

## The Power of pH: Changing Ocean Chemistry



### Topics

Ocean Acidification, pH

### Grades

9-12

### Site

Indoors

### Duration

Two 45-minute periods

### Materials

See page 3

### Vocabulary

carbonate buffer system, carbon footprints, climate change, ocean acidification, pH

### National Science Education Standards

*Physical Science* (9-12)  
Chemical reactions

### *Life Science* (9-12)

The interdependence of organisms

### *Earth and Space Science* (9-12)

Geochemical cycles

### *Science in Personal and Social Perspectives* (9-12)

Natural resources  
Environmental quality  
Science and technology in local, national and global challenges

### Overview

*What is pH and how does carbon dioxide released from the burning of fossil fuels increase the acidity of the ocean? Students explore the answers to these questions in this two-part lab investigation. Students first investigate the power of pH by creating their own pH scale through a serial dilution of hydrochloric acid and sodium hydroxide. Students then compare the pH of fresh water and sea water and add carbon dioxide to observe how pH is affected. Finally, the effect of ocean acidification on marine life is observed through the use of calcium carbonate powder and hydrochloric acid.*

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the logarithmic nature of the pH scale as it relates to the concentration of hydrogen ions within a solution and decreasing ocean pH.
- Explain the relationship between carbon dioxide and the pH of a solution.
- Recognize the reaction between an acidic solution and calcium carbonate, and infer possible implications for ocean organisms in a lower pH ocean.

### Background

Since the mid-1700s and the advent of the Industrial Revolution, human activities (like the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, industrialization, cement production, etc.) have increased the amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gas in the atmosphere. This human-released carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have contributed to **climate change**--a change in weather patterns and climate over the long term. The increase in CO<sub>2</sub> has also led to **ocean acidification**.

**VOCABULARY**

**Carbonate buffer system:** a system regulating the pH of the ocean in which carbonate ions bond with excess hydrogen ions when an acid is added and which dissociate from hydrogen ions when a base is added

**Carbon footprint:** a quantitative measure of greenhouse gas emissions based on calculations of carbon emitting behaviors

**Climate change:** any change in global temperature, precipitation or other weather patterns over the long term due to natural variability and human activity, primarily the rapid increase in greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere

**Ocean acidification:** the process of lowering the oceans' pH by dissolving additional carbon dioxide in seawater from the atmosphere

**pH:** a measurement of the concentration of hydrogen ions ( $H^+$ ) within a solution; the more hydrogen ions the lower the pH and the more acidic a solution

Ocean acidification refers to the chemical processes through which human-released  $CO_2$  dissolves in seawater and thus lowers ocean pH. The dissolution of carbon dioxide in ocean water is a natural process and part of the ocean's role as a carbon sink. However, it is estimated that the ocean has taken up one-third, or 33%, of human-released  $CO_2$ . This increased uptake of  $CO_2$  by the ocean has tipped the **carbonate buffer system** and resulted in a 0.1 unit drop in surface ocean average **pH** from approximately 8.2 in preindustrial times to approximately 8.1 today. (Note: the pH of the ocean varies with location and depth. This statistic refers to average surface ocean pH.) Due to the logarithmic nature of the pH scale, a 0.1 unit pH drop is nearly a 26% increase in the ocean hydrogen-ion concentration and acidity! Though the ocean pH is still basic, this decrease in pH is described as "ocean acidification." See student reading "Ocean Acidification" for more specifics.

**How Do We Know Ocean pH Has Decreased?**

As ice sheets develop into glaciers, air bubbles become trapped in the freezing ice. The  $CO_2$  content can be calculated from these air bubbles. This gives us a record of what atmospheric  $CO_2$  levels were in the past. Since atmospheric  $CO_2$  is roughly in equilibrium with ocean surface  $CO_2$ , we can use ice core data to calculate what ocean pH was in the recent past. Ocean pH values from tens of millions of years ago can also be calculated from the ratio of the stable isotopes of boron in marine carbonates.

