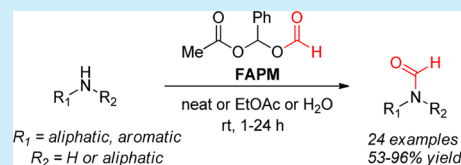


Formyloxyacetoxyphenylmethane as an *N*-Formylating Reagent for Amines, Amino Acids, and PeptidesRobert S. L. Chapman,[‡] Ruth Lawrence,[‡] Jonathan M. J. Williams, and Steven D. Bull*[§]

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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Formyloxyacetoxyphenylmethane is a stable, water-tolerant, *N*-formylating reagent for primary and secondary amines that can be used under solvent-free conditions at room temperature to prepare a range of *N*-formamides, *N*-formylanilines, *N*-formyl- α -amino acids, *N*-formylpeptides, and an isocyanide.

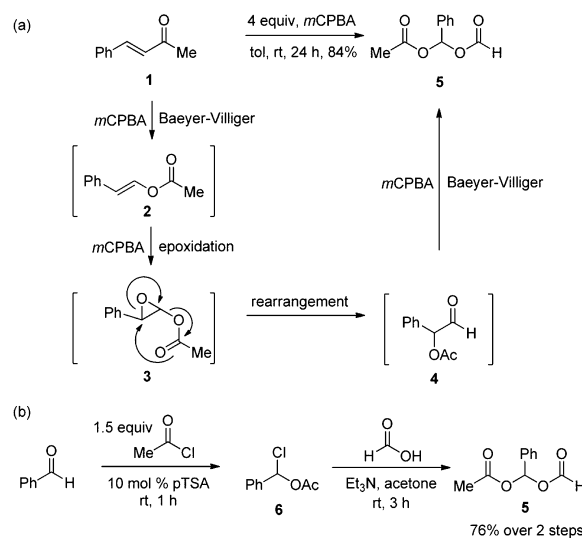


N-Formylation reactions of primary and secondary amines are important transformations in organic chemistry because they provide direct access to the highly versatile formamide group.¹ Highlighting their synthetic utility, *N*-formyl derivatives can be used as precursors for the synthesis of formamides,² ureas,³ carbamates,³ aryl amides,⁴ isocyanates,⁵ nitriles,⁶ and isocyanides.⁷ Consequently, they have often been used as intermediates for the synthesis of pharmaceuticals.⁸ Alternatively, the *N*-formyl group may be used as a protecting group for peptide synthesis,⁹ while many naturally occurring formamides exhibit important medicinal and biological activities.¹⁰ The formamide moiety is also present in pharmaceuticals, including leucovorin (chemotherapeutic),^{11a} formoterol (asthma)^{11b} and orlistat (antiobesity).^{11c}

Due to their importance, a number of *N*-formylating reagents for primary and secondary amines have been developed,¹ including the use of formic acid,^{12a} formic acid in the presence of coupling reagents (e.g., DCC),^{12b} acetic formic anhydride,^{12c} formate esters,^{12d} *N*-formyl-saccharin,^{12e} trialkyl orthoformates,^{12f} enol formates,^{12g} ammonium formate,^{12h} and *N*-formylbenzotriazole.¹²ⁱ However, many of these reagents are only moderately reactive toward sterically hindered or electronically deactivated amines, often requiring elevated temperatures, extended reaction times, or the use of excess reagent for their *N*-formylation reactions to proceed to completion.¹ A number of these formylating reagents are also susceptible to hydrolysis, while some reagents can decompose to liberate hazardous byproducts (e.g., C≡O).¹ Given these limitations, a number of catalytic *N*-formylation protocols have also been developed that employ *N*-formyl donors in combination with Brønsted acid catalysts, Lewis acids, organocatalysts, metal catalysts, and biocatalysts.¹³

Given the limitations of using many *N*-formylating reagents under catalyst-free conditions, we now report herein that formyloxyacetoxyphenylmethane (FAPM, **5**) can be used as a bench-stable formylating reagent for primary/secondary amines under solvent-free conditions at room temperature. Importantly, the stability of FAPM (**5**) toward hydrolysis enables it to be used as a catalyst free *N*-formylating reagent for α -amino acids and peptides in aqueous-based solvent systems.

