

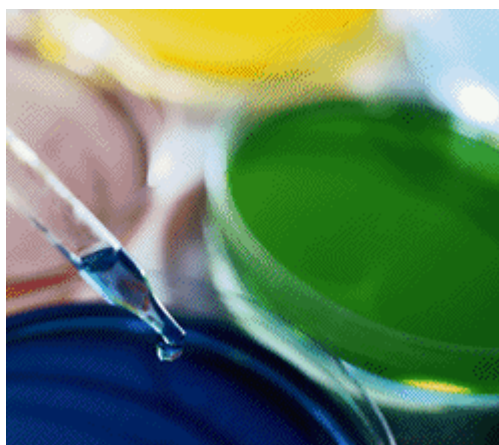
## Sulfuric Acid: Introduction

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Sulfuric acid,  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ , has many uses because it is a strong acid, an oxidising agent, and also a dehydrating agent. It is cheap to make. Concentrated sulfuric acid reacts violently with water if it is added to the acid, so the acid is diluted by adding it to water.

*Always remember that you oughter,  
Add the acid to the water.*

Most sulfuric acid is used to make other chemicals rather than being used itself. The only sulfuric acid you are likely to come across in everyday life is that used in car batteries.



### Some background

The Contact Process was developed by Rudolf Messel and Peregrine Phillips in the 1870s. The process first used platinum as the catalyst but this was later replaced by the cheaper vanadium(V) oxide. In 1843, the German chemist Justus von Liebig wrote

*'It is no exaggeration to say that we may judge the commercial prosperity of a country from the amount of sulfuric acid that it consumes.'*

This continued to be true until quite recently because sulfuric acid was involved (directly or indirectly) in the production of most manufactured goods. Today, however, modern economies produce more electronic goods and these use less acid in their production. Also, services like banking and insurance have become increasingly important.

### Did you know?

Sulfuric acid used to be known as oil of vitriol.

The recommended spelling has changed from sulphur to sulfur.

The atmosphere of Venus is thought to contain large amounts of sulfuric acid.

Sulfuric acid is formed in the air when sulfur containing fuels are burnt.