

Polar Compounds are Not Well Retained by Reversed Phase Columns Explained - HPLC Primer

Date: 14-APRIL-2020 Last Updated: 16-JANUARY-2026

Better Retention for Polar Analytes and Versatility with TYPE-C™ Silica-Hydride

1) Introduction

In classic reversed-phase HPLC, column manufacturers often end-cap residual silanol groups on silica to suppress secondary interactions and produce a more uniformly hydrophobic surface. This treatment generally improves peak shape and reproducibility for neutral or non-polar, hydrophobic analytes. However, it can compromise retention and selectivity for polar compounds.

Understanding when to use non-end-capped columns—and how modern TYPE-C™ silica-hydride columns remove the need for end-capping—can materially improve method performance and development agility.

2) End-Capping in Traditional RP: Purpose and Benefits

End-capping reacts remaining Si–OH groups with small silyl reagents to dampen silanol activity. The result is a surface that:

- Minimizes tailing and undesired secondary interactions,
- Delivers more consistent retention, and
- Performs exceptionally well for hydrophobic or neutral analytes in conventional reversed-phase mode.

These attributes explain why end-capped phases are often the default starting point in routine reversed-phase assays.

3) Where End-Capping Falls Short: Polar Analytes

Because end-capping renders the surface more uniformly hydrophobic, many **polar molecules** exhibit:

- Insufficient retention (early elution),
- Compressed selectivity, and
- Difficulty resolving closely related polar species.

In such cases, analysts may deliberately choose **non-end-capped** columns to regain polar interactions at the surface and enhance retention and resolution.

4) Why Use a Non-End-Capped Column?

Non-end-capped stationary phases maintain accessible silanol (polar) sites, which can:

- Increase retention for highly polar and ionizable compounds,
- Produce alternative selectivity vs. fully end-capped C18 phases, and
- Enable successful separations when standard RP methods fail.

Trade-offs may include more pronounced surface activity and, with traditional silica, potentially greater variability in mixed matrices.

5) A Modern Alternative: Cogent TYPE-C™ (Silica-Hydride) Columns

TYPE-C™ columns use a silica-hydride surface rather than the typical silica-hydroxyl surface. This chemistry provides a unique balance that does not require end-capping yet supports strong retention of both polar and non-polar analytes.

Crucially, TYPE-C enables operation in Reversed-Phase (RP) *and* Aqueous Normal Phase (ANP) on the same column, expanding your method toolbox without changing hardware.

5.1 Key Advantages

- No end-capping required while still achieving clean peak shapes.
- Dual-mode capability (RP + ANP) for broad analyte polarity ranges.
- Retention of polar analytes that under-retain on fully end-capped RP columns.

6) Practical Selection Guide

Analytical Situation	Recommended Column Type	Rationale
Primarily hydrophobic, neutral analytes (classic RP)	End-capped RP	Suppresses silanol interactions; delivers consistent hydrophobic retention and peak shape.
Highly polar or ionizable analytes with poor RP retention	Non-end-capped or TYPE-C™	Increased polar interactions improve retention and selectivity for polar molecules.
Mixed polarity sample sets requiring flexibility	TYPE-C™	Works in RP and ANP ; retains both polar and non-polar analytes on one platform.
Need different selectivity vs. a standard end-capped C18	Non-end-capped or TYPE-C™	Provides alternative interaction profiles for difficult separations.

7) Conclusions

- End-capped RP columns remain best for hydrophobic/neutral compounds where reduced silanol activity ensures predictable behavior.

- Non-end-capped columns are a strategic choice when polar analytes elute too early or lack selectivity on fully end-capped phases.
- Cogent TYPE-C™ silica-hydride technology provides a no-end-capping alternative that effectively retains both polar and non-polar analytes and supports RP and ANP modes, simplifying method development across diverse matrices.

[Click here to learn about TYPE-C HPLC columns](#)



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