

# Unit 6

## Cations

### 6.33 Cations

11/25:

- Lecture 32 recap.
  - Claisen condensations provide 1,3-dicarbonyls (Figure 5.35).
    - Remember that we need two hydrogens to deprotonate!
    - These reactions proceed under 1 equivalent of base.
    - Driving force: Formation of the enolate.
    - Workup yields the final 1,3-dicarbonyl, also known as a  $\beta$ -dicarbonyl.
  - Michael reactions provide 1,5-dicarbonyls (Figure 5.45).
    - We mostly discussed carbonyl enolates, sometimes from  $\beta$ -dicarbonyls!
- Today: We'll begin Unit 6 (carbocations).
  - The beginning of this unit is a recap of what you already know about carbocations.
    - Review your 5.12 notes!!
    - And/or read Clayden et al. (2012, pp. 333–339).
    - We'll cover Chapter 36 of Clayden et al. (2012) toward the end of this unit.
  - Aside (history): Carbocations were called “carbocations” when Prof. Buchwald was in school, then “carbenium ions” for a time, and now are known as “carbocations” again.
- Lecture outline.
  - A. Introduction to carbocations.
  - B. Generating carbocations.
    - 1) Addition of an electrophile to a multiple bond.
    - 2) Heterolytic cleavage of C–X bonds.
  - C. Reactions.
    - 1) Eliminations.
    - 2) Combinations with nucleophiles.
      - b) Reactions with aromatic rings.
        - Friedel-Crafts alkylation.
        - Friedel-Crafts acylation.
      - c) Reactions with olefins.
    - 3) Rearrangements and fragmentations.
      - Friedel-Crafts alkylation (revisited).

- We'll begin with Topic A: Introduction to carbocations.
  - **Carbocation:** A species that contains a carbon bearing a positive charge. *Structure*



Figure 6.1: Carbocation.

- These are  $sp^2$ -hybridized species, so typically with three  $120^\circ$  bond angles.
  - However, carbocation bond angles can be strained in rings, for example.

• Stabilizing cations.



Figure 6.2: Stabilized carbocations.

- The allyl cation is stabilized by resonance.
  - The cyclopropenyl cation is stabilized by  $4(0) + 2 = 2\pi$  electron Hückel aromaticity, even though it has significant angle strain ( $120^\circ \rightarrow 60^\circ$ ).
  - Heteroatom-stabilized carbocations are good.

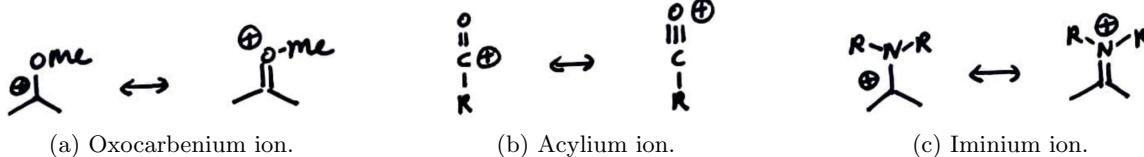
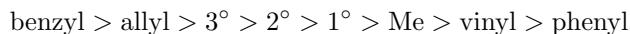


Figure 6.3: Heteroatom-stabilized carbocations.

- Figure 6.3a depicts an intermediate in the hydrolysis of ketals.
  - Heteroatom-stabilized cations can have synthetic utility, e.g., the acylium ion present in the mechanism of Friedel-Crafts acylations.
  - Iminium ions are also technically heteroatom-stabilized carbocations.

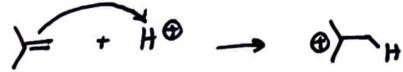
• Ordering carbocation stability.

- Ordering carbocation stability.



- $1^\circ$ , methyl, vinyl, and phenyl cations will not be discussed further in 5.13.
    - Possible exception: Know that they exist, and that they're bad.
  - Benzyl cations are stabilized by significant resonance delocalization of their positive charge.
    - This resonance implies that the *ortho*- and *para*-positions have  $\delta^+$  charges on them.
    - Thus, substitutions at these positions affect carbocation stability!
    - Example: Compare the relative stability of the *para*-trifluoromethylbenzyl cation, *para*-methylbenzyl cation, and *para*-methoxybenzyl cation.
      - Trifluoromethyl is a destabilizing EWG, methyl is an inductively stabilizing EDG, and methoxy is a resonance stabilizing EDG.

- Allyl is good; any time we can add additional resonance forms *of the same energy*, we get stabilization.
  - More substituted carbocations are stabilized by hyperconjugation (see Figure 2.3).
    - Recall that such resonance structures are sometimes referred to as “no-bond resonance forms.”
    - No-bond resonance structures are ok because they do not violate the fundamental principle that *atoms must not move between resonance structures*.
      - This is a very easy thing to forget, for intro students up to tenured professors at MIT! So be careful!!
    - The active mode of stabilization here is  $\sigma$ -donation.
  - We now move onto Topic B: Generating carbocations.
  - We'll begin with Subtopic B.1: Addition of an electrophile to a multiple bond.



