

ChemWindow DB (4.0)

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I have used ChemWindow for several years. I was attracted to it by the low price which SoftShell maintains for students and have been kept by its features. I very much like its feel, the intuitive interface, and that the fact that one can work in a large window unencumbered by toolbars. I also like the support for files created by other programs and the associated Entropy databases of structures and pictures.

The new version, ChemWindow DB, is a fine program, but do not rush out to get it and delete your copies of ChemWindow Professional 3.1. I have come to expect the highest standards from SoftShell. I found ChemWindow DB disappointing.

The most useful new feature of ChemWindow DB is the fact that it is OLE-enabled. This means that ChemWindow DB can be opened from inside any other OLE application, inserting an editable drawing into a document; or other OLE applications may be used as servers from within ChemWindow. As an example, all the components of Microsoft Office are OLE applications. The interface remains intuitive and easy to use. New features have been added; most are more convenient implementations of useful features (such as dotted double bonds) which were present in the previous version, but one which is both new and very useful is the tool which places bars in the window for manual alignment.

However, ChemWindow DB has several problems when compared to the previous version, ChemWindow Professional 3.1.

First, I do not like the user interface as well. It appears to have been copied from the typical Microsoft interface familiar to users of Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and so forth. However, unlike the previous version, the buttons and other bells and whistles take up half of the viewing area on a 13-inch screen. In v.3.1, the tools were confined to a small palette—and this palette could be made to float so that it could be moved out of the way.

I have found that, in drawing reaction schemes for organic chemistry exams, the schemes would not easily fit in the allowed workspace if I drew on two or more lines. It gets considerably worse if one is drawing in a larger style for overhead projector slides or poster presentations. This can be handled by judicious use of view reduction, but the zoom

controls do not have free settings, and so one is forced to choose between 50% (too small) and 100% (too large).

Note that if, e.g., a Word document is set for a particular magnification, ChemWindow DB operates at that zoom setting when it is used as an OLE server. Unfortunately the magnification setting I normally use in Word yields ChemWindow graphics which are too large to edit easily within the provided workspace and a setting which gives more comfortable ChemWindow graphic size yields text which is too small to read comfortably, even using the same typesize.

Second, there is no interface except cut-and-paste with the Entropy structure and drawing databases. Since the freehand drawing tool has been eliminated from ChemWindow DB, the chemical engineering and laboratory glassware drawings do not even paste into the new version. Furthermore, no replacements for the Entropy databases are supplied with ChemWindow DB.

Third and most important, the *raison d'être* of ChemWindow DB is its use as an OLE server for Microsoft Access. An example database and a starter database are supplied with the program and should allow one to create chemical databases which may be searched by structure. But despite a considerable amount of effort on my part and yeoman work by the support personnel at SoftShell, this feature has, so far, refused to work properly on my computer, a brand-new Pentium system running Windows 95 and Microsoft Office Pro.

I am a loyal SoftShell customer, and I enthusiastically recommend ChemWindow Professional 3.1. I find it easier to use than either ChemDraw or ISIS/Draw, and—because of the associated Entropy structure and drawing databases—much more useful. Nevertheless, I cannot recommend ChemWindow DB until the problems cited above are repaired.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- (1) ChemWindow DB, 4.0 is available from SoftShell International, Ltd., 1600 Ute Avenue, Grand Junction, CO 81501-4614 (www address - <http://www.softshell.com>). The price of this software is \$499; \$299 to upgrade from any other drawing software; \$199 academic; \$99 student.

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