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Examiners' report

GCSE

GATEWAY SCIENCE CHEMISTRY A

OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in Chemistry A (Gateway Science)

J248

For first teaching in 2016

J248/01 Summer 2025 series

Version 1

ocr.org.uk/science

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from Teach Cambridge.

Paper 1 series overview

J248/01 is the first of two foundation tier papers for Gateway Science Chemistry A. This unit assesses topics C1, C2, C3 and C7 and is worth 50% of the total GCSE.

There was no evidence to suggest that time was an issue for candidates, only some of the more challenging questions were omitted. Candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination.

Where candidates analysed or interpreted data, their chosen answer was often correct but either not explained or their explanation contained too little detail. Technical terms were often not used.

The most successful candidates showed full working to numerical questions such that even where an error was made, partial credit was able to be awarded.

The responses to Question 14 were often detailed and in a logical order.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• gave numerical answers to the appropriate number of significant figures or decimal places • read questions carefully so that all aspects of a question were addressed • used technical terms appropriately • used knowledge of experimental details to describe how to perform an exothermic reaction • produced a well structured and logical response to the Level of Response question, Question 18, including interpretation of the information given in the question • showed good understanding of nanoparticles and their use.	• did not show working in calculation questions • either did not explain answers or gave responses with too little detail • confused litmus and universal indicator • copied information from tables in the questions rather than interpreting the data • confused exothermic and endothermic reactions.

Section A overview

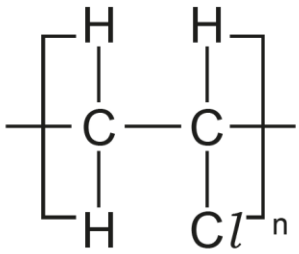
No candidates omitted any of the multiple choice questions.

Questions 1 (states of matter), 2 (atomic structure), 3 (radius of an atom) and 9 (law of conservation of mass) were answered correctly by almost all candidates.

Questions 4 (polymers), 10 (state symbols) and 13 (products of a salt preparation) proved to be particularly challenging.

Question 4

4 Which type of molecule is shown in the diagram?



A Alkane

B Alkene

C Monomer

D Polymer

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

The majority of candidates found this challenging. Both B and C were common responses with monomer being the most popular.

Question 5

5 What is meant by **activation energy**?

A The maximum amount of energy needed to end a reaction.

B The maximum amount of energy needed to start a reaction.

C The minimum amount of energy needed to end a reaction.

D The minimum amount of energy needed to start a reaction.

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

While activation energy was quite well known, the most popular incorrect response was B.

Question 6

6 How did Mendeleev order the elements in his version of the Periodic Table?

A Decreasing atomic mass

B Decreasing atomic number

C Increasing atomic mass

D Increasing atomic number

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

Mendeleev's Periodic Table was not widely known and D was a popular incorrect response.

Question 7

7 Fluorine has a melting point of –220 °C and a boiling point of –188 °C.

What is the state of fluorine at 25 °C?

A Aqueous

B Gas

C Liquid

D Solid

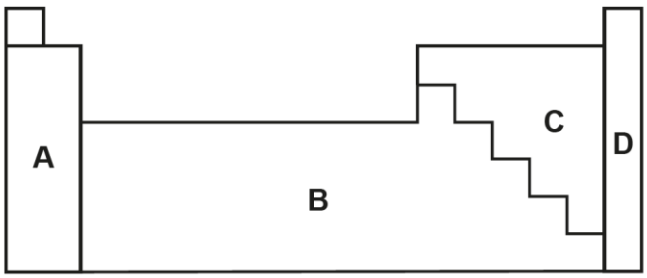
Your answer ☐ **[1]**

Lower attaining candidates often chose either C or D.

Question 8

8 An element has an electronic arrangement 2.8.1.

Which section of the Periodic Table is the element in?



Your answer ☐ **[1]**

More successful candidates appreciated that the final number of the electronic arrangement gives the group number. C was a popular incorrect choice.

Question 10

10 Methane, CH_4, burns in oxygen, O_2.

Carbon dioxide, CO_2, and water vapour, H_2O, are made.

$CH_4(g) + 2O_2(\ldots) \rightarrow CO_2(g) + 2H_2O(\ldots)$

What are the missing state symbols in the equation?

	O_2	H_2O
A	g	g
B	g	l
C	l	g
D	l	l

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

While many candidates appreciated that oxygen is a gas the vast majority thought that water vapour was a liquid.

Question 11

11 Molten copper chloride is electrolysed.

What is made at the **positive electrode (anode)**?

A Chlorine

B Copper

C Hydrogen

D Oxygen

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

Many candidates confused the anode and the cathode hence B was a popular incorrect response. Many missed molten in the question and so chose either C or D.

Question 12

12 Barium carbonate contains the ions Ba^{2+} and CO_3^{2-}.

What is the formula for barium carbonate?

A $BaCO_3$

B $Ba(CO_3)_2$

C Ba_2CO_3

D $Ba_2(CO_3)_2$

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

More successful candidates gave the correct formula. All of the responses were seen regularly.

