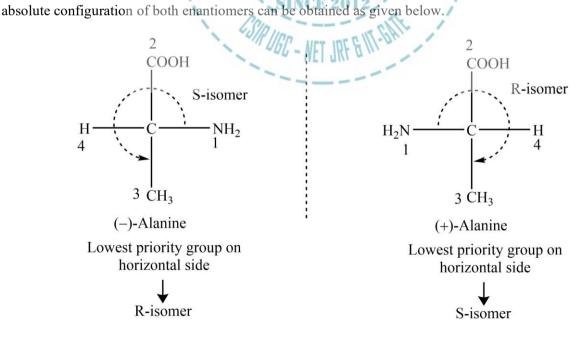
Determination of Absolute Configuration Lactic Acid, Alanine & Mandelic Acid: The absolute configuration of lactic acid, alanine & mandelic acid (i.e., R-S configurations) can be obtained using the following chemical routes.

i) Determination of absolute configuration of Lactic Acid:

As we know that lactic acid is optically active, and therefore, is bound to exist as enantiomeric pair. The absolute configuration of both enantiomers can be obtained as given below.



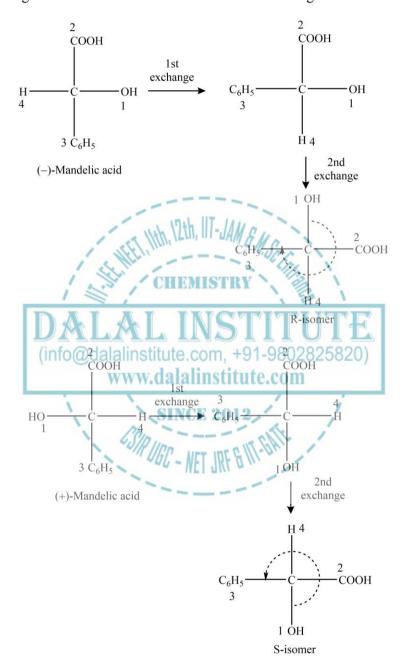
As we know that alanine is optically active, and therefore, is bound to exist as enantiomeric pair. The





ii) Determination of absolute configuration of Mandelic acid:

As we know that mandelic acid is optically active, and therefore, is bound to exist as enantiomeric pair. The absolute configuration of both enantiomers can be obtained as given below.

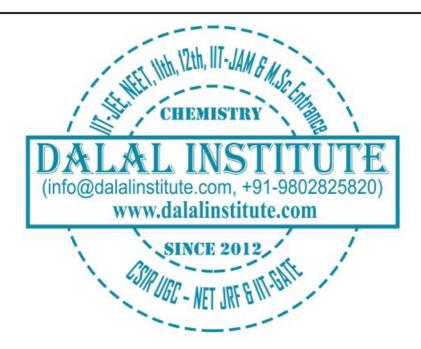


It is also worthy to note that *R*- and *S*-configuration are not bound to be dextro- or levorotatory in particular; in other words, *R*-configuration can be dextro-, as well as levorotatory. If R is dextro-, *S*-configuration will be levorotatory, and if *R* is levorotatory, *S*-configuration will be dextrorotatory.



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