

**Pacific NW Rocks and Minerals**  
**GEO143 Activity 5: Radioactive Decay and CRB Ages**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The Columbia River Flood Basalts (CRB) geologic province is a region of eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, the extreme northwest Nevada, and western Idaho where continental flood basalts erupted from fissure eruptions that eventually flowed westward toward the ocean via the ancient Columbia River Valley. The region through which they flowed is now called the Columbia River Gorge. These eruptions span from ~17 through ~5.5 million years.

There is a new brewery interested in developing a parcel that has access to a good supply of water. Interflow zones (top and bottom of CRB flows) and fault zones can form either barriers or pathways to subsurface water flow (read about hydrogeology). Your client needs to know the location of these basalts in order to better decide which land to purchase.

Your Geologic consulting company has been hired to do some drilling in search of a particular member of the CRB. Due to the local tectonics and faulting, the locations of different CRB members are poorly constrained in the region. You are tasked to determine which parcel has access to the Basalt of Lolo, part of the Priest Rapids member of the Wanapum Basalt. The drilling contractor has collected subsurface samples for you to analyze. Your coworker has already submitted the samples to the mass spectrometry lab and the results have been delivered to you electronically.

First we will review your knowledge of log scales and exponential functions. Then we will use the mass spectrometry results to determine the age of each sample. Finally, we will use these age estimates to determine which CRB member is accessed from each parcel. You will submit a report to your client listing the parcel(s) they should purchase.

**I. Log Scale and Exponential Functions**

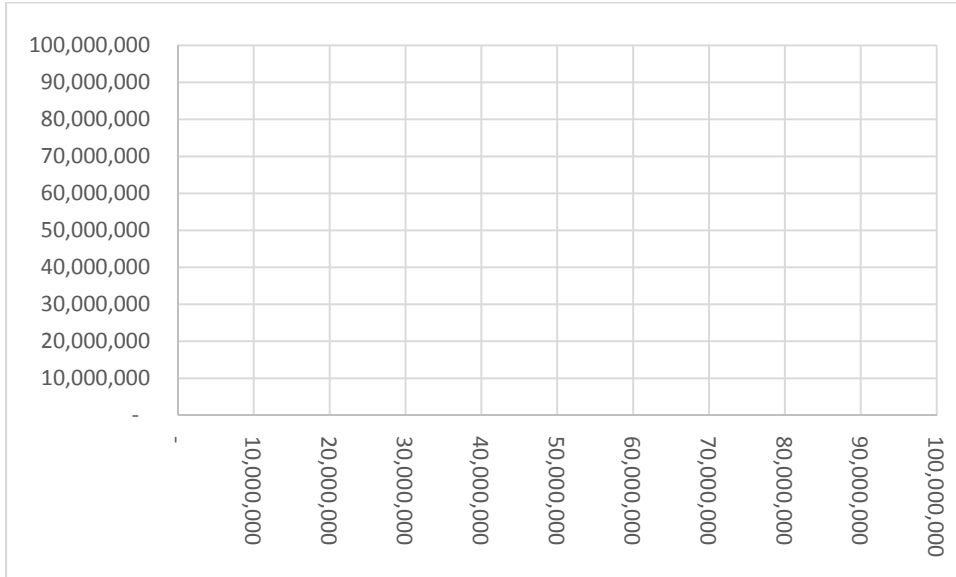
**Exponentiation** is a mathematical operation, written as  $b^n$ , involving two numbers, the **base b** and the **exponent (or power) n**. are \_\_\_\_\_. For example  $10^2 = 10 \times 10 = 100$  and  $10^3 = 10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$ . Solve the following:

$$10^1 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \quad 10^2 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \quad 10^3 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \quad 10^4 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