**Effects on Marine Organisms**

The effects of a lower pH ocean are still being studied. However, implications for marine life may include changes in respiration rates and reproductive capabilities. Of great concern is the impact ocean acidification may have on ocean calcifiers like molluscs, corals and some plankton. Calcifiers absorb calcium ( $Ca^{2+}$ ) and carbonate ( $CO_3^{2-}$ ) from surrounding waters in order to build their shells and skeletons. The excess hydrogen ions produced from the  $CO_2$  dissolving in sea water react with the carbonate ions to form more bicarbonate. This makes the carbonate ions less available and may cause the shells and skeletons of ocean calcifiers to become weaker. The reaction of carbon dioxide with water to dissolve calcium carbonate can be written as:  $CaCO_3 + CO_2 + H_2O \longrightarrow Ca^{2+} + 2HCO_3^-$ . If ocean waters become too acidic calcium carbonate structures may even begin to dissolve. This has implications for plankton, corals, molluscs and other organisms important in the marine food web and ocean ecosystem.

**Conservation and Action**

In order to slow down the rate of climate change and ocean acidification, measures need to be taken to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide released by human activities. Individual actions can be taken to reduce carbon footprints like driving less, turning off lights, unplugging electronic devices and appliances when not in use and buying local produce. Support of large-scale policies requiring more energy efficiency and reduction of emissions is another way to reduce **carbon footprints**. Entire countries are now looking into ways to reduce their emissions through utilizing more renewable energy sources, such as solar panels and wind turbines. Many countries are also looking into ways to strengthen and protect other natural carbon sinks like the protection of forests and wetland areas. Gain more ideas and information on reducing carbon footprints at [www.montereybayaquarium.org/efc/efc\\_flamingos/takeaction.aspx](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/efc/efc_flamingos/takeaction.aspx).

## Materials

For each student:

- Investigation 1 and Investigation 2 student sheets
- Safety glasses
- Gloves
- Rinse bucket or tub

### Investigation 1

Per group:

- 13 - 10mL flat-bottomed, screw-top vials and caps
- Sharpie marker to label vials
- 1 - 10mL graduated cylinder
- Pipet
- 0.1 M Hydrochloric acid (HCl)
- 0.1 M Sodium hydroxide (NaOH)
- 130 mL of distilled water for serial dilutions
- Distilled water for rinsing
- Universal Indicator solution (with color key)
- White index card
- Colored pencils

### Investigation 2

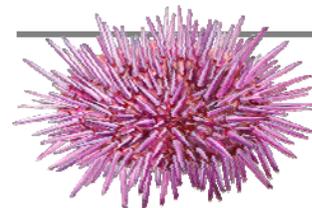
Per group:

- 3 - 10mL flat-bottomed, screw-top vials and caps
- Sharpie marker to label vials
- 1 - 10mL graduated cylinder
- 0.1M Hydrochloric acid (HCl)
- 10 mL distilled water
- 10 mL sea water or prepared "Instant Ocean"
- Universal Indicator
- Plastic pipet
- Scissors
- Balloon
- Stopwatch
- Twist tie

---

**A TON OF CARBON EMISSIONS IS RELEASED BY TRAVELING 5,000 MILES IN AN AIRPLANE, DRIVING 2,500 MILES IN A MEDIUM-SIZED CAR OR CUTTING DOWN AND BURNING A TREE ABOUT A FOOT IN DIAMETER AND 40- FEET TALL.**

Nature Conservancy website



## Teacher Preparation

1. Build any necessary background beforehand on the carbon cycle, climate change, logarithms or pH.
2. Gather materials for the investigations and make copies of the student pages. If you do not have sea water available, purchase "Instant Ocean" from aquarium supply stores or make your own sea water using recipes available online.
3. Try the investigations before giving to students. This will help you better gauge how much time it will take your students. Keep the pH scale you created as an example or comparison for students during the two investigations. Depending on your available time, you may or may not choose to have the students complete the "Before Lab" questions.



For student understanding, focus on the concentration of each pH solution rather than the color.

