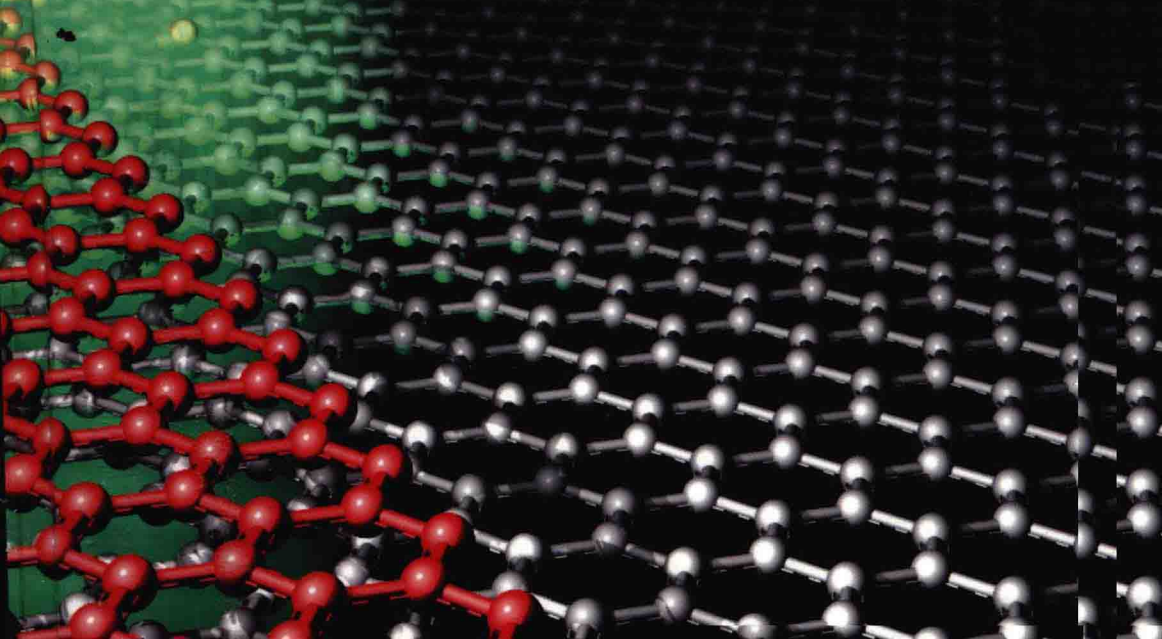




# Graphene

Fundamentals and  
emergent applications

Jamie H. Warner  
Franziska Schäffel  
Alicja Bachmatiuk  
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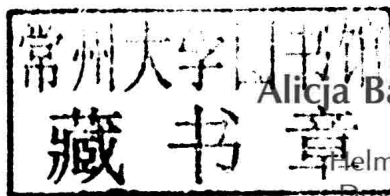
## Fundamentals and Emergent Applications

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# Graphene



<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. About the book	3
References	4
<b>2. The Atomic Structure of Graphene and Its Few-layer Counterparts</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Graphene	5
2.2. Bilayer, Trilayer and Few-layer Graphene	10
2.3. Relationship of Graphene to Carbon Nanotubes	12
2.4. Other Layered 2D Crystals	16
2.4.1. Introduction	16
2.4.2. Boron Nitride Nanosheets	17
2.4.3. Transition Metal Dichalcogenides	20
2.4.4. Transition Metal Oxides	23
2.4.5. Silicene	25
2.4.6. Graphene Oxide and Reduced Graphene Oxide	28
2.4.7. Graphane and Fluorographene	32
2.5. Nanostructured Graphene	33
2.5.1. Introduction	33
2.5.2. Patterning Graphene via Lithography	34
2.5.3. Sonochemical Cutting of Graphene	40
2.5.4. Crystallographically Selective Structuring of Graphene Through Anisotropic Etching	41
2.5.5. Graphene Nanoribbon Formation by 'Unzipping' Carbon Nanotubes	45
2.5.6. Bottom-up Fabrication of Graphene Nanostructures	47
References	49
<b>3. Properties of Graphene</b>	<b>61</b>
3.1. Electronic Properties	61
3.1.1. Introduction	61
3.1.2. The Band Structure of Graphene	62