As part of our investigations into the Baeyer–Villiger oxidation reactions of α,β -unsaturated ketones, we found that treatment of benzylidene acetone **1** with 4 equiv of *m*-chloroperoxybenzoic acid (*m*-CPBA) in toluene for 24 h gave FAPM (**5**) in 84% isolated yield (Scheme 1a).¹⁴ In this remarkable one-pot, four-

Scheme 1. Syntheses of Formyloxyacetoxyphenylmethane **5** via (a) *m*-CPBA-Mediated Oxidation Reaction of Benzylidene Acetone **1** and (b) Nucleophilic Attack of Formic Acid on α -Chlorobenzyl Acetate **6**

step reaction, benzylidene acetone **1** first undergoes an *m*-CPBA-mediated Baeyer–Villiger reaction to afford enol acetate **2**, whose electron-rich alkene bond is then epoxidized by a second equivalent of *m*-CPBA to afford epoxy acetate **3**. This unstable epoxy acetate **3** then undergoes intramolecular rearrangement to afford aldehyde **4**, which then undergoes a further *m*-CPBA-mediated Baeyer–Villiger reaction to afford FAPM (**5**). The

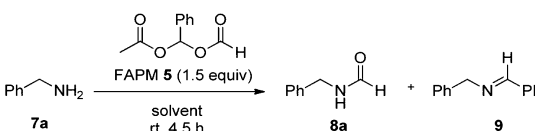
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formation of intermediates **2** and **4** in this oxidation reaction were confirmed by ^1H NMR spectroscopic analysis of a series of control reactions that were carried out using fewer equivalents of *m*-CPBA over shorter periods of time (see the Supporting Information (SI) for details).¹⁵

A second route to FAPM (**5**) was also developed using a variant of a protocol previously developed by Rephaeli and co-workers for the synthesis of nonsymmetric acyloxyalkyl esters.¹⁶ This involved treatment of benzaldehyde with 1.5 equiv of acetyl chloride in the presence of a catalytic amount of *p*-toluenesulfonic acid to afford α -chlorobenzyl acetate **6**¹⁷ that was subsequently reacted with formic acid and Et_3N in acetone to afford FAPM **5** in 76% yield (Scheme 1b).¹⁸

FAPM (**5**) proved to be a bench-stable liquid that could be stored at room temperature under nitrogen for up to 6 months without decomposition. We reasoned that FAPM (**5**) might act as a selective *N*-formyl donor for amines, which was confirmed by reacting 1.5 equiv of FAPM (**5**) with 1 equiv of benzylamine **7a** in THF at rt for 4.5 h to give *N*-formylbenzylamine **8a** and imine **9** in 90% and 10% conversion, respectively (Table 1, entry 1).

Table 1. Solvent Screen To Optimize the *N*-Formylation Reaction of Benzylamine with FAPM **5^a**

				
entry	solvent	formamide 8a	imine 9	
1	THF	90	10	
2	EtOH	88	12	
3	dioxane	92	8	
4	MeCN	96	4	
5	CH_2Cl_2	100		
6	toluene	100		
7	EtOAc	98	2	
8	THF/ H_2O (1:1)	99	1	
9	MeCN/ H_2O (1:1)	100		
10	dioxane/ H_2O (1:1)	99	1	
11	H_2O	100		
12	neat	98	2	