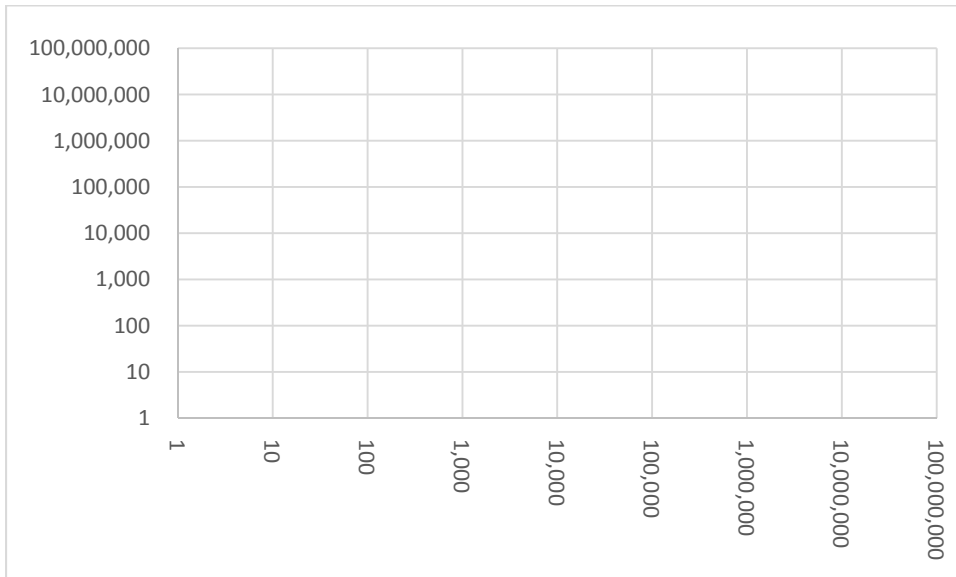
$$10^5 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \quad 10^6 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \quad 10^7 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \quad 10^8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

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Plot on a Normal-Normal scaled grid sheet:



Plot of a Log-Log scaled grid sheet:



What is the benefit to plotting on a Log-Log scaled grid?

Exponents can be negative. In this case, they are placed in the denominator (the bottom of a fraction). For example  $10^{-2} = 1 / 10^2 = 1 / 100 = 0.01$  and  $10^{-3} = 1 / 10^3 = 1 / 1000 = 0.001$ . Solve the following:

$10^{-1} =$  \_\_\_\_\_  $10^{-2} =$  \_\_\_\_\_  $10^{-3} =$  \_\_\_\_\_  $10^{-4} =$  \_\_\_\_\_

$10^{-5} =$  \_\_\_\_\_  $10^{-6} =$  \_\_\_\_\_  $10^{-7} =$  \_\_\_\_\_  $10^{-8} =$  \_\_\_\_\_

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The **logarithm** (Log) of a number is the exponent to which another fixed value, the base, must be raised to produce that number. For example, the logarithm of 1,000 to base 10 is 3, because 10 to the power 3 is 1000. This is written like this:  $\text{Log}_{10}1000 = 3$ . Solve the following:

- $\text{Log}_{10}1,000 =$  \_\_\_\_\_
- $\text{Log}_{10}10,000 =$  \_\_\_\_\_
- $\text{Log}_{10}100,000 =$  \_\_\_\_\_
- $\text{Log}_{10}1,000,000 =$  \_\_\_\_\_
- $\text{Log}_{10}10,000,000 =$  \_\_\_\_\_
- $\text{Log}_{10}100,000,000 =$  \_\_\_\_\_