Question 13

13 Sodium carbonate reacts with dilute hydrochloric acid.

Which **products** are made?

A Sodium chloride + hydrogen + carbon dioxide

B Sodium chloride + water + carbon dioxide

C Sodium hydroxide + hydrogen + carbon dioxide

D Sodium hydroxide + water + carbon dioxide

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

While many candidates appreciated that the salt sodium chloride is made, the majority thought hydrogen is also made and so opted for A.

Question 14

14 How many covalent bonds can a carbon atom form?

A 2

B 4

C 6

D 8

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

The most popular incorrect response for the less successful candidates was A.

Question 15

15 What is the ionic equation for neutralisation?

A $H^- + OH^+ \rightarrow H_2O$

B $H^+ + OH^- \rightarrow H_2O$

C $2H_2 + 2O^{2-} \rightarrow 2H_2O$

D $H^+ + O_2 \rightarrow HO_2$

Your answer ☐ **[1]**

Less successful candidates found this challenging, confusing the signs on the ions was common with A being a popular incorrect response. D was also seen quite commonly.

Section B overview

There was no evidence to suggest time was an issue to candidates.

Questions 22 and 23 were the overlap questions.

The Periodic Table, graphs, basic atomic structure, experimental details and chromatography were well known.

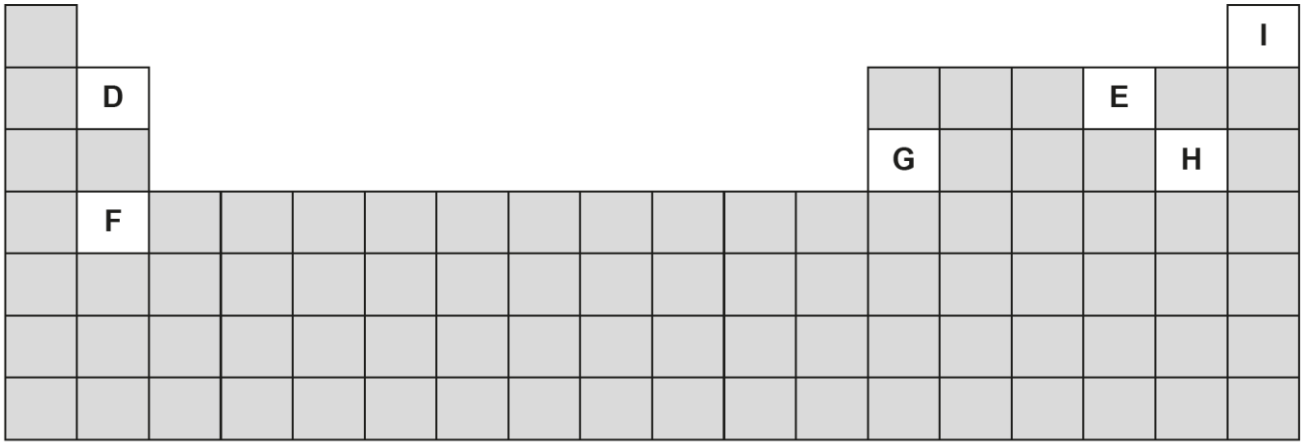
Thermal chemistry including exothermic, endothermic and energy profile diagrams proved challenging.

Separating and purifying techniques were quite well known and so responses to Question 18 were often detailed and logical.

Question 16 (a) (i)

16 The diagram shows a simplified version of the **Periodic Table**.

The letters **D**, **E**, **F**, **G**, **H** and **I** are **not** the symbols for the elements shown.



(a) Match each statement with one of the elements by writing **D**, **E**, **F**, **G**, **H** or **I**.

Use the Periodic Table on the data sheet.

(i) An unreactive gas with a full outer shell of electrons. ..... **[1]**

More successful candidates chose the element in Group 0. E, F and G were all common incorrect responses.

Question 16 (a) (iii)

(iii) An element which forms an ion with a **1–** charge. ..... **[1]**

Candidates found ion formation challenging. All responses were seen with E and F being more popular.

Question 16 (a) (v)

(v) An element which has three shells of electrons. ..... **[1]**

Many candidates omitted to count the first period of the Periodic Table containing two elements and so chose F as their response.

Question 17 (a)

17 A baker prepares some ingredients to make bread.

(a) The baker wants to understand how to use:

- an **acid** (buttermilk)
- and an **alkali** (sodium bicarbonate)

to produce bubbles which cause the bread to rise.

Complete the sentences below.

Use words from the list.

alkalis	**carbon dioxide**	**gas**	**neutralisation**
oxygen	**precipitation**	**salts**	**solid**

Acids have a pH of below 7 and ..... have a pH of above 7.

The acid and alkali react together to form bubbles because a ..... is produced.

The bubbles are ..... .

This is an example of a ..... reaction.

[4]

Most candidates chose alkalis, gas and neutralisation, but many gave the gas bubbles as oxygen.

Question 17 (b) (i)

(b)

(i) Buttermilk is a liquid.

