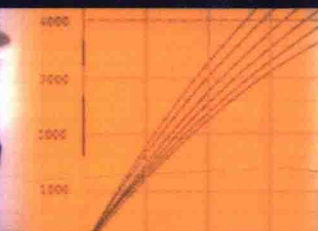
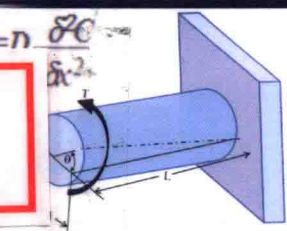




Plastics Product Design

Paul F. Mastro



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by
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Co-published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken, New Jersey, and Scrivener Publishing LLC, Salem, Massachusetts.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Cover design by Russell Richardson

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

ISBN 978-1-118-84271-3

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Plastics Product Design

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Beverly, MA 01915-6106

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Preface

My first job as a plastics engineer fresh out of college was working for a large custom molder. That gave me a wonderful opportunity to be involved in the design and manufacture of a wide array of different products spanning a number of different industries. What that experience taught me was that in the myriad of different products that I got to work on, the basic engineering principles were the same, but each different industry or product group had constraints and requirements unique to them and often used very specialized engineering techniques that one would not necessarily be aware of if they did have experience in that industry. Working on different products every day gave me an appreciation for how important this knowledge was and how difficult it could be to quickly acquire it. This was reinforced throughout my career as I worked in engineering and product design in a number of different industries. The main purpose of this book is to convey the knowledge I obtained in all of these experiences to help facilitate the design process for people involved in designing or manufacturing similar kinds of parts.

Plastic materials provide the design engineer a wide variety and ever increasing number of possible solutions to some of the most difficult design problems for an ever widening scope of applications. The purpose of this book is to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the range of plastics materials, properties, and processes available to them and an understanding of how to design a variety of basic components from plastic materials.

While the basic design principles that will be discussed in the first section of the book are applicable to the design of any plastic part, each product type or industry has specific or unique requirements, many of which will be discussed in detail in the chapters in part two that should help someone unfamiliar with them to begin to develop a part design.

This book is intended for use by designers who have had limited or no experience with plastics materials as well as a more experienced designer who is designing a part for a use, process or an application that they are not familiar with. Also, the book has an extensive discussion of materials and processes that will provide a solid introduction to plastics for anyone.

In Section 1, *Plastics as a Design Material*, the reader is provided with an introduction to plastics as a design material. The section is introduced with a brief history of the plastics industry and a discussion of general plastics material properties. The next two chapters will give an overview of the plastics materials commonly in use today and a discussion of a variety of processes available to the designer to make a part along with the design considerations each process will entail. This section also includes a discussion of useful prototyping processes, including advantages and disadvantages of each. Finally, chapter 5 will discuss general design considerations that are applicable to most plastics product designs.

In Section 2, *Plastics Product Design*, the discussion will turn to the specific design and manufacturing requirements for a number of different product types and components. This section starts with an introduction to plastic materials being used as structural components, where many basic mechanical engineering principles are reviewed as well as a discussion of how they need to be adapted to account for the viscoelastic behaviour of plastics materials. Chapters follow on enclosures, packaging, gears, hinges, bearings, snap fits, pressure vessels, including pipe, and optical components. These sections will discuss the general considerations that are relevant to these applications as well as specific insights about each particular application. Discussions of plastic joining techniques that are applicable across all product groups will layout the design choices available for putting these components together. The book concludes with a discussion of the product development process and role of the past design and designer in this process.

This book is the result of my experiences as a design and manufacturing engineer and is intended to provide the reader with a basic understanding of plastics materials and processes and to provide a resource to assist them with the design of a number of different components.

I would like to thank my wife Lois for her help and support throughout my career and in this endeavour.

Contents

Preface	xi
PART 1: Plastics as a Design Material	1
1 Introduction to Plastics Materials	3
1.1 History of Plastics	3
1.2 Definition of Plastics	5
1.3 Thermoplastics and Thermosets	5
1.4 How Plastics are Made	6
1.5 General Plastics Properties	7
1.6 Plastics Feedstocks and Volumes	8
2 Properties of Plastics	11
2.1 Molecular Weight and Molecular Weight Distribution	13
2.2 Melt Flow Index	16
2.3 Molecular Structure of Polymers	16
2.4 Thermal Properties of Plastics	17
2.5 Physical Properties of Plastics	24
2.6 Electrical Properties	28
2.7 Flammability	29
3 Overview of Plastics Materials	31
3.1 Polyethylene	32
3.2 Polypropylene	35
3.3 Polystyrene	37
3.4 Polyvinyl Chloride	39
3.5 Engineering Plastics	41
3.5.1 Cellulosics	41
3.5.2 Polymethyl Methacrylate (Acrylic)	42
3.5.3 Polycarbonates	43
3.5.4 Polyamides (Nylon)	45
3.5.5 Polyoxymethylene (Acetal)	46

