

ORGANIC with ROCHE – Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions are addressed below:

Why is my grade only based on exam scores?

Why don't you give points for attendance?

Why don't you do graded homework?

Why not just average an A to achieve the dream?

Why do you grade our exams the same day, and why should I pick up my graded exam?

Why is the class so early in the morning?

Why not use Sakai / Canvas, etc.?

Why is your class so hard/easy compared to other courses and versions?

There is too much information, why do I need to do this?

I paid for this class, I came to most of the classes, and therefore I deserve to pass this class. How dare you give me an F?

Let me start by explaining my perspective of Organic Chemistry Lecture: in this course you will be taught certain new skills that you do not currently possess, and then you will be tested to evaluate how proficient you are in using these new skills. Being successful in this class will mean you are competent in as many (ideally all) of the new skills you were taught.

The course is very goal oriented – can you do activity X? Are you proficient in task Y? The exams are your opportunity to demonstrate to me that you are proficient in doing X, Y and Z. If you can do X, Y and Z then you are going to pass the class with an A grade; if you can do X and Y, but not Z, then you will pass the class but with a lower grade; if you cannot do X, Y or Z under exam conditions then you will fail the class.

I believe students are adults, and are old/mature enough to exhibit **personal accountability**. I **expect** students to attend as many classes as possible (ideally all of them). I **expect** students to study and work with the current material during each week of the semester. The motivation of these two requirements is not to do it for trivial bonus points, but on the understanding that these are the two most important strategies and actions towards effective and efficient mastery of the Organic material and skill set, and that is how you score the highest on the examinations. That in itself is the reward.

Why is my grade only based on exam scores?

Your Organic grade is based solely on your ability to demonstrate mastery of skills X, Y and Z. These are skills that typically you either can, or cannot, do. Think of it this way – the goal is to teach you to drive a car safely on the roads. So you would take lessons, practice, practice some more, and then eventually take a driving test. Whether you get your driver's license (or not)

depends on how you drive during your test. If you are actually a proficient driver, then you will be able to drive around with the instructor in a competent and safe manner. If you cannot drive, or if you can only drive a car if there are no other cars on the road, or if you have no passengers, or if no-one is watching then guess what – it means that you are not safe to drive on the roads.

Why don't you give points for attendance?

As I mentioned above, this course is very goal oriented – can you do activity X? Are you proficient in task Y? That is what determines your grade – not whether you can actually get up and make it to the Science Lecture Hall by 9.35am. *Rutgers University has the expectation that students should attend all classes.* I don't believe attending class deserves a reward. It is an understood expectation. Equally, I don't believe it would be fair for a student to be punished (i.e. not get attendance points) if they cannot make it to class – is it their fault if I-295 was blocked up with traffic, or it snowed, or if the River Line cancelled a train, or if they are sick, or a child needs their attention ...?

The best chance of success is to come to classes. But you are adults and you can make your own choices, and choices have consequences, and you will end up having to own those consequences. If you come to class, I will not reward you with attendance points, but I will reward you with in-person education, that in turn will pay off with more points on exam days.

Alternatively think of it this way – based on a typical tuition bill, you (or someone on your behalf) are paying about \$100 a week to be in Organic lecture. That means every Tuesday or Thursday morning that you do not come to class and hear me teach you Organic, then you just threw \$50 down the drain. Just like a gym, or Netflix (or any streaming media service), you

are paying whether you use that subscription service or not. I recommend coming to class and get your money's worth of Organic education. But if you want to waste your money and not attend, that is your choice, and you can accept the repercussions of that choice.

Why don't you do graded homework?

Success in Organic requires you to stay up to date with the material. Each week I will tell you what skills you need to learn, practice and perfect. That is your "homework". Then in recitation we will review those skills and use them to solve problems. This will be your weekly "reality check" of whether you are proficient with the current material (or not). I have no interest in grading homework assignments each week, that likely were completed as a group effort or using the internet. Success in Organic comes from knowing the material, not **pretending** to know the material – there is a difference! I expect you to stay current with material because I have explained to you that this is one of the inescapable keys to success in this course. I believe that you should have the personal accountability to stay current by studying and doing problems (available on my website with answers, and during recitation), even if they are not for credit. As above, correct preparation will pay off with more points on exam days.

Why not just average an A to achieve the dream?