Describe how the baker can measure the pH of the buttermilk.

.....

.....

..... **[2]**

This proved challenging across all candidates. Many thought that litmus could be used to find the pH of the buttermilk, 'pH measurer' was also popular. Of those that chose universal indicator very few appreciated the need for matching the colour to the pH chart. Many listed the colours and pH of acidic, neutral and alkaline solutions. A small number gave a pH meter but many did not know how this could tell the pH of the buttermilk. A small number omitted the question.

Misconception

Many candidates believed that litmus can be used to determine the pH of a solution.

Question 17 (c)

(c) The formula of citric acid is $C_6H_8O_7$.

Calculate the relative formula mass of citric acid.

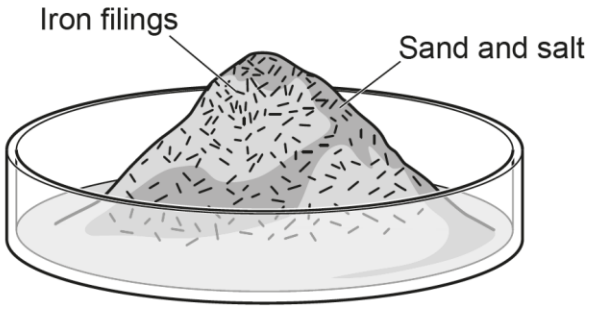
Relative atomic mass (A_r): C = 12.0 H = 1.0 O = 16.0

Relative formula mass of citric acid = ... **[2]**

Less successful candidates found this challenging. Adding the relative atomic masses of each element to get 29 as an answer, or adding the number of atoms in citric acid to get 21, were common incorrect responses. A small number omitted the question.

Question 18*

18* A student has a mixture of iron filings, sand and salt.



The student wants to collect pure samples of:

- iron filings
- sand
- salt.

The table gives some information about iron filings, sand and salt.

Substance	Soluble in water?	Magnetic?	Melting point (°C)
Iron filings	no	yes	1535
Salt	yes	no	801
Sand	no	no	1700

Describe a method the student could use to separate and collect pure iron filings, sand and salt.

You can include labelled diagrams to support your answer.

