

## Gas. Chromatography.

### Unlimited range of applications

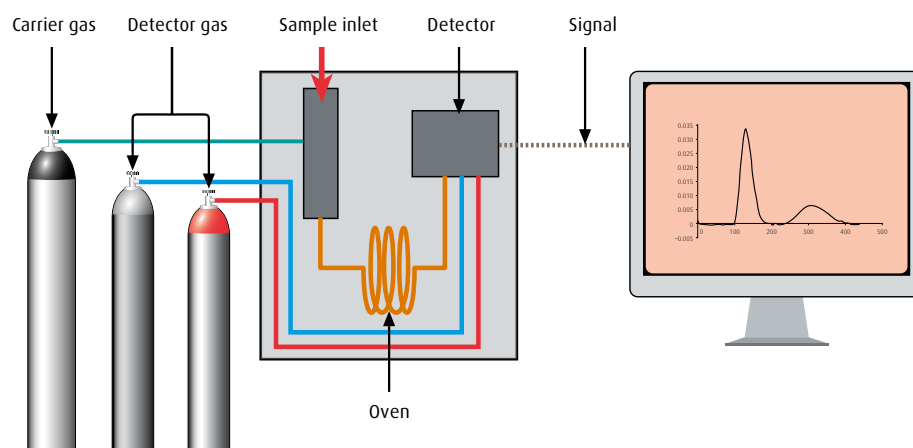
Gas chromatography (GC) is a widely used method for separating and analyzing organic compounds. There are a variety of applications for gas chromatography in every laboratory and in different processes within several industries. For example within chemical, petrochemical and pharmaceutical industry: measurements of any kinds of organic compounds like process control as well as product control. Also within environmental measurements: aromatic pollutants in air and water, detection and measurements of pesticides etc. These are only a few examples of applications where GC plays an important role. The range is basically unlimited.

### Basic principles of GC

Chromatography is the process of separating a mixture into individual components. Through the separation process each component in the sample can be identified (qualitatively) and measured (quantitatively). There are several kinds of chromatographic techniques with corresponding instruments. Gas Chromatography (GC) is one of those techniques. GC is used for compounds that are volatile, or can be made volatile, and are thermally stable. Because of its simplicity, sensitivity and effectiveness in separating components, GC is one of the most important tools in chemistry.

The basic operating principle of a GC involves evaporation of the sample in a heated inlet port (injector), separation of the components of the mixture in a specially prepared column, and detection of each component by a detector. At the end of the process the amplified detector signals are often recorded and evaluated by an integrator calculating the analytical results.

The sample is introduced into a stream of inert gas, the carrier gas, and transported through the column by the flow of this carrier gas (see illustration below.) The column can be a packed column or a capillary column, dependent on the properties of the sample. As the gas flow passes through the column, the components of the sample move at velocities that are influenced by the degree of interaction of each component with the stationary phase in the column. Consequently, the different components separate. Since the processes are temperature dependent, the column is usually contained in a thermostat-controlled oven. As the components elute from the column they can be quantified by a suitable detector and/or be collected for further analysis.



### Detectors

There are a variety of types of detectors, and the choice depends on the type of component(s) to detect and measure. The most common detectors are: Flame ionization detector (FID), Thermal conductivity detector (TCD), Electron capture detector (ECD), Alkali flame ionization detector – also called Nitrogen/phosphorous detector (NPD), Flame photometric detector (FPD) and Photo ionization detector (PID). Several of these are further described in separate leaflets.

### Carrier gases

The carrier gas has an important role transporting the sample through the column and into the detector. The carrier gas must be inert or at least not react with the stationary phase in the column. Helium, nitrogen, argon and hydrogen are commonly used as carrier gases. The choice depends on the type of detector, column, application and safety (H<sub>2</sub> is explosive). But the choice of carrier gas is also dependent on demands on separation efficiency and speed. Hydrogen has the lowest viscosity of all gases and thereby provides the highest mobile phase velocity, therefore the shortest analysis time. On the other hand, helium for many applications gives the best overall performance and peak resolutions making it an optimum choice of carrier gas for those cases.

The purity of the carrier gas is another important factor. Impurities, especially hydrocarbons, cause base line noise, reduced sensitivity and might increase detection limits. Traces of water and oxygen may also decompose the stationary phase, which leads to premature destruction of the column.

### Detector gases

Detectors need different auxiliary gases to run depending on their detection processes. FID, NPD and FPD need a mixture of synthetic air and hydrogen to create a flame, whereas ECD run on a methane mixture in argon and/or on nitrogen. With TCD the detector gases are the same as the carrier gases. For an overview see table below. As for carrier gases, purity of the gas is crucial for the performance, maintenance and lifetime of the detector.

Detector	Carrier/detector gas					
	H <sub>2</sub>	He	Ar	N <sub>2</sub>	CH <sub>4</sub> /Ar	Synthetic air
FID	■ ●	■		■		●
TCD	■ ●	■ ●	■ ●	■ ●		
ECD		■		■ ●	●	
FPD	●	■				●
NPD	■ ●	■	■	■		●
PID		■ ●		■ ●		■

■ Carrier gas      ● Detector gas

### Product program for gas chromatography

AGA has a range of high purity gases for carrier gases as well as for detector gases. For process applications the quality Instrument gases, like Instrument Argon, Instrument Helium, Instrument Hydrogen and Instrument Nitrogen are commonly used for analysis. For quality control and R&D analysis the higher quality Detector gases will be appropriate. For special detectors, such as ECD, there are gases specifically specified for the ECD analysis.

Moisture traps and other purifiers are not necessary when you use the recommended gases, equipment and purging routines from AGA.

### More information

Please look into the respective leaflet covering your detector, the HiQ® product program or contact your local AGA sales representative to find the gases that suit your analytical method(s) and application(s). Valuable information can also be found in our HiQ® catalog 'Biotech, Chemical, Petrochemical & Pharmaceutical', and on our web site, <http://hiq.aga.com>.

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