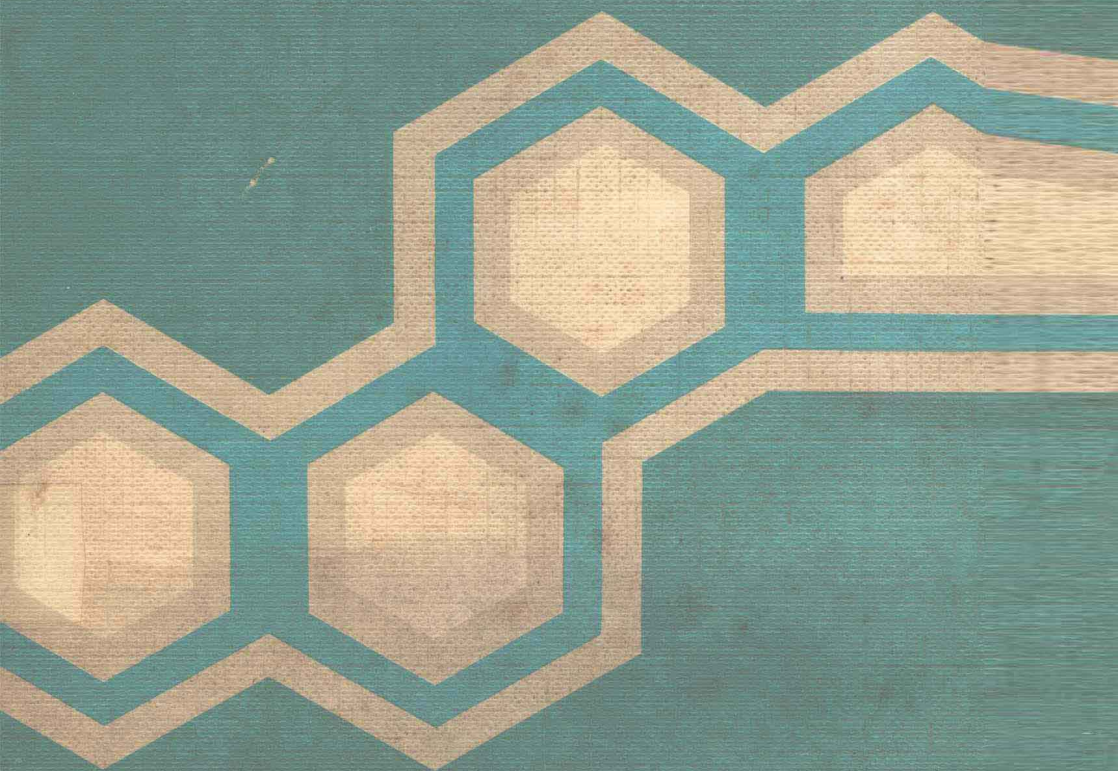


An Introduction to
**Practical
Biochemistry**

Second Edition

David T. Plummer



An introduction to practical biochemistry

Second edition

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McGRAW-HILL Book Company (UK) Limited

London . New York . St Louis . San Francisco . Auckland . Beirut . Bogotá
Düsseldorf . Johannesburg . Lisbon . Lucerne . Madrid . Mexico . Montreal
New Delhi . Panama . Paris . San Juan . São Paulo . Singapore . Sydney
Tokyo . Toronto

Published by
McGRAW-HILL Book Company (UK) Limited
MAIDENHEAD . BERKSHIRE . ENGLAND

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Plummer, David Thomas

An introduction to practical biochemistry.

2nd ed.

1. Biological chemistry — Laboratory manuals

I. Title

574.1'92'028 QP519.7 77-30195

ISBN 0-07-084074-1

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2345 WC&S 80798

PRINTED AND BOUND IN GREAT BRITAIN

To Ruth, Malcolm, Jonathan and Martyn

Psalm lll v 2 (R.S.V.) Great are the works of the Lord, studied by
all who have pleasure in them.

