

Lesson 3.2: Critical Reading

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Read these passages from the text and answer the questions that follow.

Plasma Membrane

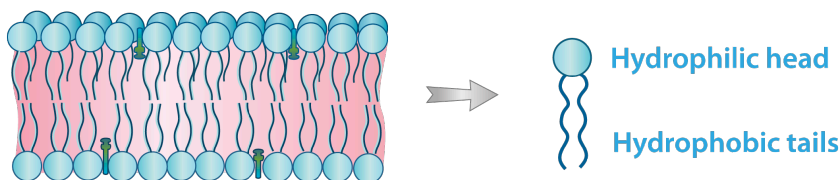
The plasma membrane forms a barrier between the cytoplasm inside the cell and the environment outside the cell. It protects and supports the cell and also controls everything that enters and leaves the cell. It allows only certain substances to pass through, while keeping others in or out. The ability to allow only certain molecules in or out of the cell is referred to as selective permeability or semipermeability. To understand how the plasma membrane controls what crosses into or out of the cell, you need to know its composition.

Phospholipid Bilayer

The plasma membrane is composed mainly of phospholipids, which consist of fatty acids and alcohol. The phospholipids in the plasma membrane are arranged in two layers, called a phospholipid bilayer. As shown in the figure below, each phospholipid molecule has a head and two tails. The head “loves” water (hydrophilic) and the tails “hate” water (hydrophobic). The water-hating tails are on the interior of the membrane, whereas the water-loving heads point outwards, toward either the cytoplasm or the fluid that surrounds the cell. Molecules that are hydrophobic can easily pass through the plasma membrane, if they are small enough, because they are water-hating like the interior of the membrane. Molecules that are hydrophilic, on the other hand, cannot pass through the plasma membrane — at least not without help — because they are water-loving like the exterior of the membrane.

Phospholipid bilayer

Phospholipid molecule



The phospholipid bilayer consists of two layers of phospholipids (left), with a hydrophobic, or water-hating, interior and a hydrophilic, or water-loving, exterior. A single phospholipid molecule is depicted on the right. (Image courtesy of CK-12 Foundation and under the Creative Commons license CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0.)

Other Molecules in the Plasma Membrane

The plasma membrane also contains other molecules, primarily other lipids and proteins. The green molecules in the figure above, for example, are the lipid cholesterol. Molecules of cholesterol help the plasma membrane keep its shape. Many of the proteins in the plasma membrane assist other substances in crossing the membrane.

Extensions of the Plasma Membrane

The plasma membrane may have extensions, such as whip-like flagella or brush-like cilia. In single-celled organisms, the membrane extensions may help the organisms move. In multicellular organisms, the extensions have other functions. For example, the cilia on human lung cells sweep foreign particles and mucus toward the mouth and nose.

Questions

1. What is the plasma membrane?

2. What is the meaning of *semipermeability*?
3. Discuss why the plasma membrane must be a bilayer.
4. What are some of the “other” molecules in the plasma membrane? Describe their function.
5. What are cilia and flagella?