Why? Each pH vial may not exhibit an individual color. Universal Indicator is effective in exhibiting pH color ranges. For example:

pH 1.0-3.0	red
pH 3.0-6.0	orange/yellow
pH 7.0	green
pH 8.0-11.0	blue
pH 12.0-14.0	purple

There may be variations within each range however.

## Procedure

### 1. INTRODUCE THE ISSUE OF OCEAN ACIDIFICATION.

Use a brief video about ocean acidification like the Natural Resources Defense Council's at <http://www.nrdc.org/oceans/acidification/aboutthefilm.asp> to pique student interest about an acidifying ocean and effects on marine organisms. Make sure students understand that climate change and ocean acidification are two different phenomena that share the same cause—rapid increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere due to human-induced combustion of fossil fuel. Since about 1750 and the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the ocean has absorbed about 33% of human-produced carbon dioxide which has caused a 0.1 decrease in average surface ocean pH.

### Investigation 1: Create Your Own pH Scale

#### 2. GIVE THE CLASS INSTRUCTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION 1: CREATE YOUR OWN PH SCALE.

Tell the class they are going to find out why a 0.1 decrease in pH is so drastic by investigating the “logarithmic” nature of pH. Demo the first step of the dilution for the class. Point out the materials, stress the importance of safety equipment (glasses and gloves) when working with hazardous chemicals and ensure there is no food or drink in the lab. Be sure students understand the importance of rinsing their graduated cylinders and pipets with distilled water between steps. Even slight variations in one step of the procedure can cause the rest of their pH scale to be inaccurate. (This may be a good time to talk about science process and the importance of following procedures exactly.)

#### 3. IN SMALL GROUPS, STUDENTS COMPLETE INVESTIGATION 1 AND CREATE THEIR OWN PH SCALE.

Pass out **Investigation 1: Create Your Own pH Scale** to student pairs. You may choose to have each group do only part of the pH scale (Part One: pH 1-7 or Part Two: pH 8-13) and then work with another pair to create a complete scale depending on available time and materials. Ensure that everyone is wearing gloves and safety glasses. Students should complete **Create Your Own pH Scale Data Sheet** when they finish. Make sure students keep the pH scale they created. They will need it for Investigation 2.

#### 4. AS A CLASS, DISCUSS STUDENTS RESULTS AND THE “POWER” OF THE PH SCALE.

You may assess students' comprehension with questions like; Does an increase in hydrogen ions mean a solution is getting more acidic or more basic? What about an increase in pH? Discuss the logarithmic nature of pH and what a slight change can mean. How significant is a 1 unit change in pH? How about a 0.1 unit change in pH? Due to the nature of the pH scale, a 0.1 unit decrease in pH is nearly a 26% increase in acidity.

### Investigation 2: Ocean Acidification

#### 5. GIVE THE CLASS INSTRUCTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION 2: OCEAN ACIDIFICATION.

Discuss the ocean as a carbon sink and what that means for ocean chemistry. Do students think seawater is an acid or a base? Is seawater more acidic or basic than fresh water? Why? Is the pH of the ocean constant? (No, it changes based on depth, water temperature, salinity, other minerals in the water, etc.) If carbon dioxide is added, is the pH going to go up or down? Why do they think so?

**6. IN SMALL GROUPS, STUDENTS COMPLETE INVESTIGATION 2 AND INVESTIGATE OCEAN ACIDIFICATION.**

Pass out **Investigation 2: Ocean Acidification** to student pairs. You will probably need to model using the balloon and cutoff pipet to add CO<sub>2</sub> to the vials of seawater and distilled water in Part Two: Effects of CO<sub>2</sub> on the Ocean for students.

