

# Practice problem: Isothermal reactor design

CHEN3010/ CHEN5040: chemical reaction engineering

## General Instructions for in class Portfolios

1. The portfolio is an open-book task.
2. You can use textbooks, the resources provided during class/ workshop etc. to answer the questions.
3. The portfolio task is made available in both pdf format and as a print.
4. You are free to choose a solution technique. It is **not** required that you use the provided python code to answer the questions. You can use any tool (pen and paper, excel, ... ) and any technique (graphical, numerical, analytical) that you are comfortable with.
5. Irrespective of your solution method, you are expected to write your answers on to the printed question paper provided. **This is what gets marked.**
6. The portfolio will take place during designated timeslot communicated earlier by the unit coordinator. Please refer to the portfolio schedule on blackboard for the portfolio dates and topics.
7. The tasks will be a mix of theory questions, short calculation type and long numerical examples.
8. You have **90 minutes** to complete the tasks in the portfolio.
9. When you are required to upload the portfolio answers on to blackboard:
  - Save your report as a pdf file.
  - Rename the file as STUDENTID\_Portfolio\_x.pdf (Where STUDENTID is your student ID, and x is the portfolio number) and
  - Upload it using assessment submission link on blackboard.

# Academic Integrity

Academic integrity at its core is about honesty and responsibility and is fundamental to Curtin's expectations of you. This means that all of your work at Curtin should be your own and it should be underpinned by integrity, which means to act ethically, honestly and with fairness.

As a Curtin student you are part of an academic community and you are asked to uphold the University's [Code of Conduct](#), principles of academic integrity, and [Curtin's five core values](#) of integrity, respect, courage, excellence and impact during your studies.

You are also expected to uphold the [Student Charter](#) and recognise that cheating, plagiarism collusion, and falsification of data and other forms of academic dishonesty are not acceptable.

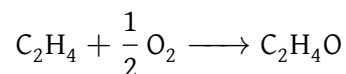
For more information, visit <https://students.curtin.edu.au/essentials/rights/academic-integrity/>

## Introduction

Ethylene oxide (EO) ( $C_2H_4O$ ), also known as oxirane, is a colorless, flammable gas with a sweet, ether-like smell. EO is an important industrial chemical used primarily to make ethylene glycol (a key ingredient in antifreeze and polyester fiber) and other chemicals, such as surfactants, detergents, and solvents.

In 2022, global production of EO was nearly 28 millions of tons and is expected to grow at a steady CAGR of 4.07% during the forecast period until 2032. With a selling price of \$1913 per tonne, the commercial value of EO is around \$53 billion.

The primary route for EO production involves the direct vapor phase oxidation of ethylene in the presence of a silver catalyst:



This reaction is highly exothermic and requires careful control to manage the risk of runaway reactions. The process typically involves a recovery stage to separate EO from water and other byproducts.

We want to design a reactor achieve a desired conversion of ethylene. Ethylene and oxygen (as air) are fed in stoichiometric proportions to a packed-bed reactor operated isothermally at  $280^\circ C$ . Ethylene is fed at a rate of 200 mol/s at a pressure of 10 atm (1013 kPa). It is proposed to use 10 banks of 25.4 mm diameter schedule 40 tubes packed with catalyst with 100 tubes per bank. Consequently, the molar flow rate to each tube is to be 0.2 mol/s.

The rate law for the reaction is

$$-r'_A = kP_A^{1/3}P_B^{2/3}$$

with  $k = 0.00392 \frac{\text{mol}}{\text{atm kg-cat s}}$  at  $260^\circ C$ . The heat of reaction,  $\Delta H$  is -106.7 kJ/mol and the activation energy,  $E$  is 69.49 kJ/mol.

## Question 1: Reactor selection

(5 marks)

In order to aid reactor design, laboratory experiments were performed at 260 °C to determine reaction rate at various ethylene conversions. The data is plotted in Figure 1.

We want to achieve 60% conversion of ethylene. What kind of reactor would you suggest? Why?

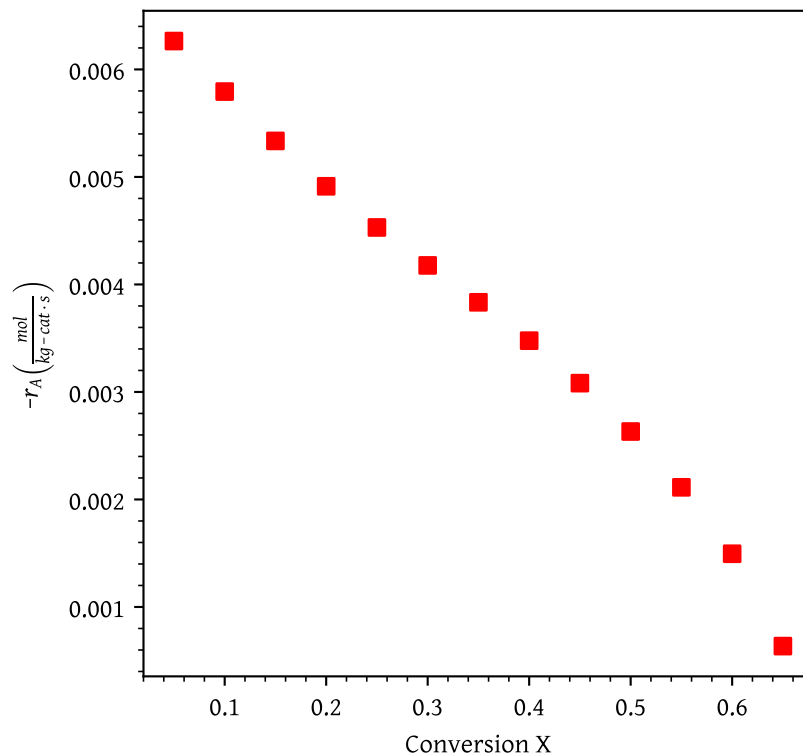


Figure 1: Rate data for oxidation of ethylene

## Question 2: Isobaric reactor design

(15 marks)

- (a) Write correct mole balance equation(s) for flow reactors in terms of conversion of ethylene. (5 marks)
- (b) Using the mole balances developed in (a), determine the weight of catalyst required to achieve 60% conversion in a PBR. Show your working by following the reaction engineering algorithm. State your assumptions if any. (10 marks)

### Question 3: Effect of pressure drop

(20 marks)

As this is a gas phase reaction carried out in a PBR, there is a significant pressure drop. The properties of the reacting fluid are to be considered identical to those of air at this temperature and pressure. The density of the 6.35 mm catalyst particles is  $1925 \text{ kg/m}^3$ , the bed void fraction is 0.45, and the gas density is  $16 \text{ kg/m}^3$ . For these catalyst properties, the pressure drop parameter  $\alpha$  is  $0.0367 \text{ 1/kg}$

- a. How will the equations change when you consider pressure drop? (4 marks)
- b. Draw the profiles of concentrations of reactants and products, conversion, volumetric flow rate ratio ( $v/v_0$ ), and pressure ratio ( $P/P_0$ ) as a function of catalyst weight. (12 marks)
- c. Estimate the catalyst weight required to achieve 60% conversion considering pressure drop. Compare the results with those obtained in question 2. (4 marks)