

2.6: Measurement

Learning Objectives

- Express quantities properly using a number and a unit.

A coffee maker's instructions tell you to fill the coffeepot with 4 cups of water and use 3 scoops of coffee. When you follow these instructions, you are measuring. When you visit a doctor's office, a nurse checks your temperature, height, weight, and perhaps blood pressure (Figure 2.6.1); the nurse is also measuring.



Figure 2.6.1: Measuring Blood Pressure. A nurse or a doctor measuring a patient's blood pressure is taking a measurement. (GNU Free Documentation License; Pia von Lützau via Wikipedia).

Chemists measure the properties of matter using a variety of devices or measuring tools, many of which are similar to those used in everyday life. Rulers are used to measure length, balances (scales) are used to measure mass (weight), and graduated cylinders or pipettes are used to measure volume. Measurements made using these devices are expressed as quantities. A **quantity** is an amount of something and consists of a **number** and a **unit**. The number tells us how many (or how much), and the unit tells us what the scale of measurement is. For example, when a distance is reported as “5.2 kilometers,” we know that the quantity has been expressed in units of kilometers and that the number of kilometers is 5.2.

5.2 kilometers
number unit

If you ask a friend how far he or she walks from home to school, and the friend answers “12” without specifying a unit, you do not know whether your friend walks—for example, 12 miles, 12 kilometers, 12 furlongs, or 12 yards.

Without units, a number can be meaningless, confusing, or possibly life threatening. Suppose a doctor prescribes phenobarbital to control a patient's seizures and states a dosage of “100” without specifying units. Not only will this be confusing to the medical professional giving the dose, but the consequences can be dire: 100 mg given three times per day can be effective as an anticonvulsant, but a single dose of 100 g is more than 10 times the lethal amount.

Both a number and a unit must be included to express a quantity properly.

To understand chemistry, we need a clear understanding of the units chemists work with and the rules they follow for expressing numbers. The next two sections examine the rules for expressing numbers.

✓ Exercise 2.6.1

Identify the **number** and the **unit** in each quantity.

- one dozen eggs
- 2.54 centimeters
- a box of pencils
- 88 meters per second

Answer a

The number is one, and the unit is dozen.

Answer b

The number is 2.54, and the unit is centimeter.

Answer c

The number 1 is implied because the quantity is only *a* box. The unit is box of pencils.

Answer d

The number is 88, and the unit is meters per second. Note that in this case the unit is actually a combination of two units: meters and seconds.

? Exercise 2.6.2

Identify the **number** and the **unit** in each quantity.

- a. 99 bottles of soda
- b. 60 miles per hour
- c. 32 fluid ounces
- d. 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit

Answer a

The number is 99, and the unit is bottles of soda.

Answer b

The number is 60, and the unit is miles per hour.

Answer c

The number 32, and the unit is fluid ounces

Answer d

The number is 98.6, and the unit is degrees Fahrenheit

? Exercise 2.6.2

What are the two necessary parts of a quantity?

Answer

The two necessary parts are the number and the unit.

Key Takeaway

- Identify a quantity properly with a number and a unit.

1.3: Measurements

"Measurements" by LibreTexts is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA.

2.6: Measurement is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **1.3: Measurements** by Anonymous is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#). Original source: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/introduction-to-chemistry-general-organic-and-biological>.