

Microscopy AND Microanalysis

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HUMOR



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Dear Abbe

Dear Abbe,

In our Physics lab, we are studying particle tunneling. For convenience we have amusingly named particles arising from these studies moles. Our problem is that the chemists a few doors down the hall are incensed about this, and assert that since moles is a unit of measure (which is almost always abbreviated mols), the name is already taken. We calmly pointed out that if prior use of a name precludes its reuse, then by their logic the unit of measure must be renamed also, since there is a still earlier use of both Mols and moles, the one referring to a Danish peninsula and the other to small burrowing mammals. The infernal chemists argue that place names and common species names are unlikely to cause scientific mix-up, but having a unit of measure and a particle share the same name when both are used in the same field of study would indeed be confusing. What is your opinion?

Amusing in Atlanta

Dear Funny Boy,

It appears you have enflamed an old rivalry between the physics and chemistry community that was around in my less productive days when Avogadro was still waxing positively philosophical about his studies on ecclesiastical law. Although several of my friends are chemists, some chemists can be petty and infantile when challenged. While we physicists were playing with particles, higher equations, and multiple dimensions, chemists were still trying to balance equations and mixing solutions together that blew up in their smug faces. I would take an appeasing approach and appeal to their sense of reason. While perhaps a few simpletons (without pointing out a particular group) might be confused as to whether one means a Danish peninsula, a skin blemish, a spy, a Mexican sauce, a burrowing mammal, or a chemical unit of measure, those a little higher up the intellectual food chain (such as undergraduate cosmetologists or NASCAR fans) will easily ascertain by context which is being referenced. However, I predict that the rogues down the hall will be utterly unable to sustain a civilized and reasoned discussion on the issue and you will be forced to engage them in a tournament of Ping Pong.

*Can't wait for the next installment of Dear Abbe? Then buy the latest books wherein he redefines therapeutic rational thought on love, life and science. Dear Abbe's latest tome, *1,001 Things To Do With Schrödinger's Cat, can be found in all seedy, beatnik science bookstores. In the future, he plans to produce a line of coffees and teas with an excessive amount of Brownian motion to keep your lab mates humming along. And don't forget his earlier works, A Fine and Pleasant Melancholy, Who Stole My Grated Grid, and Never Sniff the Fixatives.*

Nothing is too mundane or inane for the Professor! If you need assistance with your petty problems, please contact his personal secretary at jshields@cb.uga.edu.