

Star chemistry

What's in a name?

Molecules often have complicated sounding names. This guide shows how the names give clues about the formula of the substance. Reading the names of molecules often gives clues to the formula of the substance.

First part of name	Meaning	Second part of name	Meaning
<i>meth-</i>	Molecule with 1 carbon atom	<i>-ane</i>	carbon-based molecule with all bonds used
<i>eth-</i>	Molecule with 2 carbon atoms	<i>-ene</i>	carbon-based molecule with at least one C=C double bond
<i>prop-</i>	Molecule with 3 carbon atoms	<i>-yne</i>	carbon-based molecule with at least one C≡C bond
<i>buta-</i>	Molecule with 4 carbon atoms	<i>-ol</i>	carbon-based molecule with an -OH group (hydroxyl)
<i>pent-</i>	Molecule with 5 carbon atoms	<i>-one</i>	carbon-based molecule with a -CO group (ketone)
		<i>-al</i>	carbon-based molecule with a -CHO group (aldehyde)
<i>mono</i>	1 atom / 1 group of atoms	<i>amide</i>	molecule containing NH ₂
<i>di</i>	2 atoms / 2 groups of atoms		
<i>tri</i>	3 atoms / 3 groups of atoms	Other name parts found	
<i>tetra</i>	4 atoms / 4 groups of atoms	<i>cyan</i>	molecule containing CN
<i>penta</i>	5 atoms / 5 groups of atoms	<i>amino</i>	molecule containing NH ₂
<i>hexa</i>	6 atoms / 6 groups of atoms	<i>thio</i>	molecule containing SH