3.5.6	Thermoplastic Polyesters	47
3.5.7	Fluoropolymers	48
3.5.8	High Performance Polymers	49
3.5.8.1	Polyphenylenes	50
3.5.8.2	Polysulfones	50
3.5.8.3	Polyaramids	51
3.5.8.4	Polyarylether Ketones	51
3.5.8.5	Liquid Crystal Polymers (LCPs)	52
3.5.8.6	Thermoplastic Polyimides	53
3.5.8.7	Polybenzimidazole	53
3.6	Thermoplastic Elastomers	54
3.7	Biopolymers	55
3.7.1	Polylactic Acid	55
3.7.2	Polyhydroxyalkanoates	56
3.7.3	Polybutylene Succinate	56
3.8	Thermosets	56
3.8.1	Phenolics	57
3.8.2	Amino Plastics	57
3.8.3	Epoxyes	59
3.8.4	Thermoset Polyesters	60
3.8.5	Thermoset Polyurethanes	61
3.8.6	Polydicyclopentadiene	62
3.8.7	Thermoset Polyimides	62
3.9	Fillers and Reinforcements	62
4	Process Overviews, Advantages and Constraints	65
4.1	Extrusion	66
4.2	Injection Molding	69
4.3	Extrusion Blow Molding	76
4.4	Injection Blow Molding and Stretch Blow Molding	78
4.5	Compression Molding	81
4.6	Transfer Molding	82
4.7	Rotational Molding	82
4.8	Reaction Injection Molding	85
4.9	Thermoforming	85
4.10	Filament Winding	87
4.11	Pultrusion	89
4.12	Additive Manufacturing (3D Printing)	90
4.13	Other Prototyping Processes	92

5	General Design Considerations	93
5.1	Shrinkage	93
5.2	Dimensional Tolerances	94
5.3	Draft	98
5.4	Gating	100
5.5	Coring and Holes	102
5.6	Rib Design	106
5.7	Color and Appearance	107
5.8	Chemical Resistance	109
5.9	Weathering and Environmental Effects	111
5.10	Recycling and Recycling Codes	112
	PART 2: Plastics Product Design	115
6	Structural Components	117
6.1	Rigidity and Strength	118
6.2	Creep	120
6.3	Fatigue	130
6.4	Torsion	131
6.5	Impact	134
6.6	Other Elevated Temperature Considerations	137
7	Enclosures	139
7.1	Cosmetics	140
7.2	Structural Support	142
7.3	Ventilation	148
7.4	Flammability	149
7.5	Electrical Considerations	152
8	Packaging and Containers	157
8.1	Impact and Tear Resistance	157
8.2	Strength and Rigidity	158
8.3	Barrier Properties	158
8.4	Packaging Processes	162
8.5	Printing and Decorating	165
9	Snap Fits and Hinges	169
9.1	Snap Fit Designs	170
9.2	Design of Cantilever Snaps Using Classical Beam Theory	172

9.3	Assembly and Disassembly	180
9.4	Non-Rectangular Cantilevered Beams	186
9.5	Effects of Stress Concentration	186
9.6	Annular Snap Fits	187
9.7	Manufacturability	190
9.8	Plastic Hinges	192
10	Plastic Gears	195
10.1	How Gears Work	196
10.2	Types of Gears	198
10.3	Terminology	201
10.4	Gear Tooth Loading	203
10.5	Contact Stress	208
10.6	Gear Tolerances	209
10.7	Gear Tooth Design	211
10.8	Gear Mesh Conditions and Operating Distances	213
10.9	Software	216
10.10	Prototyping	217
10.11	Gear Manufacturability	217
10.12	Gear Materials	221
11	Bearings	223
11.1	Wear	225
11.2	Bearing Life and Performance	228
11.3	Bearing Design	230
11.4	Bearing Materials	230
12	Pressure Vessels and Pipes	233
12.1	Pipe	234
12.2	Miner's Rule	237
12.3	Other Pressure Vessels	239
12.4	Other Types of Pressure Vessels	243
12.5	Material and Manufacturing Considerations	243
13	Plastic Optics	247
13.1	Optical Fundamentals	247
13.2	Mirrors	252
13.3	Light Pipes	254
13.4	Lenses	254
13.5	Manufacturing Processes for Optical Components	256
13.6	Measuring Techniques	257

14 Joining Techniques	259
14.1 Threads and Threading	260
14.2 Self-Tapping Screws	263
14.3 Metal Inserts	265
14.4 Ultrasonic Welding	268
14.5 Vibration and Hot Plate Welding	272
14.6 Spin Welding	274
14.7 Solvent and Adhesive Bonding	275
14.8 Bolt and Screw Assembly	278
15 Product Design Process	281
15.1 Design Process	281
15.2 Material Selection	289
15.3 Design Services	289
Appendix A	
Thermal Properties of Selected Generic Materials	293
Appendix B	
Properties of Selected Structural Components	295
Appendix C	
Common Abbreviations for Plastic Materials	297
References	299
Index	303

PART 1

PLASTICS AS A DESIGN MATERIAL

Plastics materials have a number of unique properties that allow a wide variety of solutions to many design problems. The nature of some of these properties requires the designer to approach the application of these materials to a product design a little differently than many traditional design materials. This section will review common materials and processes and look at some of the general engineering approaches that need to be taken in developing a plastic product design.

