

# Effect of the Folding of Methylene Units in the Conformational Preferences of Small Diesters

Carlos Aleman\* and Jordi Puiggali\*

Departament d'Enginyeria Quimica, ETS d'Enginyers Industrials, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Diagonal 647, Barcelona E-08028, Spain

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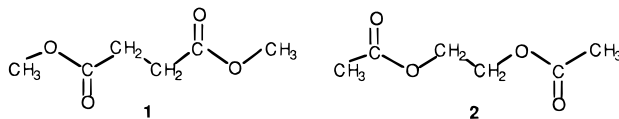
The conformational preferences of dimethyl succinate and ethylene glycol diacetate have been explored in the gas phase using ab initio quantum mechanical calculations at the HF/6-31G(d) and MP2/6-31G(d) levels. Furthermore, the effects of both aqueous and carbon tetrachloride solvents have been estimated using the self-consistent reaction-field model developed by Miertus, Scrocco, and Tomasi and adapted to semiempirical methods by Orozco and Luque. The results have been interpreted in terms of the so-called "folding of methylene units", which is the tendency of the methylene units to adopt a *gauche* conformations when a short aliphatic segment is placed between two carbonyls. For dimethyl succinate the lowest energy conformation corresponds to the TTGTT as expected from our previous studies on the folding of methylene units. On the other hand, for ethylene glycol diacetate the global minimum is the TGGST conformation, which is stabilized by the simultaneous combination of two stereoelectronic effects: (i) the folding of methylene units and (ii) the *gauche* oxygen effects.

## Introduction

During the past few years we have reported a set of experimental<sup>1-4</sup> and theoretical<sup>1,3-7</sup> studies about the so-called "folding of methylene units". This consists in the tendency of the methylene units to adopt a *gauche* conformation when the aliphatic segment is placed between two carbonyl groups. Recently published studies based on X-ray crystallography and quantum mechanical calculations on small diamide compounds [RNHCO(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>n</sub>CONHR, with *n* = 2, 3, and 4] concluded that the central methylene units do not keep a *trans* conformation but tends to fold into a *gauche* one.<sup>1,2,5</sup> These results were very important for organic and macromolecular chemistry since the methylene segments are usually considered in *all-trans* conformation in the solid state.

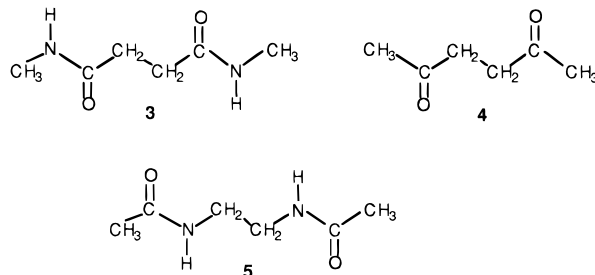
We extended our findings of the folding of methylene units to the asparagine and glutamine residues in peptides and proteins.<sup>3,7</sup> It was found that for the  $\chi_1$  and  $\chi_2$  side chain dihedral angles, in which methylene units are comprised between the backbone and side chain carbonyl groups, the *gauche* is the most populated conformation. More recently, we investigated the conformational properties of a set of small diketones [CH<sub>3</sub>CO(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>n</sub>COCH<sub>3</sub>, with *n* = 2, 3, and 4]. The results showed a strong parallelism with those found for diamides, giving a detailed picture of the folding of methylene units in ketones. Furthermore, the study of the conformational preferences of a compound with only one keto group revealed that the presence of the second carbonyl group plays a crucial role in the folding of methylene units.

We now investigate the existence of the folding of methylene units in diesters. More specifically, quantum mechanical calculations in gas phase, aqueous solution, and CCl<sub>4</sub> solution were performed on dimethyl succinate (**1**) and ethylene glycol diacetate (**2**), which contain two methylene units like the most simple diamide and diketone previously studied. A comparison of the effects of the amide, keto, and ester groups on the folding of methylene units has been performed along the work.



## Structural Background

Three compounds closely related with **1** and **2** have been investigated in our previous works. These are *N,N*-dimethylsuccinamide<sup>2,5</sup> (**3**), 2,5-hexanedione<sup>6</sup> (**4**), and *N*-(2-(acetyl amino)ethylene)acetamide<sup>4</sup> (**5**).