Optional diagram:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

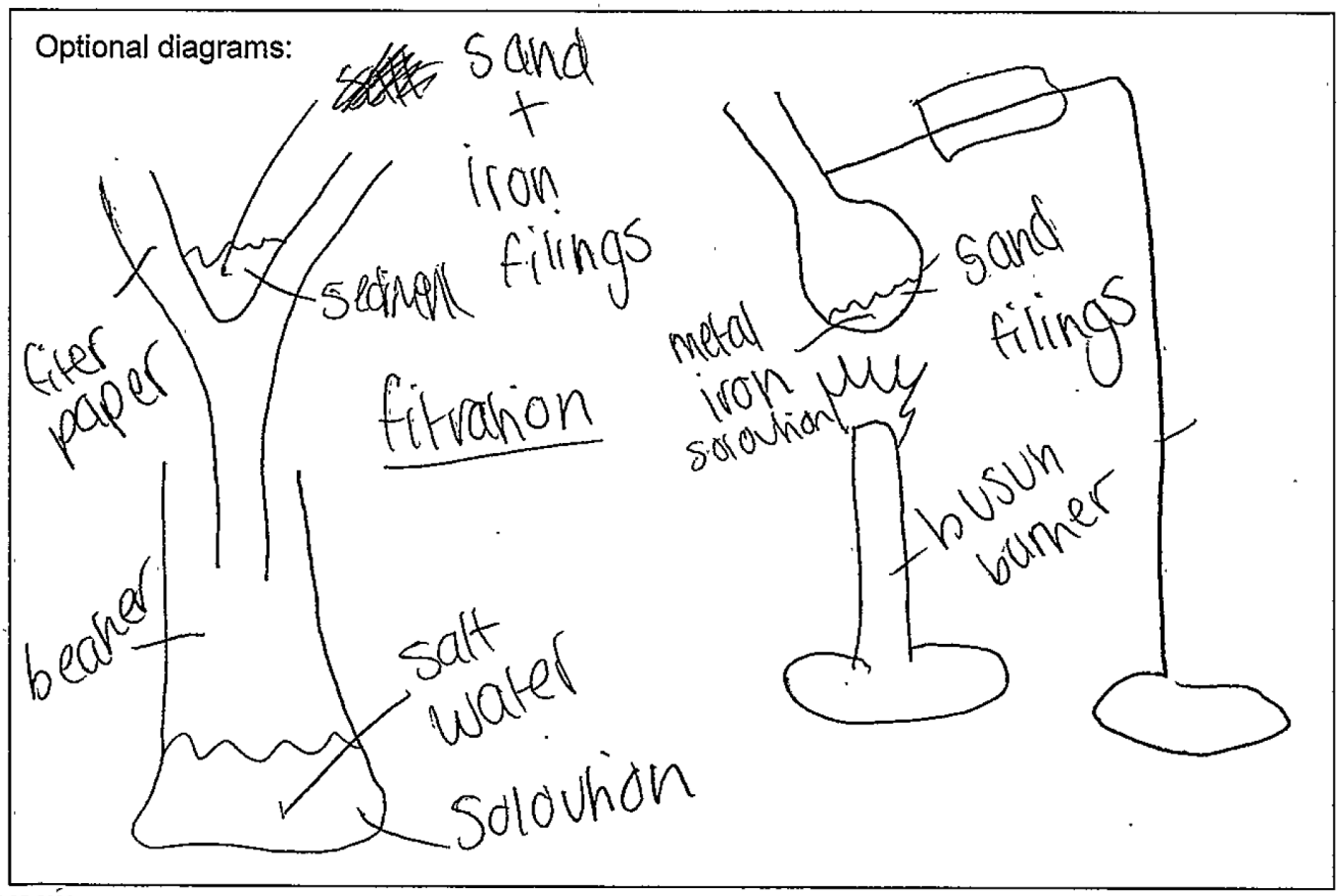
..... **[6]**

Level 1 required a basic separation of a sample of one component of the mixture such as a magnet to remove the iron. Level 2 required separation of all three samples to obtain pure sample of two and the method(s) to be structured. Level 3 required separation to produce all three as pure substances in one coherent series of steps.

Most candidates suggested using a magnet to remove the iron filings. Some added water to the remaining mixture, filtered to remove the sand and evaporated the salt solution to obtain the salt. Few obtained pure sand by drying the residue on filter paper. The use of labelled diagrams helped many candidates who had details missing in their written account but whose labelled diagrams helped explain their chosen methods.

Some of the less successful candidates heated the materials until melted and then filtered, not appreciating that such high temperatures would not only be difficult to achieve but would set fire to the filter paper in their funnel. Some also used three separate methods on three separate samples of the mixture.

Exemplar 1



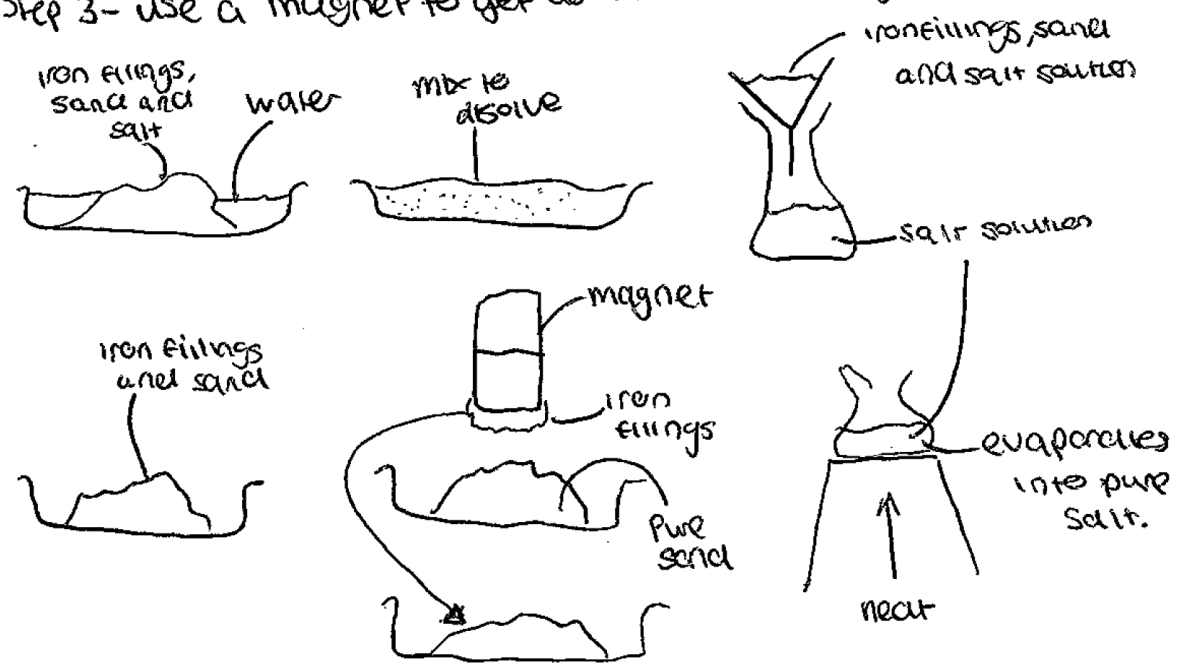
first seperate salt from iron and sand filings using filtration ~~this with~~ creates salt into a pure solution. then use distilation to melt the metal iron filings down to seperate from sand. this will then leave the student with ~~salt~~ a pure salt solution, metal iron solution and sand filings

In the written response, the candidate uses filtration, but the method does not have the required detail. However, the labelled diagram makes it clear that water has been added and that the sand and iron filings are on the filter paper and the dissolved salt is in the conical flask. This is a Level 1 response, 2 marks.

Exemplar 2

Optional diagrams:

Steps - fill with water to dissolve the salt
Step 2 - filter out the salt solution
Step 3 - use a magnet to get as much iron fillings as possible



Step 1 - add water to the iron fillings, salt and sand mixture, then mix to create a salt solution as its the only thing soluable.