Preface to the Second Edition

An Introduction to Practical Biochemistry was first published at the end of 1971, and the time is now ripe for it to be revised and updated. The straight addition of new material and experiments would produce a larger and probably less useful and more costly book, yet there is still a need for a comprehensive practical book with a wide range of experiments to satisfy the various courses taught in the subject. The case for the inclusion of new subject matter was strong and the dilemma became what to eliminate from the original work. The author has attempted to solve this problem by removing some of the old or superfluous experiments and most of those needing specialized equipment. The new edition has thus been updated and much of it rewritten, yet it still contains a comprehensive range of basic experiments, it will therefore be suitable for teaching the fundamental concepts of practical biochemistry to large classes with the minimum of specialized apparatus. Some of the experiments are more suited to smaller groups, but can still be used in a large class by operating several of these experiments at the same time and moving groups of students from one set to another on a weekly basis.

Each chapter contains a summary of the relevant biochemistry and, in addition, every experiment has a section on the biochemical principles involved in that investigation. The book is meant to be more than just a 'cookery book' for use in the laboratory; it should provide a useful theoretical background to some of the more practical aspects of biochemistry and thus complement the standard theoretical text used by the student.

The experiments are suitable for the first two years of a British

BSc in biochemistry, for an MSc course which is largely a conversion course from another discipline, and for technical courses such as those leading to HNC, HND, and M.I. Biol. The book should also be useful to undergraduates and technicians studying biochemistry as a subsidiary or ancillary subject to their main course. It may also serve as a useful reference work for research workers in other fields whose investigations carry them into the unfamiliar area of practical biochemistry.

I must, of course, thank all my colleagues and associates who have made this book possible; many of them have kindly agreed to the inclusion of their experiments in this book for which I am most grateful. In particular, I would like to thank Dr Mike Perry and Dr John Wigglesworth who have worked with me for several years in teaching the final year of our BSc. I am also indebted to Professor Tony Linnane and his colleagues of Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, with whom I spent a most useful and happy year of study leave. My thanks are also due to my colleagues Dr Malcolm Banner, Dr Peter Butterworth, Dr Derek Evered, and Dr Geoffrey Hall for helpful discussion and experiments and to Professor Harold Baum for his continued interest and encouragement. Finally I must thank my research assistants Dr Mitchell Fry, Dr Edwin Ngaha, Dr Charles Reavill, Dr Cecilio Vidal-Moreno, Mrs Claire Delpech, Miss Margaret Chai, and Miss Susan Seager, who have read the manuscript and proofs, and my technician Mr Paul Borella for carrying out some of the experiments. Last of all I must thank my wife Ruth for her love and encouragement and my family for all their patience during the preparation of the manuscript.

David Plummer

Technical notes

Solutions

A list of solutions required to carry out an investigation is given for each experiment together with the quantities needed. The figure 10 or 100 printed on the same line as the heading 'materials' means that the weights and volumes have been calculated assuming 10 or 100 students working in pairs. The amount required for a given class can, therefore, be readily calculated from this information. In arriving at the quantities needed, it has been assumed that estimations will be carried out in duplicate. In addition, an extra allowance over and above the bare minimum has been added and the solutions made up to the next most convenient volume. For example, if 300 ml is required for an experiment, then the recommended volume is given as 500 ml, but if 400 ml is needed then the volume suggested is 1 l.

Experiments with 100 marked by the 'materials' can be carried out by a class of that size but where 10 is marked there is probably some limitation on the availability of equipment or expensive reagents.

Finally, these quantities assume that the reagents are divided equally among the class with a small quantity in reserve. If reagents are left on a bench and people help themselves then much bigger quantities will need to be made up.

Laboratory Safety

In this book any obvious dangers in a particular experiment are pointed out, but some of the following general precautions are

worth noting. Always wear a laboratory coat and preferably safety spectacles when doing practical work.

Poisons

Don't be careless with poisons, always mark the danger on the solution of the toxic compound. It is recommended that any dangers inherent in the handling of a particular material be written plainly on the board in front of a class together with the common access routes to the body (i.e. mouth, lungs, skin, etc.).

All eating and drinking in the laboratory is, of course, strictly forbidden.

Never pipette poisons by mouth, use a safety bulb or dispense from a burette, preferably at one central point under academic or technical supervision. Safety pipettes should also be provided for handling corrosive materials such as strong acids or alkalis or highly reactive compounds, e.g., oxidizing and reducing agents.

Fire

The risks of fire are perhaps obvious when handling certain organic solvents, but vigilance is ever needed against this hazard. Inflammable solvents should not be evaporated over a naked flame and always check that a bunsen is not being used on an adjacent bench when handling solvents such as ether. Sparks from electrical equipment are a more subtle danger and, for this reason, solutions containing ether must not be centrifuged or left in a refrigerator. After use, organic solvents should be disposed of in special containers provided by the technical staff and never poured down the sink.

