



Problems for the 4th SYNT

1. Left-handed animals

Some animals have a preference for using one side of their body, similar to left-handed and right-handed humans. Perform experiments to obtain statistical data and investigate paw preferences of various animals.

2. Slow match

A cord in which the flame front propagates with a constant low speed has been important to ignite cannons. Produce such cords and investigate their burn rates and other properties.

3. Photography with iron salts

Mix 10 parts of ferrous oxalate (25% aqueous solution), 7 parts of concentrated ammonia solution, and 20 parts of saturated solution of oxalic acid to produce a photosensitive iron complex. Prepare separately a 25% solution of potassium ferricyanide. A sheet of paper saturated with a mix of these two solutions can be exposed to light and produce an image. What other iron salts are photosensitive? Produce photographs using various approaches and various iron salts, and investigate the role of relevant parameters.

4. Popping buoy

A light ball is held underwater and then released. The ball may sometimes pop above the water surface. Investigate this effect and the role of important parameters.

5. Disinfectants

Prepare sterile culture dishes and investigate the growth of door handle bacteria and other common microorganisms. Investigate how various disinfectants, such as antibacterial soap, affect the bacteria.

6. Piezo ignition

A common lighter uses piezoelectric crystals. Investigate the quantitative parameters describing the response of such crystals to pressure.

7. Caoutchouc

Milky latex is present not only in commercially cultivated rubber trees, but even in houseplants such as spurge or ficus. Produce natural rubber from plants of your choice and investigate the physical and chemical properties of the rubber.

8. Magnet and matchstick

A matchstick is not attracted to a magnet, however the head of a burned matchstick is attracted by a strong magnet. Investigate the reasons and the role of relevant parameters.

9. Venus flytrap

Investigate experimentally how Venus flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*) catches and digests its prey.

10. Variable stars

Some variable stars, in particular Algol (β Persei), have sufficient magnitude to be observed with unaided eye or simple telescopes. Measure the light curve for such a star. What information can be obtained from the light curve?

11. Hydrogen release



A simple method to produce gaseous hydrogen is the reaction between metal aluminum and two salts in aqueous solution (e.g. copper sulphate and sodium chloride). Investigate how the reaction rate depends on the concentration of each salt and other relevant conditions. What salts react with aluminum to release hydrogen?

12. Onion cells

Investigate the effects of various salts on the structure of onion cells.

Invent Yourself Problems

Invent Yourself problems are open problem statements. Students are asked to formulate their own closer interpretations and study these.

13. Invent Yourself: Hearing

Each speaker can pronounce a vowel on several pitches, yet a listener is likely to recognize the phoneme (e.g. /o:/ or /u:/). Astonishing auditory illusions (e.g. Yanny and Laurel), so called mondegreens, and experiences of persons with poor hearing demonstrate nevertheless that listeners perceive sounds, words and phrases differently. Propose a problem concerning speech perception, mishearing, or physical differences between sounds of spoken language.

14. Invent Yourself: Chemical oscillators

Examples of oscillating chemical reactions are the Briggs-Rauscher reaction or the Belousov-Zhabotinsky reaction which result in periodic color changes. While some of such reactions are difficult to reproduce, there are multiple ways to produce a simpler and more reliable chemical oscillator. Propose a problem about an interesting and simple chemical oscillator.

15. Invent Yourself: Tasting food

Volunteers are given the task to judge the taste of food samples using a quantitative parameter. The results may depend on multiple factors (e.g. hunger or satiety, age of individuals, or temperature of food). Is it possible to detect statistically significant differences? Propose a study concerning the perception of taste.

16. Invent Yourself: Soap production

Vegetable and animal oils and fats are historically used to make soap. Investigate how physical and chemical properties of such soap depend on ingredients and recipes, and propose an interesting problem concerning soap-making from easily accessible ingredients.

17. Invent Yourself: Weight

The weight of a living organism is not constant. Propose an interesting study concerning short-term or long-term variations in the total body mass of a living organism.