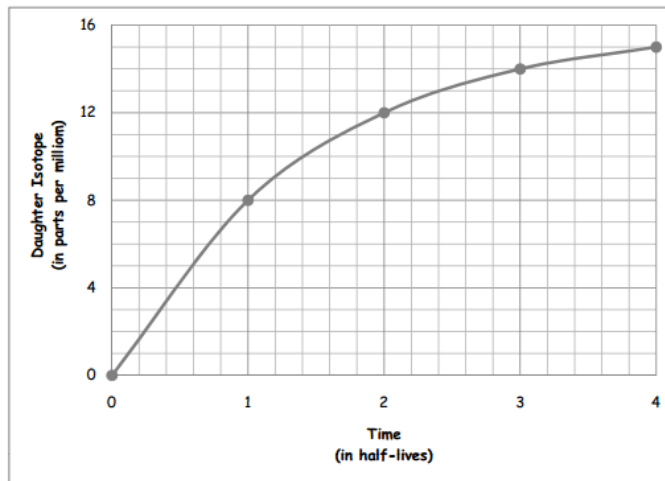
A special number used in science is “e.” e is an irrational and transcendental constant approximately equal to 2.718 281 828. Natural Logarithms use e as a base:  $\ln = \text{Log}_e$ . Calculators and computer programs know how to solve calculations of natural logs.

### II. Radioactive Decay

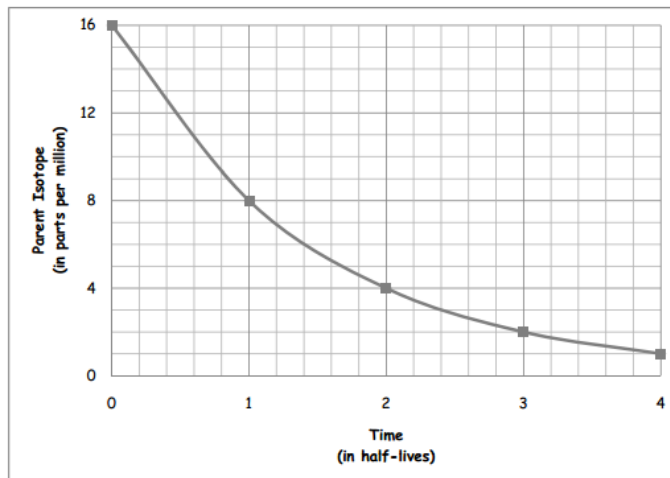
Use the Data in the table at the right to fill the first three rows in the table below. Then follow the instructions for rows 4 – 6.

	Time (in half-lives)					
	0	1	2	3	4	
Row 1	Daughter Isotope (in parts per million)	0	8	12	14	15
Row 2	Parent Isotope (in parts per million)	16	8	4	2	1
Row 3	Sum (Row 1 + Row 2)	16	16	16	16	16

Table 2—Radiometric Dating Game data table



Graph 1—Radiometric Dating Game daughter isotope abundance graph



Graph 2—Radiometric Dating Game parent isotope abundance graph

Row 4—determine the fraction of parent isotope remaining at time (in half-lives) =x, where x=0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 by placing the amount of the parent isotope (Row 2) at time=x in the numerator, and the sum of isotopes (Row 3) at time=x, which is equivalent to the initial abundance of the parent isotope, in the denominator. Simplify your fractions. Show your work.

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Row 5—calculate the percentage of the parent isotope remaining at time (in half-lives) =x, where x=0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 by multiplying the value in Row 4 at time =x by 100 or by converting the fraction to a decimal and multiplying by 100. Show your work.

