

3.9: Temperature

Learning Objectives

- Identify the difference between temperature and heat.
- Recognize the different scales used to measure temperature

The concept of temperature may seem familiar to you, but many people confuse temperature with heat. **Temperature** is a measure of how hot or cold an object is relative to another object (its thermal energy content), whereas **heat** is the flow of thermal energy between objects with different temperatures. Temperature is a measure of the average kinetic energy of the particles in matter. In everyday usage, temperature indicates a measure of how hot or cold an object is. Temperature is an important parameter in chemistry. When a substance changes from solid to liquid, it is because there was an increase in the temperature of the material. Chemical reactions usually proceed faster if the temperature is increased. Many unstable materials (such as enzymes) will be viable longer at lower temperatures.



Figure 3.9.1: The particles in glowing charcoal have a much greater kinetic energy than the particles in frost and snow.

Three different scales are commonly used to measure temperature: Fahrenheit (expressed as $^{\circ}\text{F}$), Celsius ($^{\circ}\text{C}$), and Kelvin (K). Thermometers measure temperature by using materials that expand or contract when heated or cooled. Mercury or alcohol thermometers, for example, have a reservoir of liquid that expands when heated and contracts when cooled, so the liquid column lengthens or shortens as the temperature of the liquid changes.



Figure 3.9.2: Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit (left), Anders Celsius (center), and Lord Kelvin (right).

The Fahrenheit Scale

The first thermometers were glass and contained alcohol, which expanded and contracted as the temperature changed. The German scientist, Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit used mercury in the tube, an idea put forth by Ismael Boulliau. The Fahrenheit scale was first developed in 1724 and tinkered with for some time after that. The main problem with this scale is the arbitrary definitions of temperature. The freezing point of water was defined as 32°F and the boiling point as 212°F. The Fahrenheit scale is typically not used for scientific purposes.

The Celsius Scale

The Celsius scale of the metric system is named after Swedish astronomer Anders Celsius (1701-1744). The Celsius scale sets the freezing point and boiling point of water at 0°C and 100°C, respectively. The distance between those two points is divided into 100 equal intervals, each of which is one degree. Another term sometimes used for the Celsius scale is "centigrade" because there are 100 degrees between the freezing and boiling points of water on this scale. However, the preferred term is "Celsius."

The Kelvin Scale

The Kelvin temperature scale is named after Scottish physicist and mathematician Lord Kelvin (1824-1907). It is based on molecular motion, with the temperature of 0 K, also known as absolute zero, being the point where all molecular motion ceases. The freezing point of water on the Kelvin scale is 273.15 K, while the boiling point is 373.15 K. Notice that there is no "degree" used in the temperature designation. Unlike the Fahrenheit and Celsius scales where temperatures are referred to as "degrees F" or "degrees C", we simply designate temperatures in the Kelvin scale as kelvins.

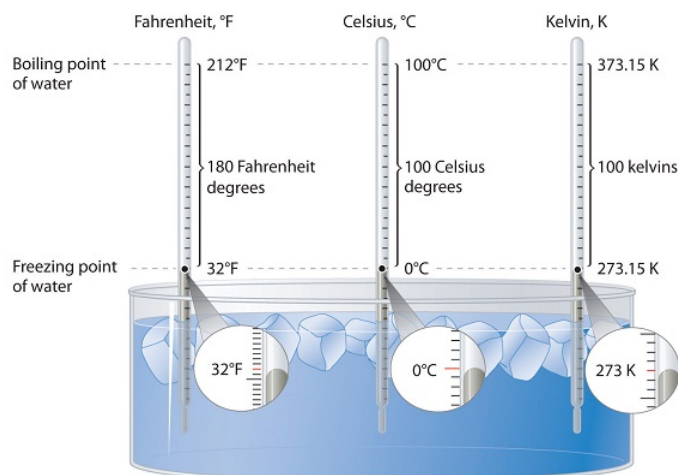


Figure 3.9.3: A comparison of the Fahrenheit, Celsius, and Kelvin temperature scales. Because the difference between the freezing point of water and the boiling point of water is 100° on both the Celsius and Kelvin scales, the size of a degree Celsius (°C) and a kelvin (K) are precisely the same. In contrast, both a degree Celsius and a kelvin are $\frac{9}{5}$ the size of a degree Fahrenheit (°F). (CC BY-SA-NC 3.0; anonymous)

Converting Between Scales

The Kelvin is the same size as the Celsius degree, so measurements are easily converted from one to the other. The freezing point of water is 0°C = 273.15 K; the boiling point of water is 100°C = 373.15 K. The Kelvin and Celsius scales are related as follows:

$$T_K = T_C + 273.15 \quad (3.9.1)$$

Degrees on the Fahrenheit scale, however, are based on an English tradition of using 12 divisions, just as 1 ft = 12 in. There is only one temperature for which the numerical value is the same on both the Fahrenheit and Celsius scales: -40°C = -40°F. The relationship between the scales is as follows, where the coefficient for degrees Fahrenheit is exact:

$$T_C = \frac{5}{9}(T_F - 32) \quad (3.9.2)$$

$$T_F = \frac{9}{5}T_C + 32 \quad (3.9.3)$$

✓ Example 3.9.1

A recipe calls for preheating the oven to 175°C. What is this temperature in K and °F?

Solution

Converting from Celsius to Kelvin requires the use of [Equation 3.9.1](#):

$$T_K = (T_C + 273.15) = 175 + 273.15 = \boxed{448 \text{ K}}$$

Converting from Celsius to Fahrenheit requires the use of [Equation 3.9.3](#):

$$T_F = \frac{9}{5}T_C + 32 = \frac{9}{5}(175) + 32 = 315 + 32 = \boxed{347^\circ \text{F}}$$

Exercise 3.9.1

Perform the following temperature conversions.

- The standard temperature for several chemical and physical relationships and equations is 25°C. What is this temperature in kelvins?
- The wind chill on a cold winter day is -40.0°F. Express this temperature in °C.
- While traveling to Africa, a temperature scan is required to determine if a person has a fever. You are told your temperature is 37.0°C. What is this temperature in °F?

Answer A

298 K

Answer B

-40.0°C

Answer C

98.6°F

Summary

- Three different scales are commonly used to measure temperature: Fahrenheit (expressed as °F), Celsius (°C), and Kelvin (K).

This page is shared under a [CK-12](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Melissa Alviar-Agnew, Henry Agnew, and Lance S. Lund (Anoka-Ramsey Community College). Original source: <https://www.ck12.org/c/chemistry/>.



LICENSED UNDER
 CK-12 Foundation is licensed under CK-12 Curriculum Materials License

3.9: Temperature is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.