Step 2 - filter out the salt solution to leave only sand and iron fillings.

Step 3 - use a magnet to seperate iron fillings and sand, this when put in seperate containers creates pure iron fillings and pure sand

Step 4 - boil the salt solution over a bunsen to create pure salt

[6]

The candidate adds water to the mixture, to create a salt solution since salt is soluble.

They filter to remove sand and iron, the diagrams show where the salt solution, iron filings and sand are after filtration.

They separate the sand and iron filings using a magnet.

They obtain the salt from solution by heating.

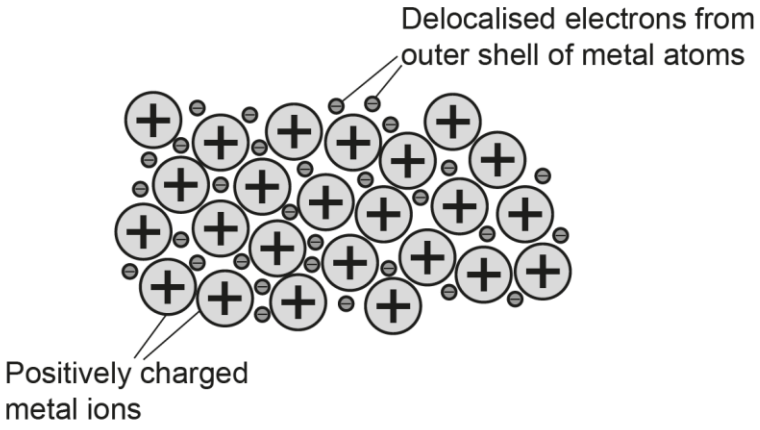
So all three components have been separated, salt is pure, iron is possibly pure as it is unlikely to be wet but the sand is not pure as it is wet (it will also have salt solution on it).

This is Level 3, 5 marks.

To obtain 6 marks the salt should be dried. (Rinsing with water to remove salt solution is desirable but was not expected).

Question 19 (a)

19 The diagram shows the structure of a metal.



(a) The table shows some information about three different metals.

Metal	Resistance to corrosion	Relative strength	Density
A	low	high	high
B	high	low	medium
C	very high	high	low

Which of these metals would you use for an aeroplane?

Explain your answer.

Use information from the table.

Metal .....

Explanation .....

.....

.....

[3]

The majority of candidates chose C, some chose A. The explanations tended to be information copied from the table rather than an explanation of how the properties chosen were relevant to use in making an aeroplane. A number of candidates thought low resistance to corrosion meant that the metal would not corrode.

Question 19 (b) (i)

(b)

(i) Explain why alloys are harder than metals.

You can include a labelled diagram to support your answer.

Optional diagram:

.....

.....

..... **[2]**

The structure of alloys was not well known. Many redrew the diagram in Question 19 (a) or drew an ionic lattice. Many answers discussed stronger bonds or stronger intermolecular forces in the alloy. Of those that did appreciate the difference in sizes of the particles very few discussed layers. A significant number omitted the question.

Alloys

Alloys are made up of particles (atoms or ions) of different sizes such that the regular, layered structure of the metal is disrupted and hence the layers are unable to slide.

Question 19 (b) (ii)

(ii) Steel alloys can be used to make tools.

A sample of tool steel contains 0.17 g of carbon and 7.73 g of iron.

Calculate the **percentage of carbon** in this alloy.

Give your answer to **3** significant figures.

Percentage of carbon = ...% **[4]**

More successful candidates calculated the percentage correctly. Many used 7.73 as the mass of the alloy instead of 7.90 or omitted to multiply the ratio by 100 to turn the value into a percentage. Significant figures proved challenging and many answers were to either 2 or many significant figures.

Calculations

It is really important that candidates show their working in calculations, otherwise it is impossible to award partial marks for responses where only one step is incorrect.

Significant figures

Candidates must remember to read questions carefully and to take note of the number of significant figures required by a calculation.

Question 20 (a)

20 Atoms contain three subatomic particles: protons, neutrons and electrons.

(a) **Table 20.1** shows some information about the subatomic particles.

Table 20.1

Subatomic particle	Relative mass	Relative charge
Electron	.....	.....
Neutron	1	.....
Proton	.....	+1

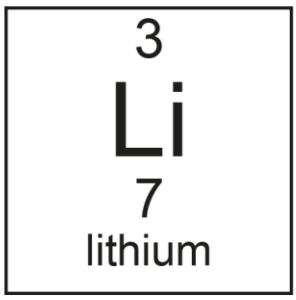
Complete the table to show the relative mass and relative charge of each subatomic particle. **[3]**

Subatomic particles were quite well known with most candidates gaining some credit. Common incorrect responses included: 0 for the mass of an electron, 0 for the charge on an electron,1 for the charge on a neutron and –1 for the mass of a proton.

Question 20 (b)

(b) **Fig. 20.1** shows some information about a lithium atom.