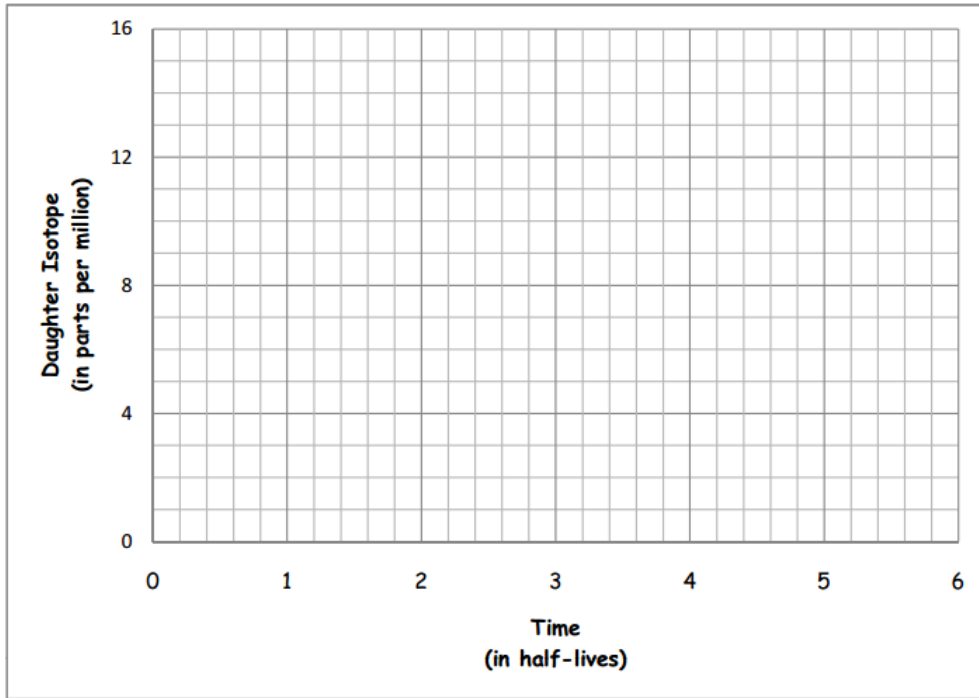
Row 6—determine the daughter-to-parent ratio at time (in half-lives)=x, where x=0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 by dividing Row 1 by Row 2 for time=x. Show your work.

		Time (in half-lives)						
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Row 1	Daughter Isotope (in parts per million)							
Row 2	Parent Isotope (in parts per million)							
Row 3	Sum of Isotopes (Row 1 + Row2)							
Row 4	Parent Isotope (fraction remaining)							
Row 5	Parent Isotope (percentage remaining)							
Row 6	Daughter-to-Parent Ratio							

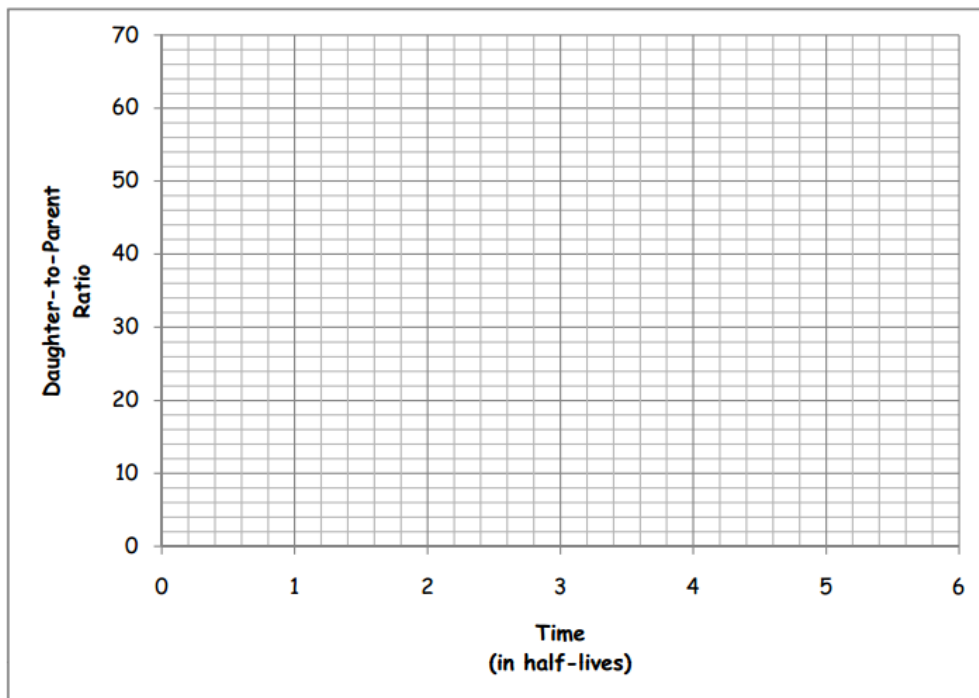
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Plot the information in Row 1 on the graph below to show the change in the abundance of the daughter isotope over time.