**7. AS A CLASS, DISCUSS THE STUDENTS' RESULTS AND THE EFFECTS OF CO<sub>2</sub> ON THE OCEAN'S PH.**

Review how CO<sub>2</sub> affects ocean pH. What happened to the calcium carbonate in the HCl solution? Why? (Make sure students understand this is a dramatic example and the ocean is not predicted to become that acidic.) What other implications might a lower pH ocean have for marine animals? (*affects shell and skeleton formation of plankton, corals, molluscs and other organisms which may lead to decreased biodiversity, changing ocean communities, food web impacts, species growth, respiration and reproduction implications*) Ask students if they think marine or fresh water organisms are more tolerant of a changing pH and why. You may choose to walk students through the chemical process of CO<sub>2</sub> absorption by the oceans on a whiteboard or overhead.

**8. BRAINSTORM WAYS TO REDUCE EXCESS CARBON DIOXIDE IN THE ATMOSPHERE.**

Estimates are that surface ocean pH will decrease by an additional 0.4 units of pH by 2100 if humans continue on with "business as usual." As a class discuss some of these sources of human-released CO<sub>2</sub>? Are there ways to reduce the CO<sub>2</sub>? What are large-scale, policy actions and regulations that may reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions? What are some actions communities could take? What are individual actions students can take?

## Extensions

[virtualurchin.stanford.edu/AcidOcean.htm](http://virtualurchin.stanford.edu/AcidOcean.htm)

Students can explore the effects an increasingly acidic ocean may have on marine life by doing a virtual lab experiment with sea urchins.

[www.keystonecurriculum.org/highschool/2009\\_lesson\\_intros/EXT\\_LA\\_GreatDebate\\_HS09.html](http://www.keystonecurriculum.org/highschool/2009_lesson_intros/EXT_LA_GreatDebate_HS09.html)

Students participate in a debate in this activity examining the reasoning behind the controversy of climate change.

## Resources

### Websites

*Alliance for Climate Education.* [www.acespace.org](http://www.acespace.org)

Learn what other students and schools are doing to fight the climate crisis and sign up for services, like school assembly presentations.

European Project on Ocean Acidification. [www.epoca-project.eu/index.php/FAQ.html](http://www.epoca-project.eu/index.php/FAQ.html)

Learn more about ocean acidification from a collaboration of experts from around the world.



Model how to add CO<sub>2</sub> to the vials in Part Two: Effects of CO<sub>2</sub> on the Ocean.



---

**BY MAKING SMALL  
CHANGES ON OUR OWN  
AND BIG CHANGES  
TOGETHER, WE CAN HELP  
ACCOMPLISH THE GOALS  
WE ALL SHARE:  
HEALTHY OCEANS,  
CLEAN AIR AND WATER,  
AND OUR WELL-BEING.**

Monterey Bay Aquarium  
website

---

*Keystone Center.* [www.keystonecurriculum.org](http://www.keystonecurriculum.org)

Search through over 20 climate change related classroom activities for high school students in this climate investigation module.

*Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute.* [www.mbari.org/highCO<sub>2</sub>](http://www.mbari.org/highCO2)

Learn more about the cutting-edge science and research being done to investigate a high CO<sub>2</sub>/low pH ocean.

*NASA's Eyes on the Earth.* [climate.nasa.gov/](http://climate.nasa.gov/)

Read about the latest in climate science and monitor the impacts of global climate change on the planet.

*Pew Center on Global Climate Change.*

[pewclimate.org/science-impacts/realities-vs-misconceptions](http://pewclimate.org/science-impacts/realities-vs-misconceptions)

Separate fact from fiction and ensure misconceptions are addressed by reading about the science behind climate change.

## References

### Books

*Foundations of College Chemistry—11th Edition.* Hein, Morris and Arena, Susan. John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2004.

### Articles

"Anthropogenic ocean acidification over the twenty-first century and its impact on calcifying organisms." *Nature* 437: 681-686.

"Ocean acidification: the other CO<sub>2</sub> problem." *The Annual Review of Marine Science* 1:169-192.

## Standards

### California State Science Standards

Grades 9-12: Biology 6b, d  
Chemistry 2a; 3a, c; 5b, d, f, g; 6d; 9b, c  
Earth Sciences 6a, c; 7a, b  
Investigation & Experimentation 1a, k, l

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Mike Guardino, chemistry and physics teacher at Carmel High School, and his AP Chemistry and Honors Chemistry students for the adaptation and piloting of this lab.