Fig. 20.1



Which statements about this lithium atom are **true**, and which are **false**?

Tick (✓) **one** box in each row.

	True	False
The atom has 3 electrons		
The atom has 3 neutrons		
The atom has 4 protons		

[2]

Higher attaining candidates interpreted the symbol in terms of subatomic particles. There was no pattern in incorrect responses.

Question 20 (c)

(c) Complete the sentence to explain how a lithium atom forms a lithium ion.

Put a ring around each correct option.

The lithium atom **gains / loses / shares** one electron to form a **negative / neutral / positive** ion.

[2]

Lower attaining candidates found this challenging. Losing electrons and negative charge, gaining electrons and positive charge and gaining electrons and negative charge were all common responses.

Question 20 (d) (i)

(d)

(i) Lithium can exist as different isotopes.

Complete the sentence about isotopes.

Use words from the list.

compound	electrons	element	ion	neutrons	protons

Isotopes are atoms of the same ..... with the same number of .....

but a different number of ..... .

[3]

Less successful candidates found this challenging. Protons and neutrons were frequently swapped.

Question 20 (d) (ii)

(ii) **Table 20.2** shows information about two different isotopes of lithium.

Table 20.2

Isotope	Mass Number
..... Li	6
$^{7}_{3}Li$	.....

Complete the table. **[2]**

Candidates found the isotope notation quite challenging. The most common incorrect responses included 3 and 6.9 for the first isotope and 10 for the second.

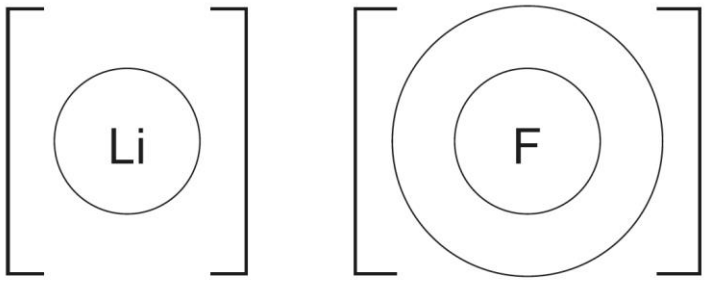
Question 20 (e)

(e) Lithium can bond with fluorine to form lithium fluoride, LiF.

Complete the dot and cross diagram in **Fig. 20.2** to show the bonding in lithium fluoride.

Include the charges on the ions.

Fig. 20.2



[2]

The higher attaining candidates gave both the electronic configurations and the charges. Many candidates drew the electronic configuration of the elements, had 4 or 8 electrons on the outer shell of lithium, omitted the charges, swapped the positive and negative charges or had 2- or 3- for fluoride. A significant number omitted the question.

Ionic bonding

The metal loses its outer shell electrons to become a positive ion. The non-metals gain electrons to obtain a filled outer shell and become negatively charged.

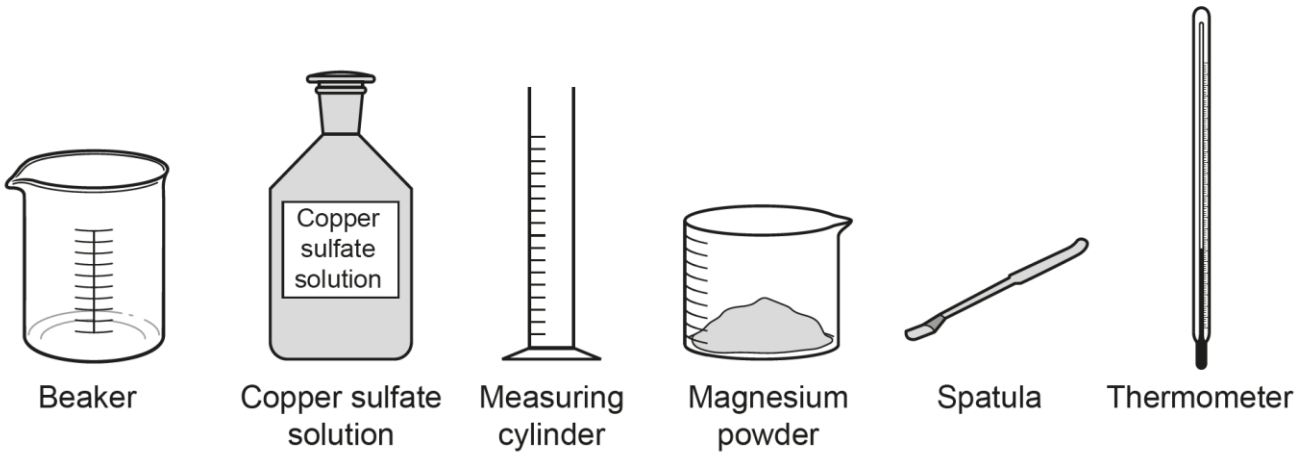
Question 21 (a) (i)

21 A student investigates the temperature change in a reaction.

(a)

(i) The student collects the apparatus needed to do their investigation, as shown in **Fig. 21.1**.