(a) Markovnikov addition to an olefin.



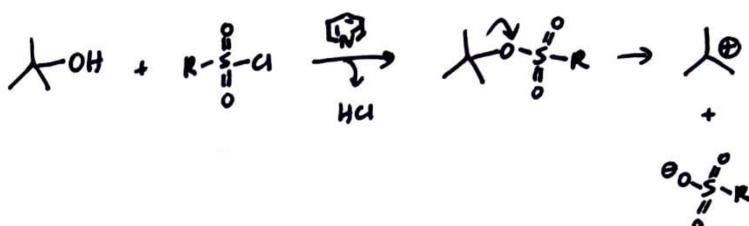
(b) Lewis acid coordination.

Figure 6.4: Multiple bonds can cleave to generate carbocations.

- We protonate in accordance with **Markovnikov's rule**.
  - Additionally, just like silicon is **oxophilic**, aluminum is an oxophilic Lewis acid.
  - **Markovnikov's rule:** Protonate so as to generate the most highly-substituted carbocation.
  - **Oxophilic** (element): An element that has a strong affinity for binding to oxygen. *Etymology* from Latin “lover of oxygen.”
  - We now move onto Subtopic B.2: Heterolytic cleavage of C–X bonds.



(a) General form.



(b) Sulfonate leaving groups.

Figure 6.5: Generating carbocations from heterolytic C–X bond cleavage.

- Acid promotes the departure of the leaving group.
  - We often run these reactions in polar solvents (e.g., DMF) to help stabilize the leaving group.
  - If we make a sulfonate out of a tertiary alcohol (using base), this can then leave — water, by itself, isn't a great leaving group.

- What's to stop the leaving group from just reattacking the carbocation?
  - It can! Leaving group departure is most certainly a reversible process.
  - Leaving group departure is just a way to generate a carbocation if you have a reaction in mind *other than* the transiently formed carbocation just reattracting the lone pair of the leaving group.
- We now move onto Topic C: Reactions.
- We'll begin with Subtopic C.1: Eliminations.

Figure 6.6: E<sub>1</sub> elimination of carbocations.

- This is the simplest carbocation reaction.
- This can be useful for isomerizing alkenes because you will preferentially eliminate to form the more substituted alkene.<sup>[1]</sup>
- We now move onto Subtopic C.2: Combinations with nucleophiles.
- We now move onto Subtopic C.2.b: Reactions with aromatic rings.
- Consider the reaction of benzene, *t*-butyl chloride, and a Lewis acid (LA).

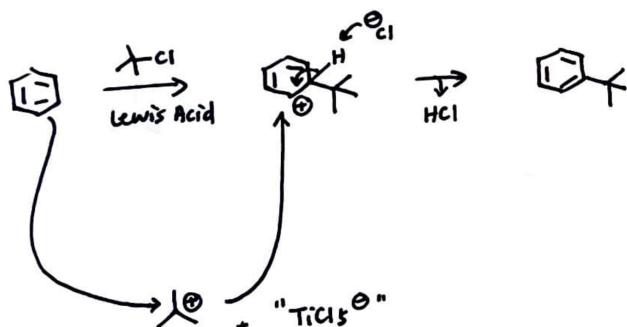


Figure 6.7: Friedel-Crafts alkylation.

- As an example of a Lewis acid, you can use titanium tetrachloride ( $\text{TiCl}_4$ ).
- $\text{TiCl}_4$  is chlorophilic, and wants to form the  $\text{TiCl}_5^-$  adduct.
- You can form a carbocation that will be attacked by benzene and then eliminated by chloride.
- You can also form a cation from an alkene and then react that with benzene.

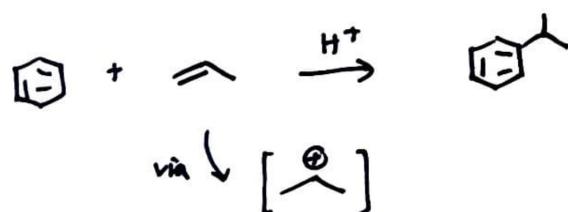


Figure 6.8: Hock process (stage 1).

<sup>1</sup>The more substituted alkene is more stable per **Zaitsev's rule**.

- This is the primary method of producing acetone.<sup>[2]</sup>
- It astounds Prof. Buchwald that this is economical: Indeed, it's easier to attach the isopropyl group to benzene and then rip it apart again, then it is to convert it directly to acetone.
- Friedel-Crafts acylation.