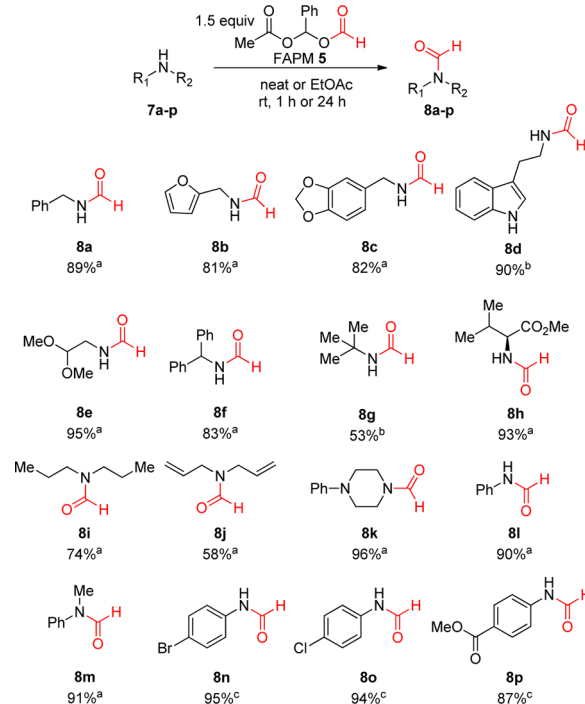
^aProduct ratios determined from integrals of diagnostic resonances for **8a** and **9** in ^1H NMR spectra of crude reaction products.

Importantly, ^1H NMR spectroscopic analysis revealed no evidence of any *N*-acetylbenzylamide having been formed via competing *N*-acyl transfer from FAPM (**5**). Mechanistically, we propose that benzylamine **10a** attacks the reactive formyl group of FAPM to irreversibly afford formamide **8a**, with benzaldehyde and acetic acid being generated as byproducts. Unwanted formation of imine **9** then occurs through acid-catalyzed reaction of benzylamine **7a** with the benzaldehyde byproduct (see the SI for reaction mechanism). A solvent screen was carried out with the aim of identifying conditions that would suppress formation of imine **9**. Use of ethanol and 1,4-dioxane (Table 1, entries 2 and 3) also afforded significant amounts of the unwanted imine **9** byproduct (8–12%). Carrying out the *N*-formylation reaction in MeCN (Table 1, entry 4) gave reduced amounts of imine (4%), while CH_2Cl_2 , toluene, and EtOAc (Table 1, entries 5–7) gave excellent conversion to *N*-formylbenzylamine **8a** with only trace amounts of imine **9** ($\leq 2\%$) being formed. Since imine formation is potentially reversible, a series of *N*-formylation reactions were

carried out in mixed aqueous solvents in the hope that the presence of bulk water would perturb the reaction equilibrium away from imine formation. Gratifyingly, use of 1:1 mixtures of THF/ H_2O , MeCN/ H_2O , and 1,4-dioxane/ H_2O (Table 1, entries 8–10) gave good conversions to *N*-formylbenzylamine **8a**, with $\leq 1\%$ of imine **9** being formed in each case. The tolerance of FAPM (**5**) toward hydrolysis in aqueous systems was confirmed by carrying out an *N*-formylation reaction in water,¹⁹ with 1.5 equiv of FAPM (**5**) resulting in complete conversion of benzylamine to *N*-formylbenzylamine **8a** (Table 1, entry 11). Finally, FAPM (**5**) could also be used under solvent-free conditions (Table 1, entry 12), resulting in clean *N*-formylation of benzylamine, with only 2% of imine **9** being produced.²⁰

^1H NMR spectroscopic analysis of the *N*-formylation reaction of benzylamine in d_8 -toluene revealed that complete consumption of benzylamine **7a** occurred after 1 h. Analysis after 15 min revealed the presence of a 87:13 mixture of formamide **8a**/imine **9**, which subsequently equilibrated to a 99:1 mixture of formamide **8a**:imine **9** after 1 h. With this information in hand, we employed 1.5 equiv of FAPM to *N*-formylate a range of 16 primary and secondary amines **7a–p** to afford a series *N*-formamides **8a–p** in 53–96% yield after chromatographic purification (Scheme 2). Most of these *N*-formylation reactions

Scheme 2. FAPM **5 as an *N*-Formylating Reagent for the Synthesis of *N*-Formamides **8a–p**^a**



^aReaction conditions: (a) 2 mmol of amine, 1.5 equiv of FAPM **5**, 1 h, rt; (b) 2 mmol of amine, 1.5 equiv of FAPM **5**, EtOAc, 1 h, rt; (c) 2 mmol of amine, 1.5 equiv of FAPM **5**, EtOAc, rt, 24 h.