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***N,N*-Dimethylsuccinamide.** The conformational preferences of the succinamide moiety were recently investigated in *N,N*-succinylbis(*N*-propylglycinamide) using X-ray crystallography.<sup>2</sup> In this compound the succinamide unit present a TTGTT conformation. Ab initio quantum mechanical studies on **3** indicated that such folded conformation is favored with respect to the expected *all-trans* one by about 0.5–1 kcal/mol, depending on the computational level.<sup>5</sup>







**Table 5. Electrostatic and Steric [Cavitation + van der Waals] Contributions to the Free Energy of Solvation (kcal/mol) of Dimethyl Succinate (**1**) in Carbon Tetrachloride Solution<sup>a</sup>**

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
$\Delta G_{\text{elec}}$	-1.0	-0.8	-1.0	-0.9	-1.1	-0.9
$\Delta G_{\text{ster}}$	-6.7	-6.9	-6.6	-7.0	-6.5	-6.8
$\Delta G_{\text{solv}}$	-7.7	-7.7	-7.6	-7.9	-7.6	-7.7
$\Delta\Delta G_{\text{solv}}$	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.2
$\Delta\Delta G_{\text{conf}}$	0.0	1.5	1.3	2.3	2.1	3.0

<sup>a</sup> Conformational free energy differences ( $\Delta\Delta G_{\text{conf}}$ ) were computed by adding  $\Delta\Delta G_{\text{solv}}$  to the best estimates of relative energies in the gas phase.

**Table 6. Electrostatic and Steric [Cavitation + van der Waals] Contributions to the Free Energy of Solvation (kcal/mol) of Ethylene Glycol Diacetate (**1**) in Tetrachloride Solution<sup>a</sup>**

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
$\Delta G_{\text{elec}}$	-0.9	-0.9	-1.0	-1.0	-1.0	-1.0	-1.0	-0.8
$\Delta G_{\text{ster}}$	-6.6	-7.1	-7.2	7.2	-7.2	-7.1	-7.0	-7.0
$\Delta G_{\text{solv}}$	-7.5	-8.0	-8.2	-8.2	-8.2	-8.1	-8.0	-8.1
$\Delta\Delta G_{\text{solv}}$	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1
$\Delta\Delta G_{\text{conf}}$	0.0	0.8	1.5	2.3	1.5	2.3	0.3	2.8

<sup>a</sup> Conformational free energy differences ( $\Delta\Delta G_{\text{conf}}$ ) were computed by adding  $\Delta\Delta G_{\text{solv}}$  to the best estimates of relative energies in the gas phase.

TTGTT conformation and the *all-trans* one is the same in both the gas phase and carbon tetrachloride solution.

On the other hand, for **2** the largest value of  $\Delta\Delta G_{\text{solv}}$  is 1.0 kcal/mol, and the  $\Delta\Delta G_{\text{conf}}$  between the global minimum and the *all-trans* conformation is 2.3 kcal/mol. Note that the *all-trans* conformation is stabilized with respect to the TGGST one by 0.7 kcal/mol when the molecule is taken from the gas phase to carbon tetrachloride solution. This must be explained in terms of the van der Waals interactions between the solute and the solvent. Thus,

the molecular surface area accessible to the solvent is larger in the *all-trans* conformation than in the folded one.

## Conclusions

The results indicate that the tendency of the methylene units to fold in a *gauche* conformation is present in diesters. Furthermore, the folding of the methylene units in dicarboxylic compounds seems to be almost independent of the chemical nature of the carbonyl group. Thus, similar results have been found for **1** and the related diamide and diketone. On the other hand, a *gauche* oxygen effect has been found for the central O-C-C-O sequence of **2**. This stereoelectronic effect is combined with the folding of methylene units induced by the carbonyl groups. As a result the TGGST conformation has the lowest energy conformation for **2**. Solvents do not display any remarkable effect in the conformational preferences of **1** and **2**, indicating that polarizable environment do not have any stabilizing effect on the folding of methylene units.

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**Supporting Information Available:** Complete computational results of the dimethyl succinate and ethylene glycol diacetate (10 pages). This material is contained in libraries on microfiche, immediately follows this article in the microfilm version of the journal, and can be ordered from the ACS; see any current masthead page for ordering information.

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