Achieving the dream (of not taking the final and still receiving an A) is reserved exclusively for students who demonstrate mastery of **all** the required skills on **all** of the exams. If a student can demonstrate that they can do A, B and C on exam 1, and can do M, N and O on exam 2, and X, Y and Z on exam 3, then they have mastered everything in the course and deserve an A without having to take the final. For such students there is no point to

the final exam since they have demonstrated to me that they can do everything that was required of them and they deserve their A grade. But for a student who did not receive an A grade on each their exams, this points to certain tasks or skills that were not mastered during the semester. Such students do not deserve an immediate A if they have not demonstrated competency in all the required areas – therefore such students can use the final exam to ultimately convince me that they can answer questions on topics that they were deficient on during the semester. I view the final exam as a chance of redemption – to show me that you can correctly perform the tasks that you were not able to demonstrate during the semester. Essentially my final exams are predictable questions, on obvious topics, which students did not master the first time around.

Why do you grade our exams the same day, and why should I pick up my graded exam?

Exams are the reality check of whether you can do tasks A, B and C under exam conditions. They are the brutally honest description of your current understanding and skill set. If they reveal that you can successfully do tasks A, B and C, then great, you are ready for the next set of material. If the graded exam reveals that you cannot do A, B or C then there is a problem, and you need to fix these deficiencies as soon as possible. You need to be proficient in A, B and C to be able to handle skills M, N and O. So any weakness or misunderstanding in A, B and C will handicap your progression in the course. Therefore the sooner this deficiency is identified, the sooner it can be fixed. Your exams very clearly show you what you **don't know** – and the idea is that you should address that issue as quickly as possible. Much of Organic is about intellectual progression – first crawling, then walking, then running, etc. If you cannot do one of these foundational activities, it will

significantly hinder the future tasks of sprinting, parkour or Olympic level gymnastics. So picking up your graded exam provides a clear “snap shot” of where you currently stand. If you learn from your mistakes, you will get 100% next time. If you don’t learn from your mistakes (or pretend they do not exist, or procrastinate and put off fixing them for a month or two), not only are you destined to repeat them, but you are obstructing and limiting your future progression and success.

Why is the class so early in the morning?

The large class size, and diverse number and type of majors required to take Organic makes scheduling this class somewhat challenging. For more than 30 years, Organic has had the same time slot, and this has worked well accommodating the labs and other requisite or commonly taken courses (e.g. Physics) for students and their schedules.

Occasionally, Rutgers-Camden will offer an evening section of Organic 1 lecture. This additional lecture section is demand and enrollment driven. It will be taught by a different instructor, but the level of expectation and material will be equivalent.

If morning classes are a deal-breaker for you, Rutgers does provide an option to take Organic chemistry at other local institutions (e.g. Rowan, U. Penn, local Community Colleges, other Rutgers campuses, etc.) and have the course equivalency transfer into Rutgers-Camden.

Why not use Sakai / Canvas, etc.?

I choose to have all my lecture notes / exams for all my class offerings freely available to all people via the internet, and not behind a password protected application. Additionally as described above, you should be in possession of your old graded exams, so you will know your current standing in the class.

Why is your class so hard/easy compared to other courses and versions?

There is too much information, why do I need to do this?

Organic is a foundational course that often serves as a gateway to other (possibly more interesting or relevant) courses such as biochemistry, molecular biology, advanced chemistry courses, etc. The content and scope of this Organic sequence is shaped by three major factors:

(1) The American Chemical Society (ACS) releases an annual description of what topics and types of questions undergraduate Organic courses should address.

(2) Organic is a component of standardized tests for certain “College Admission Tests” such as the MCAT, PCAT or DAT. This course is designed to help prepare you for such tests.

(3) This Organic course provides you the molecular understanding so you are prepared for more advanced topics such as amino acids, enzymes, drug design, genetics, nucleic acids, etc. in your future classes.

I paid for this class, I came to most of the classes, and therefore I deserve to pass this class. How dare you give me an F?

Just because you paid your tuition does not 100% guarantee that you will pass this class. Organic requires the learning, and then demonstration of new skills. If at the end you cannot perform those skills, then you don't pass the class. Organic is a merit based course. You must demonstrate the necessary skills. The good news is that if you follow my direction, and put in the requisite effort you will easily pass this class. (But if you don't, then you probably won't).

Put it this way – pretend your goal is to get fitter: buying a membership to Planet Fitness will not make you fitter. Going inside the Planet Fitness

location will give you a higher probability of success, but only through using the equipment and actually working out are you guaranteed of getting fitter.