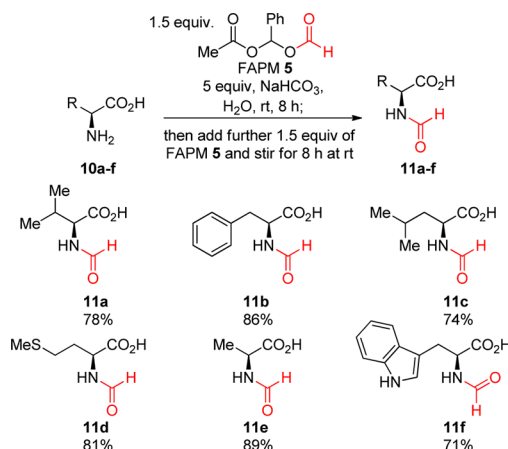
were carried out under solvent-free conditions by dissolving the amine in neat FAPM and stirring at rt, followed by purification by silica chromatography. In those cases where the parent amine was insoluble in FAPM (**5**), EtOAc was employed as a cosolvent to afford a homogeneous reaction mixture. *N*-Formylation reactions of primary aliphatic amines proved particularly facile, typically affording their corresponding formamides **8a–e** in good

to excellent yields (81–95%). Pleasingly, amines containing acid-sensitive functionalities, such as furan and dimethyl acetal, were well tolerated, affording formamides **8b** and **8e** in 81% and 95% yields, respectively. FAPM (**5**) reacted exclusively with the primary amine functionality of tryptamine to afford formamide **8d** in 90% yield. While the formamide **8f** of sterically congested benzhydrylamine was formed in good 83% yield, formylation of *tert*-butylamine gave *N*-formamide **8g** in only 53% isolated yield, arising from losses during reaction workup due to its volatility. (*S*)-Valine methyl ester afforded *N*-formamide **8h** in an excellent 93% yield with no evidence of any racemization having occurred. Acyclic and cyclic secondary amines were also formylated using FAPM **5**, with moderate to excellent 58–96% yields of *N*-formamides **8i–k** being isolated. Pleasingly, electron-deficient aniline and its secondary *N*-methyl derivative gave their corresponding formamides **8l,m** in excellent 90% and 91% yields, respectively. However, formylation of anilines containing deactivating halogen or ester groups required extended reaction times of 24 h for their corresponding *N*-formamides **8o,p** to be formed in 87–95% yields, respectively. Alternative workup procedures were then developed to allow these *N*-formylation reactions to be carried out on scale, without the need for chromatographic purification (see the SI for details).

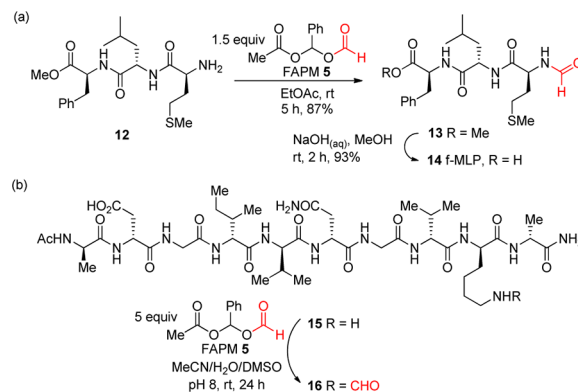
Although several reagents have been developed for the *N*-formylation of amino ester derivatives,²¹ extension of these methods to unprotected α -amino acids has not been widely reported. This is due to the instability of many formylating reagents toward hydrolysis in aqueous media and the insolubility of α -amino acids in nonaqueous solvents. Currently, *N*-formyl- α -amino acids are most commonly prepared via treatment of the parent α -amino acids with a large excess of Ac₂O and formic acid (via formation of formyl acetate in situ), which often requires forcing conditions and/or extended reaction times.²² *N*-Formylation of α -amino acids using formic acid in water has been reported; however, this protocol requires Oxyma as a stoichiometric coupling reagent.²³ Given the observed stability of FAPM in aqueous solvents, a range of six L-amino acids **10a–f** were treated with 1.5 equiv of FAPM in water containing 5 equiv of NaHCO₃ as a base, which resulted in 80–85% conversion to their corresponding formamides **11a–f** after 16 h. However, we subsequently found that modifying these formylation reactions, by incorporating addition of a second portion of FAPM **5** (1.5 equiv) after 8 h, resulted in complete consumption of each α -amino acid, giving *N*-formylamino acids **11a–f** in good to excellent 71–89% isolated yields, with no racemization having occurred (Scheme 3).