Plot the information in Row 6 on the graph below to show the change in the daughter-to-parent ratio over time.



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Compare the graph of daughter isotope abundance in Problem 2 with the graph of daughter-to-parent ratio in Problem 3. Describe the shape of the curves and their trajectories. If both graphs contain information about the daughter isotope, then why do they behave so differently?

The initial abundance of the parent isotope at the formation of our sample was 16 parts per million (ppm). If modern mass spectrometers are capable of accurately measuring isotope abundance down to a level of 10 parts per billion (ppb), after how many half-lives will it no longer be possible to calculate an accurate age for the sample? [Hint: At time  $t=6$ , the remaining parent isotope equals  $\frac{1}{4}$  ppm. There are 1000 ppb in 1 ppm. Calculate the amount of the parent isotope remaining in ppb for time  $t=x$ , where  $x=6, 7, 8$ , and so on until the quantity remaining is less than 10 ppb.] Show your work.

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**III. Columbia River Basalt**

How old are they?

Using radioactive decay to determine the age of materials requires several geologically reasonable assumptions to be made. (1) The half-life has not changed through time. This is generally accepted. For example, tree rings have been counted back over 11,000 years to calibrate the radiocarbon curve. (2) The initial concentration of the parent isotope is known. This is also determinable for the various isotopes. (3) There was a closure time, when the radioactive clock began. There cannot be any contamination of “new” material to the system after this time (i.e. it is a “closed” system). This assumption is sometimes difficult to test and analyses may be cross checked with analyses with samples from different locations. (4) The sample was not contaminated and the measurement was taken with high precision.

Potassium–Argon dating, abbreviated K–Ar dating, is a radiometric dating method used in geochronology and archaeology. It is based on measurement of the product of the radioactive decay of an isotope of potassium (K) into argon (Ar). Potassium is a common element found in many materials, such as micas, clay minerals, tephra, and evaporites. In these materials, the decay product <sup>40</sup>Ar is able to escape the liquid (molten) rock, but starts to accumulate when the rock solidifies (recrystallizes). Time since recrystallization is calculated by measuring the ratio of the amount of <sup>40</sup>Ar accumulated to the amount of <sup>40</sup>K remaining. The long half-life of <sup>40</sup>K allows the method to be used to calculate the absolute age of samples older than a few thousand years.

To calculate the age of rocks in the <sup>40</sup>K–<sup>40</sup>Ar system scientists use the following formula:

$$t = (1/\lambda) \ln [(^{40}\text{Ar}/^{40}\text{K}) (\text{correction factor}) (\lambda/\lambda_e) + 1]$$

Where t is the time since the radioactive clock started, λ is the decay constant of <sup>40</sup>K–<sup>40</sup>Ca–<sup>40</sup>Ar system (5.543x10<sup>-10</sup>/yr and λ<sub>e</sub> is the decay constant for the <sup>40</sup>K–<sup>40</sup>Ar system (0.581x10<sup>-10</sup>/yr). And ln is the natural log. The ratio of <sup>40</sup>Ar/<sup>40</sup>K must be adjusted for the difference in atomic weight. The correction factor is 0.97838 (adjustment to handle the difference of masses for <sup>40</sup>Ar/<sup>40</sup>K or: 39.0983/39.9623).