## Investigation 1 Create Your Own pH Scale!

The pH of the surface ocean is lower and more acidic now than it was before the Industrial Revolution. Scientists attribute this to rising levels of CO<sub>2</sub> in our atmosphere.

How does CO<sub>2</sub> alter the chemistry of our ocean? In this two-part investigation, you are going to explore the changing pH of the ocean to find out.

### Before the Lab

1. Read the “pH: The Power of Hydrogen.”
2. Read “Part One: pH 1-7.” Complete the following tasks and questions on a separate sheet of paper.
  - Create a materials list based on the lab procedure.
  - Why is it important to rinse the pipet and graduated cylinder between each step?
  - Why is it important to mix the contents of the vial in each step?
  - Which pH solution is the most concentrated acid?
3. Read “Part Two: pH 8-13.” Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.
  - Why do the pH numbers decrease with each step?
  - Which pH solution is the most concentrated base?
  - What do you think is going to happen to the vials when you add universal indicator?

### During the Lab

#### *Part One: pH 1-7*

**Wear eye protection and gloves throughout this experiment! Wash your hands thoroughly when you are finished. Do not eat, drink, or chew anything while you are in the laboratory!**

1. Use a pencil or indelible marker to label a screw top vial “pH 1.” Measure 10 mL of 0.1M HCl in a graduated cylinder and pour it into the vial. *Don't screw the cap on yet.*
2. Measure 9 mL of distilled water in a graduated cylinder.
3. Use a pipet to add 1mL of the “pH 1” solution (0.1M HCl) to the water, diluting the acid to 0.01M.
4. Pour this solution into another screw top vial and label it “pH 2”. Screw the top tightly on the vial and gently shake to mix the contents. Unscrew top after mixing.
5. Rinse the graduated cylinder and pipet with distilled water.
6. Repeat steps 2-5, adding 1 mL of the previous pH solution to 9 mL of distilled water, pouring into a vial, labeling “pH 3,” screwing on top, shaking gently to mix contents and unscrewing the top.

Vial (pH)	Contents
1	10 mL of 0.1M HCl
2	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 1
3	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 2
4	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 3
5	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 4
6	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 5
7	10 mL of distilled water

7. Continue this process, diluting the solution in each vial by taking 1 mL of the previous solution (and the highest pH), adding to 9 mL of distilled water, pouring into a vial and labeling sequentially. Stop once you have six vials. (The last vial should be labeled "pH 6.")

**Remember to gently shake each vial to mix the contents before you take out 1 mL!  
Be sure to rinse out the graduated cylinder and pipet with distilled water after each measurement!**

8. Now measure 10 mL of distilled water in the graduated cylinder and add to a vial. Label it "pH 7."

9. Use a clean pipet to add 10 drops of universal indicator to each vial. Gently shake to mix contents.

10. Now fill out the **Create Your Own pH Scale** data sheet.

### *Part Two: pH 8-13*

**Wear eye protection and gloves throughout this experiment! Wash your hands thoroughly when you are finished. Do not eat, drink, or chew anything while you are in the laboratory!**

1. Use the pencil or indelible marker to label a screw top vial "pH 13." Measure 10 mL of 0.1M NaOH in a graduated cylinder and pour it into the vial. *Don't screw the cap on yet.*

2. Measure 9 mL of distilled water in a graduated cylinder.

3. Use a pipet to add 1mL of the "pH 13" solution (0.1M NaOH) to the water, diluting the solution to .01M.

4. Pour this solution into another screw top vial and label it "pH 12". Screw the top on the vial and gently shake to mix the contents.

5. Rinse the graduated cylinder and pipet with distilled water.

6. Repeat step 2, adding 1 mL of the previous pH solution to 9 mL of distilled water, pouring into a vial, labeling "pH 11" and shaking gently to mix contents. Unscrew top after mixing.