3.1.3. Transport Experiments in Graphene	64
References	71
<b>3.2. Chemical Properties of Graphene</b>	<b>73</b>
3.2.1. Introduction	73
3.2.2. Covalent Functionalisation of Graphene	74
3.2.3. Noncovalent Functionalisation of Graphene	80
3.2.4. Summary	83
References	84
<b>3.3. Electron Spin Properties of Graphene</b>	<b>86</b>
3.3.1. Introduction	86
3.3.2. Spin and Magnetism in Graphite	87
3.3.3. Magnetism and Spin in Graphene	88
3.3.4. Summary	95
References	97
<b>3.4. The Mechanical Properties of Graphene</b>	<b>99</b>
3.4.1. Elastic Properties and Intrinsic Strength	99
3.4.2. Adhesion, Tearing and Cracking of Graphene	102
3.4.3. The Role of Defects and Structural Modification on the Mechanical Properties	103
3.4.4. Graphene Derivatives	104
3.4.5. Graphene-based Composites	110
References	111
<b>3.5. The Thermal Properties of Graphene</b>	<b>114</b>
3.5.1. Thermal Conductivity	114
References	125
 <b>4. Methods for Obtaining Graphene</b>	 <b>129</b>
<b>4.1. Mechanical Exfoliation</b>	<b>129</b>
4.1.1. Introduction to Mechanical Exfoliation	129
4.1.2. Micromechanical Exfoliation	130
4.1.3. Mechanical Cleavage of Graphite	134
4.1.4. Mechanical Milling of Graphite	135
4.1.5. Summary	135
References	136
<b>4.2. Chemical Exfoliation</b>	<b>137</b>
4.2.1. Introduction to Chemical Exfoliation	137
4.2.2. Review of Chemical Exfoliation	138
4.2.3. Different Types of Graphite	147
4.2.4. Different Types of Solvents	148
4.2.5. Different Types of Sonication	150
4.2.6. How to Characterise Chemically Exfoliated Graphene	151
4.2.7. Other 2D Crystals	153
4.2.8. Summary	153
References	154

<b>4.3. Reduced Graphene Oxide</b>	<b>155</b>
4.3.1. Graphene Oxide	155
4.3.2. Chemical Reduction of Graphene Oxide	156
4.3.3. Heat Treatment of Graphene Oxide	159
4.3.4. Electrochemical Reduction of Graphene Oxide	159
4.3.5. Summary	160
References	162
<b>4.4. Bottom-up Synthesis of Graphene from Molecular Precursors</b>	<b>163</b>
4.4.1. Introduction	163
4.4.2. Solution-based approaches	163
4.4.3. Solubilisation Strategies	164
4.4.4. Solvothermal Synthesis and sonication	166
4.4.5. Chemothermal-based Approaches	167
4.4.6. Self-assembly of Graphene Oxide Nanosheets	170
References	171
<b>4.5. Chemical Vapour Deposition Using Catalytic Metals</b>	<b>173</b>
4.5.1. Introduction	173
4.5.2. CVD Basics	173
4.5.3. Substrate Selection	174
4.5.4. Substrate Pretreatment	175
4.5.5. Graphene Over Ni and Cu	176
4.5.6. Early Growth	177
4.5.7. The Role of Hydrogen in The CVD Reaction	183
4.5.8. Graphene–other Metals and Alloys	184
4.5.9. Segregation routes	186
References	187
<b>4.6. CVD Synthesis of Graphene Over Nonmetals</b>	<b>189</b>
4.6.1. Introduction	189
4.6.2. Aspects to Consider with Nonmetal Catalysts	190
4.6.3. Non-metals as Catalysts for CVD-grown Graphene	191
4.6.4. Metal-assisted Routes	195
4.6.5. Non-metals as Catalysts for Carbon Nanowall Fabrication (vertical graphene)	195
4.6.6. The Basics of Plasma-Enhanced Chemical Vapour Deposition	196
4.6.7. Nanowall or Nanosheet Synthesis	197
4.6.8. Substrate-free PECVD Synthesis of Graphene Sheets	198
4.6.9. Graphene Formation from Solid-carbon Sources on Surfaces	198
References	201
<b>4.7. Epitaxial Growth of Graphene on SiC</b>	<b>204</b>
4.7.1. Introduction	204
4.7.2. Reaction Protocol	205
4.7.3. Nucleation and Growth	206



