

Arrhenius-Plot

Basics

Many thermally excited reactions are described by

$$y = y_0 \exp - \frac{E_a}{kT}$$

- With E_a = activation energy (or enthalpy) of the process, and kT with its usual meaning.
- This equation governs not only the equilibrium concentration of point defects, but also, for example, the emission of electrons from a hot wire or the growth of bacterial cultures.

An Arrhenius plot of this equation is simply a plot of **log y** (or **ln y**) over **1/T** (or **1/kT**). This produces a straight line:

$$\ln y = \ln y_0 - \frac{E_a}{k_B} \cdot \frac{1}{T}$$

- The (extrapolated) cut with the **ln y**-axis gives directly the value of the pre-exponential factor y_0 , and the slope of the straight line gives the activation energy.

An Arrhenius plot is extremely useful if data are determined experimentally. It shows at a glance if the scatter of the data points is small or large, if we have an Arrhenius relation at all (i.e. a straight line), and if we have enough data points to get unambiguous values for the activation energy and the pre-exponential factor.

In the following Java module, you can play a bit with the representations of the exponential law.

- Shown is the function

$$c_v = c_0 \cdot \exp - \frac{H_F}{k_B}$$

- in a direct plot and in an Arrhenius plot. You can change the values of the parameters and see what happens.