7. Continue this process, diluting the solution in each vial by taking 1 mL of the previous solution (and the lowest pH number), adding to 9 mL of distilled water and pouring into a vial. **Note that the pH numbers decrease with each step.** Stop once you have six vials. (The last vial should be labeled "pH 8.")

**Remember to gently shake each vial to mix the contents before you take out 1 mL!**

**Be sure to rinse out the graduated cylinder and pipet with distilled water after each measurement!**

Vial (pH)	Contents
13	10 mL of 0.1M NaOH
12	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 13
11	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 12
10	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 11
9	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 10
8	9 mL of distilled water + 1 mL from vial 9

8. Use a clean pipet to add 10 drops of universal indicator to each vial. Gently shake to mix contents.

9. Now fill out the **Create Your Own pH Scale** data sheet.

**Keep the pH scale you just created. You will need it for Investigation 2.**

## pH: The Power of Hydrogen



What do stomach enzymes, Coca-cola® and lemon juice have in common? All are acids. An acid is a corrosive solution that increases hydrogen-ion activity when dissolved in water and can be measured on a pH scale.



### DID YOU KNOW?

A mole is a unit of measurement used to count atoms.

For example, a dozen is a unit of measurement that equals 12 objects.

A mole is a unit of measurement that equals  $6.022 \times 10^{23}$  objects.

### What does pH mean?

It's an abbreviation for "power of the hydrogen ion." The pH scale measures the concentration of hydrogen ions  $[H^+]$  within a solution in moles (mol) per liter.

The pH scale ranges from 0-14. The more hydrogen  $[H^+]$  ions and fewer hydroxide  $[OH^-]$  ions, the lower the pH number and the more acidic the solution (e.g., Coca-cola® with a pH of 2.5). The fewer hydrogen  $[H^+]$  ions and more hydroxide  $[OH^-]$  ions, the higher the pH number and the more basic it is (e.g., bleach with a pH of 13.0). A neutral substance of pH 7.0 (e.g., distilled water) has equal concentrations of hydrogen  $[H^+]$  and hydroxide  $[OH^-]$  ions.

### What do earthquakes have to do with pH?

The pH scale and the Richter scale are logarithmic. An earthquake measuring 6.0 on the Richter scale is 10 times stronger than one measuring 5.0 on the scale. In chemistry, a solution with a pH of 5.0 is 10 times more acidic than a solution with a pH of 6.0. Why?

A standard logarithmic scale means that two adjacent values increase or decrease by a power of 10. The pH scale is a negative logarithmic scale, so a decrease in pH of 1 unit is actually a ten time increase in the amount of hydrogen ions. A solution with a pH of 5.0 is 100 times more acidic than a neutral substance of pH 7.0 and 1,000,000 times more acidic than pH 11.0!

### What does pH mean for life?

Many biological systems are controlled by delicate pH systems. Human blood must stay between pH 7.35 and 7.45 in order for oxygen to be efficiently transferred from our lungs to our cells. A 0.4 pH unit change in our blood can result in death! Small changes in pH within organisms or their environments may result in large changes in the health of organisms and ecosystems.

	pH	$[H^+]$	$[OH^-]$
↑	14	$1 \times 10^{-14} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^0 \text{ M } OH^-$
	13	$1 \times 10^{-13} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-1} \text{ M } OH^-$
	12	$1 \times 10^{-12} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-2} \text{ M } OH^-$
increased basicity	11	$1 \times 10^{-11} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-3} \text{ M } OH^-$
	10	$1 \times 10^{-10} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-4} \text{ M } OH^-$
	9	$1 \times 10^{-9} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-5} \text{ M } OH^-$
neutral	8	$1 \times 10^{-8} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-6} \text{ M } OH^-$
	7	$1 \times 10^{-7} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-7} \text{ M } OH^-$
	6	$1 \times 10^{-6} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-8} \text{ M } OH^-$
increased acidity	5	$1 \times 10^{-5} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-9} \text{ M } OH^-$
	4	$1 \times 10^{-4} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-10} \text{ M } OH^-$
	3	$1 \times 10^{-3} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-11} \text{ M } OH^-$
↓	2	$1 \times 10^{-2} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-12} \text{ M } OH^-$
	1	$1 \times 10^{-1} \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-13} \text{ M } OH^-$
	0	$1 \times 10^0 \text{ M } H^+$	$1 \times 10^{-14} \text{ M } OH^-$

