Meet Dr. Masha Elkin, Thieme Chemistry Journals Awardee 2026!


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Dr. Masha Elkin *is an assistant professor of chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA). She earned her BA from Washington University in St. Louis (USA) in 2014, and her PhD from Yale University (USA). She subsequently became an NIH Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, Berkeley (USA) and in 2023, Masha joined the MIT Department of Chemistry.*

Thieme: Which field of organic chemistry are you interested in the most and why?

Dr. Elkin: I am most interested in synthetic organic chemistry, particularly the discovery of new reactions and new strategies for making complex molecules. I enjoy the creativity and endless discovery that comes from considering new reactions, new sequences of steps, and new overall strategies in multistep synthesis.

Thieme: Following that, what is the focus of your current research activity?

Dr. Elkin: My group works at the intersection of organic synthesis and computational modeling. We develop reactions for modifying complex molecules and computational tools that capture chemical intuition, identify limitations in current methods, and guide reaction discovery.

Thieme: What do you think about the modern role and prospects of organic chemistry?

Dr. Elkin: Organic chemistry remains central to advances in medicine, materials, energy, agriculture, and many more industries. Its future will involve integration with computation, automation, and data science, and in doing so will need to maintain a strong foundation in rigorous fundamental science.

Thieme: Which difficulties are there for young upcoming chemists in your field? Do you have any tips?

Dr. Elkin: Young chemists must develop deep expertise while navigating an increasingly broad and rapidly changing field. My advice is to build a strong foundation, seek mentors with different perspectives, ask a million questions, and treat unexpected results as opportunities to discover something new.

Thieme: What is your most important scientific achievement to date and why?

Dr. Elkin: My most important scientific achievement was teaching myself to code, building a machine-learning model, and passing the work on to future generations of students—all as a fifth-year graduate student. Although I had a strong foundation in synthetic organic chemistry, this work challenged me to cross disciplinary boundaries and bring others along with me.

Thieme: Could you tell us something about yourself outside the lab, such as your hobbies or extra-work interests?

Dr. Elkin: Outside the lab, I love to garden, collect vinyl records, cook, and read books. I believe that analog engagement is increasingly important in a digital world.