Biological hazards

The hazards involved in handling biological material are perhaps not quite so obvious as those mentioned above and it is the responsibility of the member of staff in charge of a class to point out any particular dangers. The booklet published by Imperial College (University of London) on precautions against biological hazards is very comprehensive and is recommended.

All *microorganisms* should be treated as potentially dangerous, but probably one of the greatest biological dangers is the risk of *serum hepatitis* (Australia antigen). Infection is effective primarily

through the blood but other body fluids can also transmit the virus. The mortality rate for this hepatitis can be as high as 30% of those infected and there is no known cure for the disease. Furthermore the disease can be carried by apparently healthy people so all apparatus in contact with human blood or urine should be sterilized immediately after use. The carrier rate may be as low as 0.1% (British population) or as high as 20% (some African populations). All human fluids should therefore be used with the greatest care and strict precautions taken.

Contents

PREFACE	xix
TECHNICAL NOTES	xxi
CHAPTER 1 ACCURACY IN THE LABORATORY	1
Units and Quantities	1
Basic units	1
Derived units	1
Prefixes	2
Units used in conjunction with SI	3
Molarity, moles, and concentration	4
Accurate Measurement	5
The sources of error	5
The normal distribution curve	8
Biological variation	10
Volumetric glassware	12
Writing up the Experiment	16
The recording of results	16
Tables and illustrations	18
Bibliography	21
CHAPTER 2 pH AND BUFFER SOLUTIONS	23
Acids and Bases	23
Definitions	23
Strength	24
Hydrogen Ion Concentration and pH	24
Definition of pH	24
Dissociation of water	25
Accurate measurement of pH	26

pH indicators	28
Dissociation of Acids and Bases	29
Strong acids	29
Weak acids	29
Titration curves	31
Buffer Solutions	34
Theory	34
Buffers used in biology	35
pH and Life	37
Animals	37
Plants	38
Bacteria	38
Practical Exercises	39
The care and use of the pH meter	39
Titration curves	41
Experiment 2.1 The determination of pH using indicators	41
Experiment 2.2 Titration of a mixture of a strong and weak acid	42
Experiment 2.3 Titration of a strong acid with a strong base	43
Experiment 2.4 Titration of a weak acid with a strong base	44
Experiment 2.5 The determination of pK_a	44
Experiment 2.6 pK_a values of a dicarboxylic acid	45
Experiment 2.7 Citric acid—potassium citrate mixtures as buffer solutions	45
Bibliography	46
 CHAPTER 3 SEPARATION METHODS	 47
General Introduction	47
Dialysis	48
The membrane	49
Solvent	50
Physical conditions	50
Donnan membrane equilibria	51
Experiment 3.1 The passage of molecules through a dialysis membrane	52
Experiment 3.2 Demonstration of Donnan membrane equilibria	52
Gel Filtration	53
Theory	55
Materials for gel filtration	56
Experiment 3.3 The separation of haemoglobin and 2,4-dinitrophenylaspartic acid on Sephadex G25	58

Experiment 3.4 The desalting of a protein solution	59
Thin layer gel filtration	59
Experiment 3.5 The determination of the molecular weight of chymotrypsin by thin layer gel filtration on Sephadex G200	60
Chromatography	61
The practice of column chromatography	61
Adsorption chromatography	66
Experiment 3.6 The separation of grass pigments on calcium carbonate	68
Experiment 3.7 The separation of leaf pigments by adsorption chromatography	69
Ion exchange chromatography	70
Experiment 3.8 The uptake of sodium chloride by a cation exchange resin	74
Experiment 3.9 The separation of amino acids by ion exchange chromatography	75
Partition chromatography	77
Experiment 3.10 The identification of the sugar in milk by paper chromatography	81
Experiment 3.11 The separation of amino acids by two-dimensional paper chromatography	83
Thin layer chromatography	85
Experiment 3.12 The identification of sugars in fruit juices using thin layer chromatography	86
Experiment 3.13 The separation of lipids by thin layer chromatography	86
Electrophoresis	88
Theory	88
Practice	89
Experiment 3.14 The separation of amino acids by paper electrophoresis	92
Experiment 3.15 The separation of serum proteins by electrophoresis on cellulose acetate	93
Experiment 3.16 Polyacrylamide-gel electrophoresis	95
Bibliography	98
 CHAPTER 4 COLORIMETRY AND SPECTRO- PHOTOMETRY	 99
Colorimetry	99
The Beer—Lambert law	100
Measurement of extinction	103