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Create Your Own pH Scale! Data Sheet

1. Fill in the chart below. Describe the color or use colored pencils to indicate the color of each vial in the "Color" column.  
**Hint: Hold a white index card behind the vials to better observe colors.**

Color (after adding indicator)	pH	Acid, Base or Neutral?	More [H <sup>+</sup> ] or [OH <sup>-</sup> ] ions?	Hydrogen Ion [H <sup>+</sup> ] Concentration [H <sup>+</sup> ] [mol/L]
	13.0			
	12.0			
	11.0			
	10.0			
	9.0			
	8.0			1 x 10 <sup>-8</sup> M H <sup>+</sup>
	7.0			
	6.0			
	5.0			
	4.0			
	3.0			
	2.0			1 x 10 <sup>-2</sup> M H <sup>+</sup>
	1.0			

2. The pH scale you created uses two diluted solutions to represent the pH scale.

a. Is pH 1.0 or pH 6.0 a more concentrated acidic solution? Explain.

b. Is pH 8.0 or pH 13.0 a more concentrated basic solution? Explain.

3. Stomach Enzymes: pH 2.3      Human Saliva: pH 6.5

Which of the above has a greater concentration of hydrogen ions? Why?

4. Describe the relationship between pH and hydrogen ions.

5. pH 2.0    1 x 10<sup>-2</sup>M H<sup>+</sup>      pH 8.0    1 x 10<sup>-8</sup>M H<sup>+</sup>

How many times more acidic is a substance with a pH of 2.0, than a substance with a pH of 8.0?

## Investigation 2

### Ocean Acidification

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Before the Lab

1. Predict the numerical pH of the ocean (1-14). Do you think it is acidic or basic? Why?
2. How do you think CO<sub>2</sub> affects the pH of the ocean?
3. Read "Ocean Acidification."

#### During the Lab

##### *Part One: What Is the pH of the Ocean?*

1. Use a graduated cylinder to measure 10 mL of sea water. Pour it into a screw top vial. Don't forget to label it. Use a clean pipet to add 10 drops of Universal Indicator to the vial. Gently shake to mix contents. Compare it to the pH scale you just created.
  - What is the approximate pH of your sample?
  - What is the most common pH of surface sea water (refer to "Ocean Acidification")?
  - If the pH of your sample is different, what could be the reasons?
2. Now use a graduated cylinder to measure 10 mL of distilled water. Pour it into a screw top vial and label it. Use a clean pipet to add 10 drops of Universal Indicator and shake gently. Compare it to the pH scale you just created.
  - What is the approximate pH of your sample?
  - How does the pH of the two samples compare?

##### *Part Two: Effects of CO<sub>2</sub> on the Ocean*

1. Blow up a large balloon and secure the opening with a twist tie. (Hint: Twist balloon neck before securing opening.)
2. Cut the end off of the bulb of a plastic pipet. Insert into the balloon neck.
3. Place the tip of the pipet in the sea water sample. Undo the twist tie and slowly release pressure on the balloon's neck.
4. Use a stopwatch to start timing as soon as the pressure is released and the solution begins bubbling. Stop timing as soon as the color changes. Compare it to the pH scale you just created. Record your data below.

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Color: \_\_\_\_\_

pH: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Repeat the procedure using the sample of distilled water. Record your data below.

Time:                      Color:                      pH:

6. Fill out the chart below.

Solution		Measured pH	Acid, base or neutral?		pH (after adding CO <sub>2</sub> )	Time (in seconds) for pH to change
Sea water	Part One			Part Two		
Distilled water						

7. Compare the results of the distilled water and seawater. Why are they different? (refer back to "Ocean Acidification.")