1

Introduction to Plastics Materials

In this chapter we will briefly discuss the history of plastics, examine what plastics are, how they are made and some of the general properties of plastics materials. We will also look at the overall size of the plastics industry today.

1.1 History of Plastics

It is hard to imagine a world without plastics, but plastics are a family of relatively new materials and have been around for a little more than 100 years. The start of the plastics industry dates back to 1868 when John Wesley Hyatt, in search of an alternate material to ivory for billiard balls, discovered celluloid, the first commercially successful plastic material. Celluloid also found application in photographic still and movie film and shirt collars and buttons. It is still in use today to make ping pong balls.

Celluloid was a modified naturally occurring polymer, cellulose. In 1907 Dr. Leo Baekeland, through a condensation reaction of phenol and formaldehyde, invented phenolic, the first plastic produced entirely from synthetic materials. This was an easily moldable, cost effective material that became widely used in electrical components and general moldings. Its major limitation was that it was only available in dark colors. This problem was solved in 1929 when American Cyanamid Company introduced urea formaldehyde thermoset molding compounds which could be produced in a wide array of colors.

In 1934 Dr. Wallace Carothers, working for DuPont, invented nylon. This is notable because he was hired to develop a synthetic material to replace silk and he developed a polymer to meet this specific need, a first for polymer chemists.

The first inorganic polymer, polytetrafluoroethylene, more commonly known as Teflon[®], was discovered by another DuPont chemist, Dr. Roy Plunkett, in 1938.

Throughout the 1940s thermoset materials dominated the plastics market, but starting in the 1950s new thermoplastic materials and processes began to take over. The first commercial reciprocating screw injection molding machine appeared in Germany in the mid-1950s from Ankerwerk. Due to its ability to produce significantly improved thermoplastic melts, numerous manufacturers around the world soon offered their own versions. Injection-molded thermoplastics started to replace many thermoset applications and many new opportunities for growth were found.

In 1953, the first reinforced plastic car bodies appeared in the Chevrolet Corvette [1], and plastics continue to make inroads in the auto industry as their low costs and high strength-to-weight ratios help engineers meet ever-increasing fuel economy requirements. Use of plastics materials to reduce the weight of cars is a major strategy of the automobile industry as they strive to meet the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 2025 CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) standards of 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025.

Advances in polymer chemistry and catalysts now allow polymer chemists to scientifically develop plastic materials with specific properties to meet the needs of specific applications. Stereospecific catalysts like Zeigler Natta catalysts and metallocene catalysts can help control how and where the molecules attach to one another. Ruthenium catalysts enable ring opening metathesis polymerization, which has opened the possibilities of new families of high performance polymers.

This is allowing plastics to move into areas of much more demanding functional requirements and to be used in a wide array of engineering applications. Plastic materials are not only used in housewares, toys and packaging, but also aerospace, construction, electronics, transportation and industrial applications.

1.2 Definition of Plastics

What actually is a plastic material? There are many similar definitions used, but for our purposes, plastics are materials that are composed of large molecules that are synthetically made and, under the proper conditions, can be readily formed or molded into the desired shape. The large plastic molecules are called polymers from the Greek words poly, which means many, and meros which means units. The polymer is made up of many smaller molecules called monomers which are joined together through chemical bonding, generally through either a condensation or an addition polymerization reaction. The chemical properties of the monomer will determine if and how it can form into a polymer, as well as what properties the finished polymer might have.

1.3 Thermoplastics and Thermosets

Plastics are divided into two basic families, thermoplastics and thermosets. Thermoplastics are materials that when heated will soften and flow, allowing the polymer chains to slide over one another, and when cooled, they will harden. This process can be repeated many times. This allows thermoplastic materials to be easily recycled and reused. A thermoset material will soften and flow when it is heated, but additional heat will cause a chemical reaction called crosslinking to occur. In crosslinking, chemical bonds form between the polymer chains. This crosslinking reaction locks the polymer chains together and prevents them from sliding over one another, causing the polymer to harden. This process is irreversible. As a result, parts made from thermosets cannot be easily recycled.

Figure 1.1 shows the differences in how thermoplastics and thermosets respond to changes in temperature. At lower temperatures (upper left on the chart) both thermoplastics and thermosets are solids (usually – although a thermoset resin can start out as a liquid). As the temperature is increased, the viscosity (resistance to flow) of both materials will lower until they go from a solid state to a viscous (thick)