Spectrophotometry	105
Absorptiometric analysis	105
Absorption spectra	106
Experiment 4.1 The absorbance curves of two dyes	108
Experiment 4.2 Demonstration of Beer's law	109
Experiment 4.3 The colorimetric estimation of inorganic phosphate	109
Experiment 4.4 The validity of Beer's law for the colorimetric estimation of creatinine	111
Experiment 4.5 The absorption spectrum of <i>p</i> -nitrophenol	111
Experiment 4.6 Determination of the pK_a value of <i>p</i> -nitrophenol	112
Experiment 4.7 The progress curve of <i>p</i> -nitrophenyl phosphatase	113
Experiment 4.8 The estimation of barbiturates with the ultraviolet spectrophotometer	113
Experiment 4.9 Experiments with haemoglobin	115
Bibliography	117
 CHAPTER 5 AMINO ACIDS AND PROTEINS	 119
Chemical and Physical Properties	119
Chemistry of the amino acids	119
The amino acid composition of proteins	122
Protein structure	123
Isolation of proteins	128
Function in the Living Organism	131
Amino acids	133
Peptides	133
Proteins	135
Qualitative Tests	136
General properties of amino acids	136
Experiment 5.1 The solubility of amino acids	136
Experiment 5.2 The ninhydrin reaction	136
Experiment 5.3 The xanthoproteic reaction	137
Experiment 5.4 Millon's reaction	138
Experiment 5.5 Glyoxylic reaction for tryptophan	138
Experiment 5.6 Pauly's test	139
Experiment 5.7 Ehrlich's reagent	140
Experiment 5.8 The nitroprusside test	140
Experiment 5.9 The Sakaguchi reaction	140
General reactions of proteins	142

Experiment 5.10 The biuret test for peptide bonds	142
Experiment 5.11 Denaturation by heat and extreme pH	142
Experiment 5.12 Precipitation by heavy metals	143
Experiment 5.13 Precipitation by acidic reagents	143
Assay Methods	144
Experiment 5.14 The quantitative estimation of amino acids using the ninhydrin reaction	144
Experiment 5.15 Biuret assay	144
Experiment 5.16 The Folin—Lowry method of protein assay	145
Experiment 5.17 The ultraviolet absorption of proteins and amino acids	146
Experiment 5.18 A comparison of the various methods of protein estimation	147
Experiment 5.19 Titration curves of amino acids	147
Experiment 5.20 The formol titration of alanine	148
The Isolation of Proteins	149
Experiment 5.21 The solubility of proteins in distilled water and salt solutions	149
Experiment 5.22 The isolation of casein from milk	150
Experiment 5.23 The preparation and properties of cytochrome <i>c</i>	151
Protein Structure	154
Experiment 5.24 The identification of the C-terminal amino acid of a protein	154
Experiment 5.25 The determination of the free amino end group of some proteins	155
Experiment 5.26 The detection of changes in the conformation of bovine serum albumin by viscosity measurements	157
Experiment 5.27 The effect of pH on the conformation of bovine serum albumin	159
Bibliography	159
 CHAPTER 6 CARBOHYDRATES	 161
The Function of Carbohydrates in the Biosphere	161
A source of energy	161
Structure of cells and molecules	162
The Structure of Carbohydrates	162
Introduction	162
Stereochemistry	162
The glycosidic link	166