Fig. 21.1



Describe the experiment the student does to measure the temperature change.

You can include a labelled diagram to support your answer.

Optional diagram:

.....

.....

.....

..... **[4]**

Higher achieving candidates gave a detailed and logical account of the experiment, but less successful candidates found this more challenging. Some did not measure the volume of copper sulfate or record its initial temperature. Most added magnesium to the copper sulfate but many gave the temperature after mixing as the initial temperature. Few recorded the maximum temperature reached or the temperature at the end of the reaction, a significant number measured incorrectly the temperature change.

Question 21 (a) (ii)

(ii) The student does the experiment three times and records their results in **Table 21.1**.

Table 21.1

Experiment	Start temperature (°C)	End temperature (°C)	Temperature change (°C)
1	21	63	+42
2	21	7	–14
3	21	34	+13

The student uses their results to determine if the reactions are endothermic or exothermic.

Tick (✓) **one** box in each row of **Table 21.2** to show if each result is endothermic or exothermic.

Table 21.2

Experiment	Endothermic	Exothermic
1		
2		
3		

[1]

Candidates found this challenging with the most common response being the reverse of the changes.

Misconception

Many candidates thought exothermic reactions are accompanied by a decrease in temperature and endothermic reactions are accompanied by an increase in temperature.

Question 21 (b)

(b) The student thinks they can improve their experiment to get more accurate results.

Suggest **one** improvement they can make to the apparatus shown in **Fig. 21.1**.

Explain why this will make their results more accurate.

Improvement .....

Explanation .....

.....

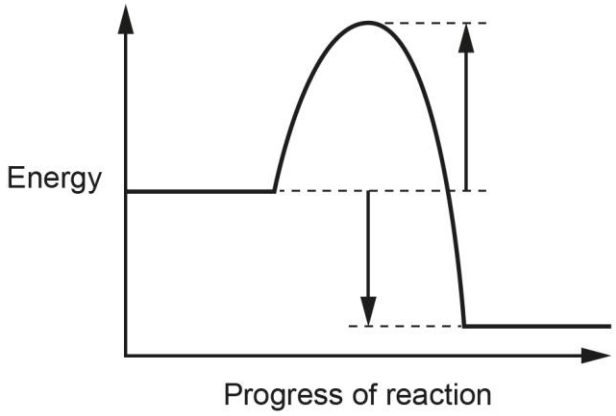
[2]

Candidates found this extremely challenging with only the most successful putting a lid on the apparatus in order to reduce heat loss from the reaction mixture. Many candidates gave changes to the chemicals rather than the apparatus including weighing the magnesium or used a digital thermometer or stopwatch. Repeating was also a popular response. A significant number omitted the question.

Question 21 (c) (i)

(c) **Fig. 21.2** shows a reaction profile for one of the experiments.

Fig. 21.2



(i) Label on **Fig. 21.2** the:

- **Reactants**
- **Products**
- **Activation energy**
- **Energy change.**

[3]

More successful candidates completed the energy profile diagram correctly. Many thought the activation energy was the top-most dotted line and the energy change was the bottom dotted line rather than the energies indicated by the two arrows. Many gave the reactants and the products in the correct places. A significant number omitted the question.

Energy profile diagrams

The energy changes accompanying chemical reactions are shown using arrows which originate from the reactant.

Question 21 (c) (ii)

(ii) Is the reaction shown in **Fig. 21.2** endothermic or exothermic?

Tick (✓) **one** box.

Endothermic ☐ Exothermic ☐

Explain your answer.

.....

.....

[1]

Endothermic was a very popular choice. Those that chose exothermic either didn't give an explanation or discussed energy being lost.

Question 22 (a)

22 Scientists are developing the use and application of nanoparticles.

(a) The table shows the diameters of four different particles.

Particle	Diameter (nm)
A	97
B	2100
C	11
D	0.73

Which **two** particles are nanoparticles?

..... and .....

Explain your answer.

.....

.....

[2]

Nanoparticle size was not well known. Frequently C and D were chosen because they are the smallest or A and B because they were the largest.

Question 22 (b) (i)

(b)

(i) One use of nanoparticles is in medicines.

State **one other** use of nanoparticles.

Explain why they can be used for that purpose.

Use .....

Explanation .....

.....

.....

[2]

Uses of nanomaterials was not well known and a significant number omitted the question. The most popular correct responses was sunscreens for blocking UV rays. Many did not appreciate that the question asked for one other use and so gave a medical use, including scans and X-rays.

Question 22 (b) (ii)

(ii) Some scientists are worried about the risks of using nanoparticles.

Which statements are risks to humans of using nanoparticles?

Tick (✓) **two** boxes.

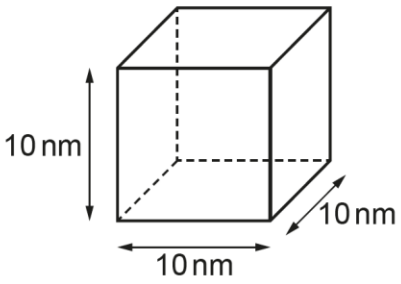
- They can block ultraviolet light. ☐
- They can catalyse harmful reactions in the body. ☐
- They can have antibacterial properties. ☐
- They can have toxic effects on the body. ☐
- They have a high surface area to volume ratio. ☐

[2]

Risks of nanoparticle use were quite well known. All responses were seen.

