

3.3: WASHING YOUR GLASSWARE

Cooking a dinner creates dirty dishes and doing an organic chemistry lab experiment creates dirty glassware. Cleaning your glassware properly is an important aspect of the lab experience. This should be a priority, as impurities or trace amounts of chemicals from previous labs can ruin or complicate your experiment. Starting with visibly dirty or contaminated glassware is also considered poor lab practice, as the outcome of the reaction cannot be trusted: was the outcome due to the reagents you combined, or was it in some way influenced by the contaminants?

We will cover two good cleaning protocols, one for glassware that has been used for organic samples, and one for inorganic solutions.

A good cleaning protocol for glassware that has contained organic solutions or samples: the glassware is rinsed with acetone in the hood, and the contaminated acetone solution is then poured into the organic waste. The glassware is then allowed to air dry. If the glassware is still dirty, try this: wash with soap and water, rinse with distilled water, then rinse with acetone again, and air-dry.

This might seem like a very involved process, but in most cases the glassware is perfectly clean after the initial acetone rinses and requires no further cleanings. Also, by performing an acetone rinse first, it is usually safe to remove still dirty glassware from the hood for further cleaning because the acetone rinse will most likely have washed away potentially harmful organic materials. Then, when you wash with soap and water, you do not need to worry about working with potentially harmful organic materials outside of the hood, or pouring them into the drain.

Glassware that has contained only non-hazardous inorganic solutions (such as dilute solutions of NaHCO_3 , HCl , NaOH , NaCl , and so on) can be rinsed with water in the sink, and then soap, if necessary, washed with soap and water. The glassware is then lastly rinsed with distilled water and allowed to air dry.

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