N-Formylmethionineleucylphenylalanine (f-MLP, **14**) is a chemotactic *N*-formyltripeptide that is a potent chemoattractant for leukocytes and a macrophage activator that is involved in triggering the innate immune response toward bacterial pathogens.²⁴ Consequently, it was chosen as a suitable target to test the utility of FAPM for the *N*-formylation of peptidic substrates. The parent tripeptide ester **12** was treated with 1.5 equiv of FAPM in EtOAc for 5 h to afford formamide **13** in 87% yield, which was then hydrolyzed using NaOH/MeOH to afford f-MLP **14** in 93% yield (Scheme 4a). Similarly, a decapeptide with the sequence Ac-ADGIVNGVKA-NH₂ **15** containing *N*-acetamide and C-primary amide termini was reacted with 5 equiv of FAPM in a mixture of MeCN/H₂O (pH 8.0) containing a few drops of DMSO. This resulted in *N*-formylation of the free ω -amino group of its lysine residue affording *N*-formyldecapeptide **16**, as confirmed from HRMS analysis (Scheme 4b).

Scheme 3. FAPM **5** as an *N*-Formylating Reagent for the Synthesis of *N*-Formyl- α -amino Acids **11a–f**

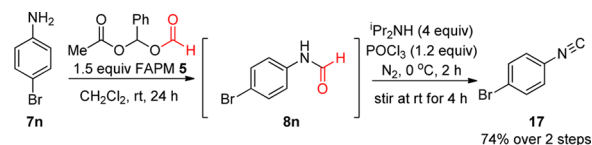


Scheme 4. FAPM **5** for the Synthesis of (a) *N*-Formylmethionylleucylphenylalanine (f-MLP) **14** and (b) *N*-Formyldecapeptide **16**



Formamides are often employed for the synthesis of isocyanides,⁷ and so we investigated whether FAPM **5** could be used to develop a stepwise “one-pot” protocol to directly convert an amine into its corresponding isocyanide. 4-Bromoaniline **7n** and FAPM (**5**) (1.5 equiv) were stirred in CH₂Cl₂ at room temperature for 24 h to afford its corresponding formamide **8n** in situ (confirmed by ¹H NMR spectroscopic analysis). Sequential dropwise addition of diisopropylamine (4 equiv) and POCl₃ (1.2 equiv) to this solution of formamide **8n** in CH₂Cl₂ at 0 °C, followed by stirring at 0 °C for 2 h and room temperature for 4 h, gave 1-bromo-4-isocyanobenzene **17** in 74% yield over two steps (Scheme 5).

Scheme 5. FAPM **5** for the One-Pot Synthesis of Isocyanide **17**



In conclusion, two practical syntheses of formyloxyacetoxypheylmethane (**5**) have been developed and its use as a water-tolerant *N*-formylating reagent for primary and secondary amines under solvent-free conditions demonstrated. Its potential as a reagent for the synthesis of *N*-formyl- α -amino acids and *N*-formylpeptides in aqueous systems has been established, and it

has also been used as an *N*-formylating reagent in a one-pot protocol to convert an aniline into its corresponding isocyanide.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/acs.orglett.7b02382.

Complete experimental procedure and relevant spectra (^{13}C and ^1H NMR spectra) for all compounds (PDF)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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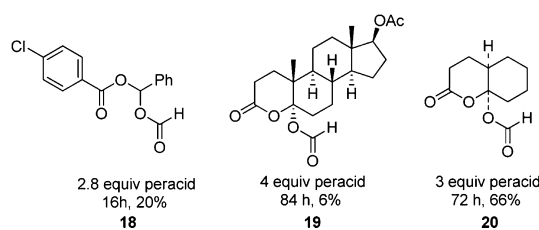
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