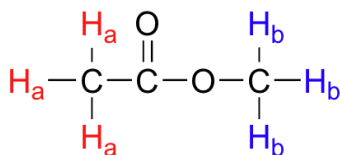


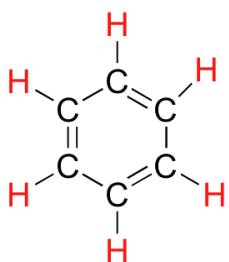
# Chemical equivalence

If all protons in all organic molecules had the same resonance frequency in an external magnetic field of a given strength, the information in the previous paragraph would be interesting from a theoretical standpoint, but would not be terribly useful to organic chemists. Fortunately for us, however, resonance frequencies are not uniform for all protons in a molecule. *In an external magnetic field of a given strength, protons in different locations in a molecule have different resonance frequencies, because they are in non-identical electronic environments.* In methyl acetate, for example, there are two 'sets' of protons. The three protons labeled  $H_a$  have a different - and easily distinguishable - resonance frequency than the three  $H_b$  protons, because the two sets of protons are in non-identical environments: they are, in other words, chemically nonequivalent.

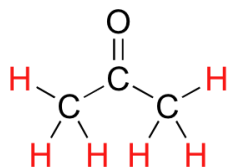


On the other hand, the three  $H_a$  protons are all in the same electronic environment, and are chemically equivalent to one another. They have identical resonance frequencies. The same can be said for the three  $H_b$  protons.

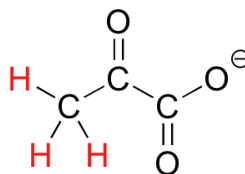
The ability to recognize chemical equivalency and nonequivalency among atoms in a molecule will be central to understanding NMR. In each of the molecules below, all protons are chemically equivalent, and therefore will have the same resonance frequency in an NMR experiment.



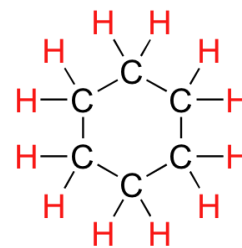
benzene



acetone

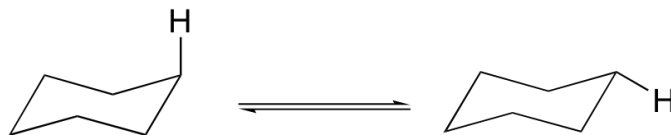


pyruvate



cyclohexane

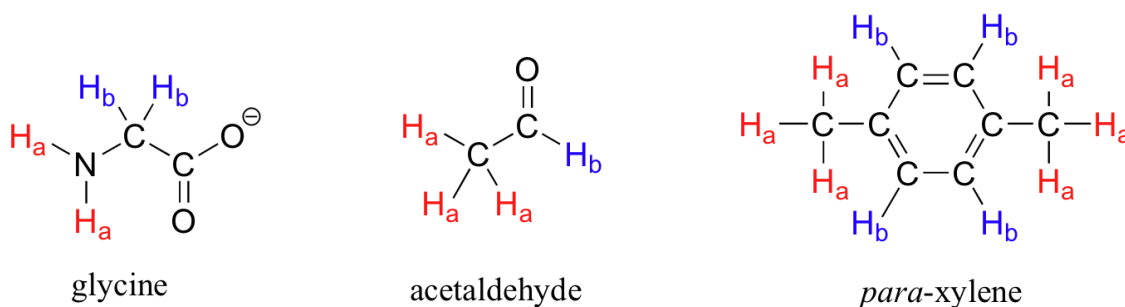
You might expect that the equatorial and axial hydrogens in cyclohexane would be non-equivalent, and would have different resonance frequencies. In fact, an axial hydrogen *is* in a different electronic environment than an equatorial hydrogen. Remember, though, that the molecule rotates rapidly between its two chair conformations, meaning that any given hydrogen is rapidly moving back and forth between equatorial and axial positions. It turns out that, except at extremely low temperatures, this rotational motion occurs on a time scale that is much faster than the time scale of an NMR experiment.



ring-flip process is *fast* compared to the NMR time-scale

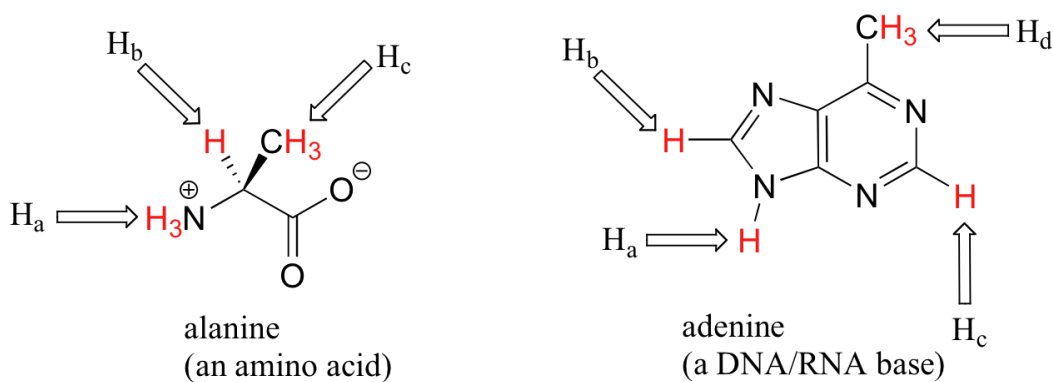
In this sense, NMR is like a camera that takes photographs of a rapidly moving object with a slow shutter speed - the result is a blurred image. In NMR terms, this means that all 12 protons in cyclohexane are equivalent.

