

"Chemistry — Today and Tomorrow" by Ronald Breslow American Chemical Society, 1997 134 pages

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For those of us who have been asked just what a chemist does, and why, and not known quite how to respond: help is at hand. Breslow has provided a brief and lucid introduction to chemistry and its central role in the contemporary world. Indeed, the easy option of just buying the book and presenting it to your curious friend should work well. Breslow has obviously been careful to keep the complexity of presentation, language, and length at levels well short of exceeding the capacity of a typical scientifically untrained reader. The organization, concentrating on applications (such as health, production of consumer goods, environmental issues) first and concepts (catalysis, synthesis, structure, mechanism) later, is also well conceived for the purpose of keeping readers' interest from flagging. Personally, I think Breslow may have been a little too concerned about keeping things clear and simple: he avoids the risks of complexity, but at the expense of muting some of the richness and excitement of the practice of chemistry. Nonetheless, as a first introduction to the subject (especially for high school students wondering whether they might have a future in chemistry), this book is an attractive and valuable contribution.