4.7.4.	Epitaxial Graphene on the SiC (0001) Face	207
4.7.5.	Face-to-Face Growth	208
4.7.6.	Laser-induced Growth of Epitaxial Graphene	209
4.7.7.	Epitaxial Graphene on the SiC (000 $\bar{1}$ ) Face	210
4.7.8.	Graphene Growth by Molecular Beam Epitaxy of SiC	212
4.7.9.	Graphene Synthesis on Cubic SiC/Si Wafers	212
4.7.10.	Graphene From the Carbothermal Reduction of SiO <sub>x</sub>	213
4.7.11.	SiC/Metal Hybrid Systems for Graphene Formation	213
	References	214
<b>4.8.</b>	<b>Transfer to Arbitrary Substrates</b>	<b>216</b>
4.8.1.	Introduction	216
4.8.2.	Transfer of Mechanically Exfoliated Graphene to Arbitrary Substrates	216
4.8.3.	Transfer of CVD-grown Graphene on Metals to Arbitrary Substrates	219
4.8.4.	Transfer of Graphene Grown on SiC	223
4.8.5.	Towards a Universal Transfer Route for Graphene Grown on Arbitrary Substrates	225
4.8.6.	Summary	226
	References	227
<b>5.</b>	<b>Characterisation Techniques</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>5.1.</b>	<b>Optical Microscopy</b>	<b>229</b>
	References	237
<b>5.2.</b>	<b>Raman Spectroscopy</b>	<b>238</b>
5.2.1.	Introduction	238
	References	246
<b>5.3.</b>	<b>Scanning Electron Microscopy</b>	<b>248</b>
	References	253
<b>5.4.</b>	<b>Transmission Electron Microscopy</b>	<b>254</b>
5.4.1.	Introduction	254
5.4.2.	Atomic Resolution Imaging (TEM/STEM) and Atomic Scale Spectroscopy (EELS)	256
5.4.3.	Surface Contamination	259
5.4.4.	Determining the Number of Layers Through (Scanning) Transmission Electron Microscopy	261
5.4.5.	Characterisation of Defects in Graphene	265
5.4.6.	Characterisation of Graphene Edges	272
5.4.7.	In-situ Manipulation of Graphene in a TEM	276
	References	277
<b>5.5.</b>	<b>Electron Diffraction</b>	<b>280</b>
5.5.1.	Introduction	280
5.5.2.	Determining the Number of Layers Using Electron Diffraction	281

5.5.3.	Determining the Graphene Topography	284
5.5.4.	Determination of Stacking Order and Identification of Rotational Stacking Faults	287
5.5.5.	Low-energy Electron Diffraction	292
	References	294
<b>5.6.</b>	<b>Scanning Tunnelling Microscopy</b>	<b>296</b>
5.6.1.	Introduction to Scanning Tunnelling Microscopy	296
5.6.2.	STM Studies of Graphite	298
5.6.3.	STM of Graphene on Metals	299
5.6.4.	STM of Graphene on Insulators	304
5.6.5.	Summary	306
	References	307
<b>5.7.</b>	<b>AFM as a Tool for Graphene</b>	<b>309</b>
5.7.1.	Introduction	309
5.7.2.	Graphene on Different Surfaces	310
5.7.3.	AFM Studies on GO	313
5.7.4.	AFM as a Tool to Investigate and Engineer Physical Properties	313
	References	319
<b>5.8.</b>	<b>Hall Mobility and Field-effect Mobility</b>	<b>321</b>
5.8.1.	Introduction to the Hall Effect	321
5.8.2.	Measurement of the Hall Mobility on Graphene Samples	322
5.8.3.	Measurement of the Field-effect Mobility in Graphene	325
5.8.4.	Maximising Mobility	326
5.8.5.	Summary	331
	References	331
<b>6.</b>	<b>Applications of Graphene</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>6.1.</b>	<b>Electronic Devices</b>	<b>333</b>
6.1.1.	Introduction	333
6.1.2.	Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor Field Effect Transistors (MOSFETs)	333
6.1.3.	The Graphene MOSFET	336
6.1.4.	Opening a Band Gap	338
6.1.5.	Strain Engineering a Band Gap	338
6.1.6.	Field Induced Band Gap in Bilayer Graphene	338
6.1.7.	Graphene Nanoribbons	339
6.1.8.	Further Techniques	340
6.1.9.	The Optimisation of Mobility	340
6.1.10.	Deposition of a High- $\kappa$ Gate Dielectric and Low-Resistance Metal Contacts	341
6.1.11.	The Viability of Graphene in CMOS	342
6.1.12.	Radio-Frequency (RF) Electronics	343
6.1.13.	Novel Field Effect Transistor Designs	344

