This page explains what acid anhydrides are and looks at their simple physical properties such as boiling points. It introduces their chemical reactivity in a general way. A carboxylic acid such as ethanoic acid has the structure:

\[
\text{CH}_3\text{C} = \text{O} \quad \text{ethanoic acid}
\]

If you took two ethanoic acid molecules and removed a molecule of water between them you would get the acid anhydride, ethanoic anhydride (old name: acetic anhydride).

Acid Anhydrides react with water to form carboxylic acids

General Reaction

\[
\text{R} = \text{O} \quad \text{O} = \text{O} \quad \text{R} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \quad \text{Pyridine} \rightarrow 2 \quad \text{HO} = \text{C} \quad \text{R}
\]

Example 1:

\[
\text{Ph} = \text{O} \quad \text{O} = \text{Ph} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \quad \text{Pyridine} \rightarrow 2 \quad \text{Ph} \quad \text{COH}
\]

Mechanism

1) Nucleophilic Attack by the water molecule
2) Deprotonation by pyridine

3) Leaving group removal

4) Protonation of the carboxylate

Acid Anhydrides react with alcohols to form esters

Reactions of anhydrides use Pyridine as a solvent

Example 1:
Mechanism

1) Nucleophilic Attack by the Alcohol

2) Deprotonation by pyridine

3) Leaving group removal

4) Protonation of the carboxylate

Acid Anhydrides react with amines to form amides
General Reaction

Example 1:

Mechanism

1) Nucleophilic Attack by the Amine

2) Deprotonation by the amine

3) Leaving group removal

Contributors

- Prof. Steven Farmer (Sonoma State University)
- Jim Clark (Chemguide.co.uk)