Figure 6.9: Friedel-Crafts acylation.

- Asides on Friedel-Crafts acylation.
  - Crafts was the president of MIT at one point, once he got tired of running these reactions!
  - If you open a bottle of AlCl<sub>3</sub>, it reacts with water in the air to release HCl (very toxic).
- We now move onto Subtopic C.2.c: Reactions with olefins.

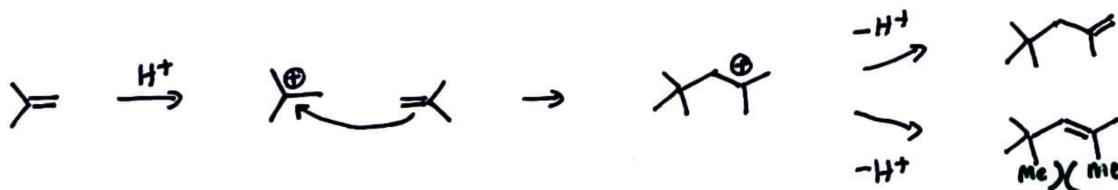


Figure 6.10: Olefin dimerization via carbocations.

- Dimerization under equilibrating conditions would give *mostly* the trisubstituted olefin, but not 100 : 0 because the trisubstituted olefin has some steric clash between the methyl and *t*-butyl group. This steric clash raises its energy relative to the disubstituted alkene product.
- We now move onto Subtopic 3: Rearrangements and fragmentations.



(a) Stepwise pathway.



(b) Concerted pathway.

Figure 6.11: Carbocation rearrangement.

- The MG is the “migrating group,” and the LG is the “leaving group.”
- When the leaving group departs, we form a 2° carbocation.

<sup>2</sup>You can read more about this process — called the **Hock process** — on [Wikipedia](#).

- The migrating group can then hop over to give us a  $3^\circ$  carbocation!
- Alternative pathway: A concerted process in which migrating and leaving happen simultaneously.
  - This might be favored because we can avoid the high-energy carbocation intermediate!
  - Following lower-energy pathways is favorable.
- The driving force for this reaction is the formation of the  $3^\circ$  carbocation.

- A case in which we thought a reaction would do one thing, and it does another.

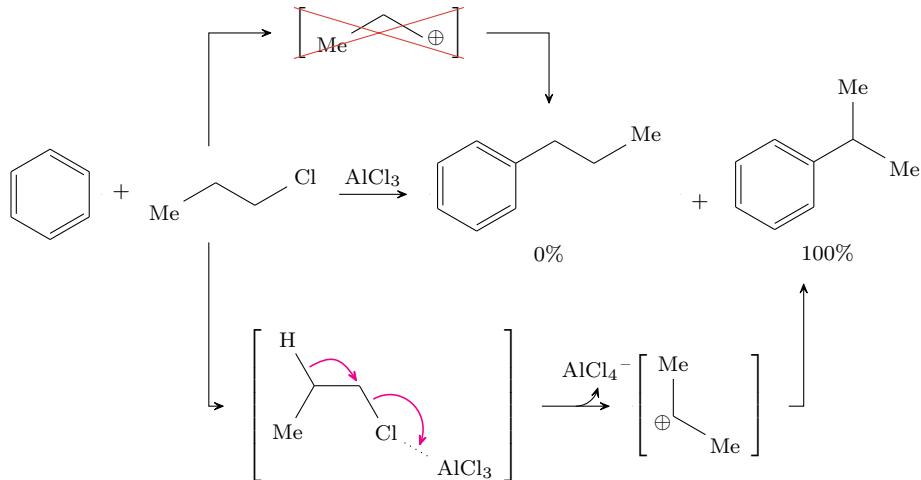


Figure 6.12: Carbocation rearrangements can explain Friedel-Crafts alkylation product distributions.

- These are often the times where we get the most interesting results; serendipity often leads to the most interesting discoveries.
  - Here, the primary carbocation is too high energy, so instead, we get concerted migration of the hydrogen to form the same secondary carbocation that we saw in Figure 6.8 from the protonation of propene.
  - This secondary cation can then react, as before, to form isopropyl benzene again.
- Why wouldn't the activated isopropylbenzene react further?
    - We're doing this in benzene as a solvent, so there's just far more of it around.
    - Example of when it does happen twice: Butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) is a radical chain inhibitor often present as a preservative in our food!
      - It is made from *para*-methylphenol and isobutylene in acid.
      - This does happen two times!
  - Naming.
    - If MG = H, then it's a **hydride shift**.
    - If MG = R, then it's an **alkyl shift**, also known as a **Wagner-Meerwein rearrangement**.
  - There *might* be a guest in Wednesday's lecture!!