6.1.14. Gas Sensors	345
6.1.15. Metrology and the Definition of the Ohm	346
References	346
<b>6.2. Spintronics</b>	<b>352</b>
6.2.1. Introduction	352
6.2.2. Magnetoresistance using Carbon Nanotubes	352
6.2.3. Magnetoresistance using Graphene	357
6.2.4. Summary	365
References	365
<b>6.3. Transparent Conducting Electrodes</b>	<b>366</b>
References	380
<b>6.4. Nanoelectromechanical Systems (NEMS) using Graphene</b>	<b>384</b>
6.4.1. Actuation, Detection and Quality Factor of NEMS	384
6.4.2. Graphene Electromechanical Resonators	386
References	396
<b>6.5. Freestanding Graphene Membranes</b>	<b>397</b>
6.5.1. Free-Standing Graphene as the Ultimate Microscope Slide	397
6.5.2. Graphene as a Template for Catalyst-Free Graphene Fabrication by Electrons	402
6.5.3. Free-Standing Graphene as a Subnanometer Trans-Electrode Membrane	405
6.5.4. Permeability of Free-Standing Graphene	406
References	407
<b>6.6. Graphene-Based Energy Application</b>	<b>409</b>
6.6.1. Graphene-Based Materials in Supercapacitors	409
6.6.2. Graphene in Electrochemical Double-Layer Capacitors (EDLCs)	411
6.6.3. Graphene-Based Pseudo Capacitors	414
6.6.4. Graphene-Based Materials in Lithium Ion Batteries	416
6.6.5. Graphene-Based Materials in Fuel Cells	418
6.6.6. Graphene-Based Materials in Solar Cells	419
References	421
<b>6.7. Superstrong Graphene Composites</b>	<b>425</b>
6.7.1. Graphene-Based Composites	425
6.7.2. Ex Situ Polymerisation	427
6.7.3. In Situ Polymerization	434
References	435
<b>Index</b>	<b>439</b>

# Introduction

Jamie H. Warner

The Nobel prize for physics in 2010 was awarded to Sir Professor Andrei Geim and Sir Professor Kostya Novoselov, from the Manchester University, for their ‘ground-breaking experiments regarding the two-dimensional material graphene’. Reading these words carefully, there is no mention of ‘discovery’ and this is a debatable topic, and a similar discussion clouds the discovery of carbon nanotubes and its relation to the landmark paper of Sumio Iijima that stimulated the field of nanotubes (Iijima, 1991). In contrast, the Nobel prize in chemistry (1996) was awarded to Robert F. Curl Jr, Sir Harold W. Kroto, and Richard E. Smalley for ‘their discovery of fullerenes’, leaving no ambiguity.

Whilst it was pointed out by Professor Walt de Heer from the Georgia Tech University that numerous factual errors were made by the Nobel Committee in their scientific background document on the Nobel prize for graphene, there is no doubt that the papers in 2004 and 2005 by Novoselov et al. were instrumental in igniting the field of graphene (Novoselov et al., 2004, 2005). The Manchester group is seen as developing the ‘scotch-tape’ mechanical exfoliation technique for graphene production that was simple, effect, cheap, and therefore could be taken up rapidly by research groups all across the world. It is this simplicity that helped the graphene research develop at a remarkable pace and generate momentum. Although this technique had been applied for cleaving graphite for scanning tunnelling microscopy studies, there was no further development in demonstrating how it could be used to discover the superb electronic properties of graphene.