8. How does the balloon experiment model ocean absorption of CO<sub>2</sub>?

### *Part Three: Effects of Changing pH on Marine Life*

1. What do you think will happen to a calcium carbonate shell when added to acidic solution? Why?
2. Now try it! Measure 10mL of 0.1M HCl in a graduated cylinder. Pour it into a screw top vial. Add 10 drops of Universal Indicator. Add a stopper and gently shake to mix contents. Take the stopper off and add crushed shells (CaCO<sub>3</sub>) to the vial.

Do you think the pH will increase or decrease? Why?

What happens to the calcium carbonate (CaCO<sub>3</sub>)?

How do you think this is similar to what is happening in the ocean? How is it different? Explain.

Bonus: Write the chemical equation of this reaction.

## Ocean Acidification

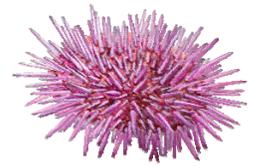
Between 1751 and 1994, surface ocean pH is estimated to have decreased from approximately 8.2 to 8.1. That may not seem like much but it is a nearly 26% increase in acidity!

### What is causing the ocean's pH to change?

The ocean is one of the world's largest carbon sinks. Every day it absorbs more than one million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) every hour! CO<sub>2</sub> is a naturally-occurring gas in our atmosphere that is integral in maintaining a healthy climate. However, additional CO<sub>2</sub> is released into the atmosphere from the burning of coal, oil and other fossil fuels. It is estimated that in the United States, approximately 15 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> are emitted every day due to human activities. When CO<sub>2</sub> dissolves in the ocean, it increases the hydrogen-ion concentration.

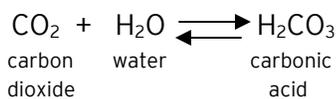
### A Massive Carbon Sink

The absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> by the ocean is a natural process. Chemically it looks like this:



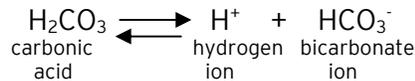
#### Phase One

As the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) it bonds with water and forms carbonic acid (H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>).



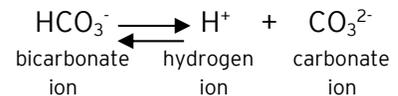
#### Phase Two

Carbonic acid can dissociate into a hydrogen ion (H<sup>+</sup>) and a bicarbonate ion (HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>).



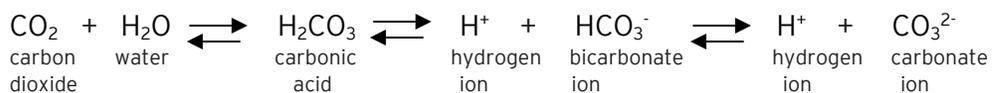
#### Phase Three

The bicarbonate ion can further dissociate into a hydrogen ion (H<sup>+</sup>) and a carbonate ion (CO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>).



### Carbonate Buffering System: A System Out of Balance

Sea water is more resistant to changes in pH than fresh water. This is because of a carbonate buffer system. Carbonate ions (CO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>) tie up excess hydrogen ions when an acid is added and result in carbonic acid (H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>). The carbonic acid (H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>) donates hydrogen (H<sup>+</sup>) ions when a base is added. This system regulates the pH of sea water. Depending on the addition of hydrogen ions, the reactions will reduce or increase carbonate ions to remain in equilibrium.



However, an excessive amount of hydrogen ions released into ocean waters (as with the absorption of excess atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>) causes the ocean to become more acidic and tips the delicate buffering system of the ocean.

### The Effects on Marine Organisms

Carbonate ions (CO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>) can bond with calcium ions (Ca<sup>2+</sup>) to form the compound calcium carbonate (CaCO<sub>3</sub>) which is utilized by marine organisms to build shells and skeletons. However, if there are excess hydrogen (H<sup>+</sup>) ions, those ions will usually "reunite" with the carbonate ions to form more bicarbonate. This makes the carbonate (CO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>) ions less available for shell- and skeleton-building animals. If ocean waters become too acidic, calcium carbonate structures may even begin to dissolve!