Properties of Solutions: Electrolytes and Non-Electrolytes

In this experiment, you will discover some properties of strong electrolytes, weak electrolytes, and non-electrolytes by observing the behavior of these substances in aqueous solutions. You will determine these properties using a Conductivity Probe. When the probe is placed in a solution that contains ions, and thus has the ability to conduct electricity, an electrical circuit is completed across the electrodes that are located on either side of the hole near the bottom of the probe body (see Figure 1). This results in a conductivity value that can be read by the computer. The unit of conductivity used in this experiment is the microsiemens per centimeter, or µS/cm.

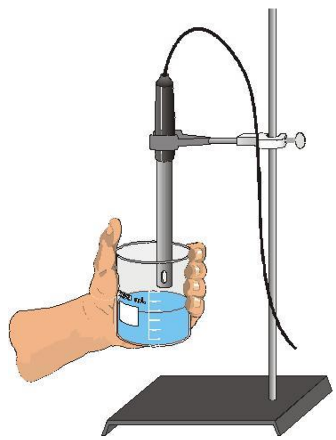

Figure 1

The size of the conductivity value depends on the ability of the aqueous solution to conduct electricity. Strong electrolytes produce large numbers of ions, which results in high conductivity values. Weak electrolytes result in low conductivity, and non-electrolytes should result in no conductivity. In this experiment, you will observe several factors that determine whether or not a solution conducts, and if so, the relative magnitude of the conductivity. Thus, this simple experiment allows you to learn a great deal about different compounds and their resulting solutions.

In each part of the experiment, you will be observing a different property of electrolytes. Keep in mind that you will be encountering three types of compounds and aqueous solutions:

Ionic Compounds

These are usually strong electrolytes and can be expected to 100% dissociate in aqueous solution.

Example: $NaNO_3(s) \rightarrow Na^+(aq) + NO_3^-(aq)$

Molecular Compounds

These are usually non-electrolytes. They do not dissociate to form ions. Resulting solutions do not conduct electricity.

Example: $CH_3OH(l) \rightarrow CH_3OH(aq)$

Molecular Acids

These are molecules that can partially or wholly dissociate, depending on their strength.

Example: Strong electrolyte $H_2SO_4 \rightarrow H^+(aq) + HSO_4^-(aq)$ (100% dissociation)

Example: Weak electrolyte $HF \leftarrow \rightarrow H^+(aq) + F^-(aq)$ (<100% dissociation)

OBJECTIVES

In this experiment, you will

- Use a Conductivity Probe to measure the conductivity of solutions.
- Investigate the conductivity of solutions resulting from compounds that dissociate to produce different numbers of ions.

MATERIALS

computer	H_2O (distilled)
Vernier computer interface	0.05 M NaCl
Logger *Pro*	0.05 M $CaCl_2$
Vernier Conductivity Probe	0.05 M $AlCl_3$
250 mL beaker	0.05 M $HC_2H_3O_2$
wash bottle with distilled water	0.05 M H_3PO_4
tissues	0.05 M H_3BO_3
ring stand	0.05 M HCl
utility clamp	0.05 M CH_3OH (methanol)
H_2O (tap)	0.05 M $C_2H_6O_2$ (ethylene glycol)

PROCEDURE

1. Obtain and wear goggles! **CAUTION:** Handle the solutions in this experiment with care. Do not allow them to contact your skin. Notify your teacher in the event of an accident.
2. The Conductivity Probe is already attached to the interface. It should be set on the 0-20000 µS/cm position.
3. Prepare the computer to monitor conductivity by opening the file “13 Electrolytes” from the *Chemistry with Vernier* folder.
4. Obtain the Group A solution containers. The solutions are: 0.05 M NaCl, 0.05 M $CaCl_2$, and 0.05 M $AlCl_3$. Add enough of each of these solutions to medium sized test tubes, so that the probe properly fits in the solution. (See 5 a below)
5. Measure the conductivity for each of the solutions.
   a. Carefully raise each test tube and its contents up around the Conductivity Probe until the hole near the probe end is completely submerged in the solution being tested. **Important:** Since the two electrodes are positioned on either side of the hole, this part of the probe must be completely submerged.
   b. Briefly swirl the test tube contents. Once the conductivity reading has stabilized, record the value in your data table.

c. Before testing the next solution, clean the electrodes by rinsing them liberally with distilled water from a wash bottle. Blot the outside of the probe end dry using a tissue. It is *not* necessary to dry the *inside* of the hole near the probe end.

6. Obtain the four Group B solution containers. These include 0.05 M H_3PO_4, 0.05 M $HC_2H_3O_2$, 0.05 M H_3BO_3, and 0.05 M HCl. Repeat the Steps 4 and 5 procedure.
7. Obtain the five Group C solutions or liquids. These include 0.05 M CH_3OH, 0.05 M $C_2H_6O_2$, distilled H_2O, and tap H_2O. Repeat the Steps 4 and 5 procedure.

DATA TABLE

Solution	Conductivity (µS/cm)
A - $CaCl_2$	
A - $AlCl_3$	
A - NaCl	
B - $HC_2H_3O_2$	
B - HCl	
B - H_3PO_4	
B - H_3BO_3	
C - $H_2O_{distilled}$	
C - H_2O_{tap}	
C - CH_3OH	
C - $C_2H_6O_2$ (Ethylene Glycol)	

PROCESSING THE DATA

1. Based on your conductivity values, do the Group A compounds appear to be molecular, ionic, or molecular acids? Would you expect them to partially dissociate, completely dissociate, or not dissociate at all?
2. In Group B, do all four compounds appear to be molecular, ionic, or molecular acids? Classify each as a strong or weak electrolyte, and arrange them from the strongest to the weakest, based on conductivity values.

3. In Group C, do all four compounds appear to be molecular, ionic, or molecular acids? Based on this answer, would you expect them to dissociate?
4. How do you explain the relatively high conductivity of tap water compared to a low or zero conductivity for distilled water?