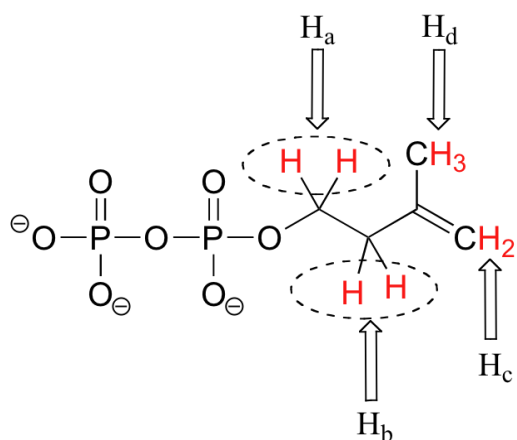
Each the molecules in the next figure contains *two* sets of protons, just like our previous example of methyl acetate, and again in each case the resonance frequency of the H<sub>a</sub> protons will be different from that of the H<sub>b</sub> protons.



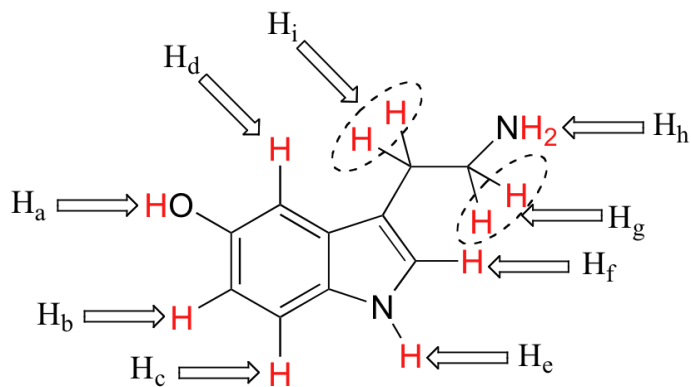
Notice how the symmetry of *para*-xylene results in there being only two different sets of protons.

Most organic molecules have several sets of protons in different chemical environments, and each set, in theory, will have a different resonance frequency in <sup>1</sup>H-NMR spectroscopy.





isopentenyl diphosphate  
(a lipid building block)

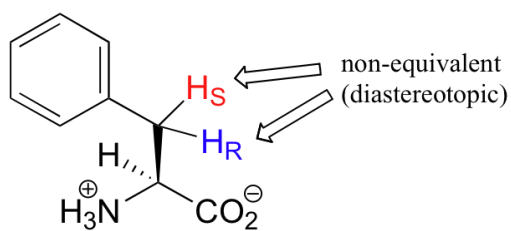


serotonin (a neurotransmitter)

When stereochemistry is taken into account, the issue of equivalence vs nonequivalence in NMR starts to get a little more complicated. It should be fairly intuitive that hydrogens on different sides of asymmetric ring structures and double bonds are in different electronic environments, and thus are non-equivalent and have different resonance frequencies. In the alkene and cyclohexene structures below, for example,  $H_a$  is *trans* to the chlorine substituent, while  $H_b$  is *cis* to chlorine.

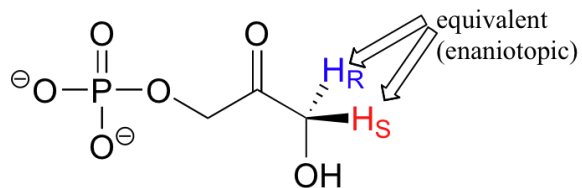


What is not so intuitive is that diastereotopic hydrogens ([section 3.10](#)) on chiral molecules are also non-equivalent:

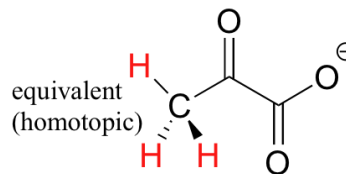


phenylalanine

However, enantiotopic and homotopic hydrogens are chemically equivalent.



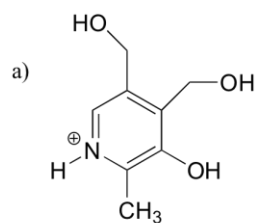
dihydroxyacetone  
phosphate



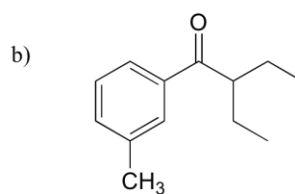
pyruvate

## Example

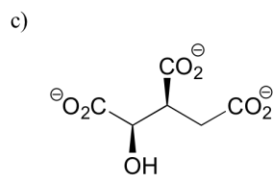
Exercise 5.1: How many different sets of protons do the following molecules contain? (count diastereotopic protons as non-equivalent).



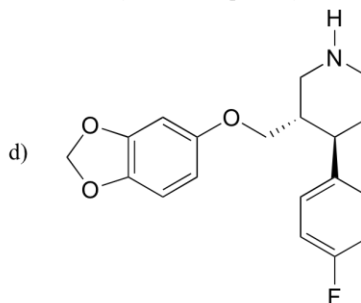
pyridoxine  
(vitamin B<sub>6</sub>)



DEET  
(an insect repellent)



isocitrate  
(a citric acid cycle intermediate)



paroxetine  
(an anti-anxiety drug, trade name Paxil)

## Contributors

- **Organic Chemistry With a Biological Emphasis** by Tim Soderberg (University of Minnesota, Morris)

Source: [http://chemwiki.ucdavis.edu/Organic\\_Chemistry/Organic\\_Chemistry\\_With\\_a\\_Biological\\_Emphasis/Chapter\\_\\_5%3A\\_Structure\\_Determination\\_II/Section\\_5.2%3A\\_Chemical\\_equivalence](http://chemwiki.ucdavis.edu/Organic_Chemistry/Organic_Chemistry_With_a_Biological_Emphasis/Chapter__5%3A_Structure_Determination_II/Section_5.2%3A_Chemical_equivalence)