**Table 1. Mass Spectrometry Results**

Parcel Number	Parent Concentration Time(t) (ppb)	Daughter Concentration Time(t) (ppb)	Decay Constant	Decay Constant Electron Capture
#	<sup>40</sup> K	<sup>40</sup> Ar	λ	λ <sub>e</sub>
931-412-12	14,065	7.1	5.54E-10	5.81E-11
931-412-13	14,065	10.1	5.54E-10	5.81E-11
931-412-14	14,065	10.9	5.54E-10	5.81E-11
931-412-15	14,065	12.2	5.54E-10	5.81E-11
931-412-16	14,065	12.9	5.54E-10	5.81E-11
931-412-17	14,065	13.1	5.54E-10	5.81E-11
931-412-18	14,065	13.9	5.54E-10	5.81E-11

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Calculate the ages for each of the seven samples. Show your work. Enter these ages in the table on the right. List the name

Parcel Number	Age	Basalt Name
#	(Ma)	Name
931-412-12		
931-412-13		
931-412-14		
931-412-15		
931-412-16		
931-412-17		
931-412-18		

of the Basalt that you interpret to be found in each parcel, based on your age determination and the table provided at the end of this packet. (From Reidel et al. (1989b) and Tolan et al. (1989).)



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Which parcel will work?

Write a paragraph explaining your age determinations. List the age determination you made for the Basalt of Lolo, part of the Priest Rapids member of the Wanapum Basalt. Finally list the parcel number that you recommend that they purchase for their development.

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Series	Group	Formation	Member	Isotopic Age (m.y.)	Magnetic Polarity				
Miocene	Upper	Saddle Mountains Basalt	Lower Monumental Member	6	N				
			Ice Harbor Member	8.5					
			Basalt of Goose Island		N				
			Basalt of Martindale		R				
			Basalt of Basin City		N				
			Buford Member		R				
			Elephant Mountain Member	10.5	N <sub>1</sub> T				
			Pomona Member	12	R				
			Esquatzel Member		N				
			Weissenfels Member						
			Basalt of Slippery Creek		N				
			Basalt of Tenmile Creek		N				
			Basalt of Lewiston Orchards		N				
			Basalt of Cloverland		N				
			Asotin Member	13					
			Basalt of Huntzinger		N				
			Wilbur Creek Member						
			Basalt of Lapwai		N				
	Basalt of Wahluke		N						
	Umatilla Member								
	Basalt of Sillusi		N						
	Basalt of Umatilla		N						
	Middle	Columbia River Basalt Group	Yakima Basalt Subgroup	Priest Rapids Member	14.5				
				Basalt of Lolo		R			
				Basalt of Rosalia		R			
				Roza Member		T, R			
				Shumaker Creek Member		N			
				Frenchman Springs Member					
				Basalt of Lyons Ferry		N			
				Basalt of Sentinel Gap		N			
				Basalt of Sand Hollow	15.3	N			
				Basalt of Silver Falls		N, E			
				Basalt of Ginkgo	15.6	E			
				Basalt of Palouse Falls		E			
				Eckler Mountain Member					
				Basalt of Dodge		N			
				Basalt of Robinette Mountain		N			
				Vantage Horizon					
				Lower	Columbia River Basalt Group	Prineville Basalt	Sentinel Bluffs Member	15.6	
							Slack Canyon member		
	Fields Springs member								
	Winter Water member		N <sub>2</sub>						
	Umtanum member								
	Ortley member								
	Armstrong Canyon member								
Meyer Ridge member									
Grouse Creek member									
Wapshilla Ridge member		R <sub>2</sub>							
Mt. Horrible member									
China Creek member		N <sub>1</sub>							
Downy Gulch member									
Center Creek member									
Rogersburg member									
Teepee Butte Member		R <sub>1</sub>							
Buckhorn Springs member	16.5								
Lower	Columbia River Basalt Group	Picture Gorge Basalt	Imnaha Basalt					R <sub>1</sub>	
					T				
					N <sub>0</sub>				
			Imnaha Basalt	17.5	R <sub>2</sub>				

Stratigraphic nomenclature of the CRBG. From Reidel et al. (1989b) and Tolan et al. (1989).