Simple monosaccharide derivatives	167
Carbohydrates of Biochemical Importance	168
Simple sugars	168
Macromolecules	168
Chemical Properties	173
General tests for carbohydrates	173
Experiment 6.1 Molisch's test	174
Experiment 6.2 The anthrone reaction	174
Reactions of reducing sugars	175
Experiment 6.3 Benedict's test	175
Experiment 6.4 Barfoed's test	176
Experiment 6.5 The preparation of osazones	176
Tests for individual carbohydrates	178
Experiment 6.6 Bial's test for pentoses	178
Experiment 6.7 Seliwanoff's test for ketoses	179
Experiment 6.8 Tests for sucrose	179
Experiment 6.9 Iodine test	180
Experiment 6.10 The hydrolysis of polysaccharides	180
Scheme for the identification of an unknown carbohydrate	181
Polarimetry	181
Experiment 6.11 The mutarotation of glucose	182
Quantitative Determination of Carbohydrates	183
Experiment 6.12 Estimation of carbohydrates by the anthrone method	183
Experiment 6.13 Determination of reducing sugar by the Somogyi—Nelson method	184
Experiment 6.14 The determination of glucose by means of the enzyme glucose oxidase (β -D-glucose; oxygen oxidoreductase, 1.1.3.4.)	185
Experiments with Polysaccharides	187
Experiment 6.15 Acid hydrolysis of glycogen and other polysaccharides	187
Experiment 6.16 Enzymic hydrolysis of glycogen by α - and β -amylase	188
Experiment 6.17 Chromatographic identification of the products of the acid and enzymic hydrolysis of glycogen	189
Experiment 6.18 The breakdown of glycogen and the production of glucose-1-phosphate by muscle phosphorylase	189
Bibliography	192

CHAPTER 7 LIPIDS AND MEMBRANES	193
Classification and Biological Role of Lipids	193
Simple lipids	193
Compound lipids	196
Derived lipids	198
Membranes	201
Phospholipids in membranes	201
Cholesterol and other lipids in membranes	203
Proteins and membranes	203
Qualitative Tests for Lipids	204
Experiment 7.1 The solubility of lipids	204
Experiment 7.2 Tests for fatty acids	205
Experiment 7.3 Tests for glycerol	206
Experiment 7.4 Tests for unsaturation	206
Quantitative Analysis of Lipids	207
Experiment 7.5 The determination of the acid value of a fat	207
Experiment 7.6 The saponification value of a fat	208
Experiment 7.7 The iodine number of a fat	209
Properties of Cholesterol	211
Experiment 7.8 The preparation of cholesterol from brain	211
Experiment 7.9 The estimation of blood cholesterol	212
Fat-soluble Vitamins	213
Experiment 7.10 The effect of ultraviolet light on vitamin A	213
Experiment 7.11 Preparation of the D vitamins by irradiation of their precursors with ultraviolet light	215
Membranes	217
Experiment 7.12 The effect of lipid composition on the permeability of a lipid monolayer	217
Experiment 7.13 The effect of detergents and other membrane-active agents on the erythrocyte membrane	218
Bibliography	219
 CHAPTER 8 NUCLEIC ACIDS	 221
Chemical Composition of the Nucleic Acids	221
Purines	222
Pyrimidines	222
The pentose sugars	223
Nucleosides	223
Nucleotides	223

Nucleic acids	224
The Biological Role of Nucleic Acids	227
DNA	227
RNA	228
Experiments with Nucleic Acids	231
Experiment 8.1 The isolation of RNA from yeast	231
Experiment 8.2 Electrophoresis of RNA nucleotides	232
Experiment 8.3 The separation of RNA nucleotides by ion exchange chromatography	233
Experiment 8.4 The base composition of RNA	235
Experiment 8.5 The isolation of DNA from pig spleen	236
Experiment 8.6 The ultraviolet absorption of the nucleic acids	238
Experiment 8.7 The estimation of DNA by the diphenyl- amine reaction	240
Experiment 8.8 The estimation of RNA by means of the orcinol reaction	241
Experiment 8.9 The determination of the phosphorus content of a nucleic acid	242
Bibliography	242
 CHAPTER 9 ENZYMES	 243
Introduction	243
Enzymes as catalysts	243
Experiment 9.1 Enzymic catalysis	244
Measuring enzyme activity	245
Experiment 9.2 The progress curve obtained during the hydrolysis of <i>p</i> -nitrophenyl phosphate by serum alkaline phosphatase (orthophosphoric monoester phosphohydrolase, 3.1.3.1)	247
Enzyme concentration	248
Experiment 9.3 Variation of serum alkaline phosphatase activity with enzyme concentration	249
Enzyme Activity and Substrate Concentration	250
Michaelis—Menten enzymes	250
Experiment 9.4 The determination of the Michaelis constant for the digestion of casein by trypsin (3.4.4.4.)	254
Allosteric enzymes	256
Experiment 9.5 Yeast isocitrate dehydrogenase: an allosteric enzyme	259
Coenzymes and Activators	261
Coenzymes	261