

functional group

Organic compounds are thought of as consisting of a relatively unreactive backbone, for example a chain of sp^3 hybridized carbon atoms, and one or several functional groups. The functional group is an atom, or a group of atoms that has similar chemical properties whenever it occurs in different compounds. It defines the characteristic physical and chemical properties of families of organic compounds.

Source:

PAC, 1994, 66, 1077 (*Glossary of terms used in physical organic chemistry (IUPAC Recommendations 1994)*) on page 1116