Question 22 (c)

(c) A cube-shaped nanoparticle has sides of length 10 nm.



Calculate the surface area to volume ratio of the cube.

Use the equation:

$$\text{Surface area to volume ratio} = \frac{\text{surface area}}{\text{volume}}$$

Surface area to volume ratio = ...**[3]**

Higher attaining candidates calculated the ratio correctly. Volume was often correctly calculated while many gave the surface area of one face as 100 forgetting that the cube had 6 surfaces. Many candidates did not show their working and so incorrect responses scored 0 as error carried forward marks could not be awarded.

Calculations

It is really important that candidates show their working in calculations, otherwise it is impossible to award partial marks for responses where one of the steps may be incorrect.

Question 23 (a)

23 This question is about separation techniques.

(a) What is meant by a **pure** substance?

.....

..... **[1]**

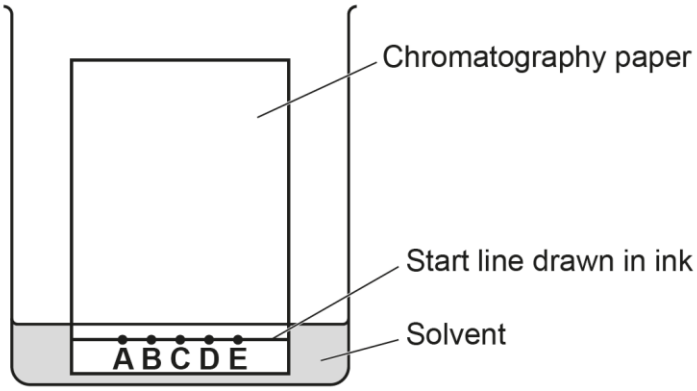
Higher attaining candidates discussed their answer in terms of element or compound. Many discussed 'only one substance', 'contains nothing else' or 'unmixed substance' which were too vague to be creditworthy.

Question 23 (b) (i)

(b)

(i) A student does a chromatography experiment to separate some dyes.

The diagram shows how they set up their equipment.



The student's experiment will **not** work to separate the dyes.

Suggest **two** changes the student can make so that the experiment will work.

1 .....

2 .....

[2]

The changes were quite well known. Adding less solvent, more solvent or having the solvent at the start line were popular incorrect responses. Missing solvent front line, adding a lid and holding up the paper were also seen often.

Question 23 (b) (ii)

(ii) The student calculates that a dye has an R_f value of 0.67.

The table shows the R_f value of different dyes.

Colour of dye	R_f value
Blue	0.15–0.20
Red	0.35–0.40
Pink	0.40–0.80
Yellow	0.75–0.80

Which dye did they use in their experiment?

Explain your answer.

Dye .....

Explanation .....

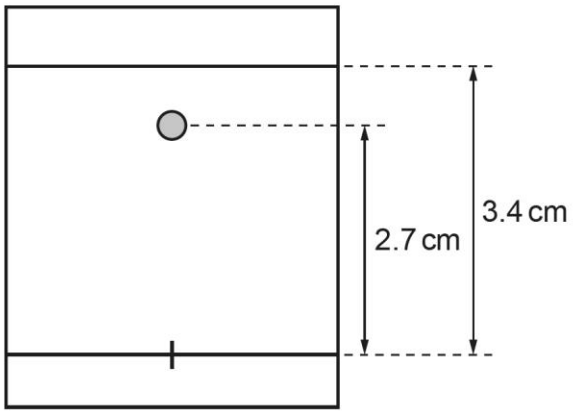
.....

[2]

This was well answered by the majority of candidates. Some repeated the information in the question rather than explaining their choice of dye.

Question 23 (c)

(c) The diagram shows a chromatogram for another dye.



Calculate the R_f value of the dye.

Use the equation: $R_f = \frac{\text{distance travelled by the substance}}{\text{distance travelled by the solvent}}$

R_f value = ... **[2]**

Lower attaining candidates inverted the division and a small number multiplied the two distances.

Question 23 (d)

(d) A student separates substance **S** from a mixture of substances **S** and **T**.

The starting mass of the mixture is 9.7 g and they obtain 5.1 g of pure substance **S**.

Calculate the mass of pure substance **S** that could be separated from 15.0 g of the mixture.

Mass of pure substance **S** = ... g **[2]**

Many candidates found this challenging. Commonly masses were added or subtracted. Many candidates did not show their working and so it was impossible for incorrect responses to earn partial marks. A significant number omitted the question.

Calculations

In multi-step calculations it is important that interim answers are not given to few significant figures or are incorrectly rounded such that the final answer becomes incorrect. Encourage students to leave their answers in the calculator. However, where full working is shown such answers may gain partial credit.

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