The pioneering work of Professor de Heer should be recognised, as his group developed synthetic graphene from silicon carbide precursors and undertook electronic measurements of monolayer graphene independently of the Manchester group (Berger et al., 2004). He was already aware of the wonders that graphene could offer before the 2004 report of Novoselov et al. (2004). His group published a report showing 2D electron gas properties in ultrathin epitaxial graphite films and opened a route towards scalable graphene-based nanoelectronics (Berger et al., 2004). In 2005, Professor Philip Kim’s group from the Colombia University reported the observation of the quantum Hall effect and Berry’s phase in graphene and extended this further with many important contributions to discovering the amazing electronic properties of

graphene (Zhang et al., 2005). Their method for obtaining graphene was similar to that reported in Novoselov's 2004 report as is cited as such. Professor Rodney Ruoff, from the University of Texas at Austin, has also been instrumental in advancing the chemical vapour deposition growth of graphene using metal catalysts that is critical to graphene having a commercial impact. There have been numerous other leaders in the field of graphene research and far too many to mention without offending someone by unintentionally leaving them out. Instead, we celebrate all contributions to graphene research that has led to so much high impact science and helped forge/reinvigorate/establish many careers for both the young and experienced.

The boom in graphene was helped by many people who were already studying carbon nanotubes and fullerenes, simply translating their activities into this new area. The apparatus for characterising graphene is often similar to those used for nanotubes, such as transmission electron microscopy (TEM), scanning electron microscopy (SEM), electronic device fabrication, diffraction and Raman spectroscopy. This also bodes well for rapid advances in understanding the properties of new 2D crystals that may exhibit new behaviour absent in graphene.

Graphene is the building block for understanding the structure of fullerenes, nanotubes and graphite, and given the simplicity of its isolation, it is surprising it was studied last. Many people who do not work on graphene question its hype, which is fair considering the hype that surrounded the discovery of fullerenes (1985) and nanotubes (1991) and the lack of real world implementation and life-changing technology that has resulted. Perhaps the biggest difference between fullerenes and nanotubes with graphene is the manufacturing aspect. It is challenging to produce vast quantities of fullerenes that are pure, apart from  $C_{60}$  and  $C_{70}$ . Some of the most interesting and useful properties of fullerenes come by adding dopants or molecular functional groups, but this makes their separation using high-performance liquid chromatography time consuming and thus the end product expensive. Carbon nanotubes are facing criticism as being asbestos-like when inhaled. More work is needed to be sure of this as residual metal catalysts that are known to be toxic are often retained in the material. Carbon nanotubes also suffer from the problem of mixed chiralities that lead to both semiconducting and metallic electronic transport behaviour. This has limited their application in electronics, despite demonstrating their outstanding properties at the single-device level. Carbon nanotubes will continue to be intensively studied as they encompass the ideology of a 1D nanowire at its best. Graphene, on the other hand, looks to be solving these manufacturing challenges with SiC and chemical vapour depositions proving fruitful for electronic-grade graphene, whilst chemical exfoliation is excellent for solution-based processing for spray-casting and polymer blending. In order for graphene to be useful in applications, there will be a strong need to interface it with other materials, in particular semiconductor nanomaterials. The pathway for cheap, high-quality graphene suited for a variety of applications is achievable. Perhaps, it is this reason that graphene

leaped ahead of carbon nanotubes in being awarded a Nobel prize, since carbon nanotubes also display amazing electronic and mechanical properties that captured the imagination and interest of the world for more than 10 years.

## 1.1. ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is aimed at undergraduate students towards the end of the degrees and PhD students starting out, plus anyone new entering into the field of graphene. The objective of the book is to provide the necessary basic information about graphene in a broad variety of topics. Each chapter is designed to be relatively self-contained, and as a consequence, there may be some occasions of slight repetition. The field has grown extensively over the past 9 years, and it is not possible to cover every published piece of work, and therefore, we have restricted discussions to the key findings in the field. The book starts with a description of the atomic structure of graphene, as this essentially dictates the properties of graphene. Monolayer, bilayer, trilayer and few-layer graphene are all discussed and how they stack in both AB Bernal stacking as well as Rhombohedral stacking. The relationship of graphene to nanotubes is explored, namely rolling up graphene to form a cylinder. Once an understanding of the atomic structure is obtained, we move towards describing graphene's properties: electrical, chemical, spin, mechanical and thermal. It is these amazing properties that have generated the exuberant fascination in graphene.

Any experimental researcher will need to know how to obtain graphene, and for theoretical scientists, it is important to have a real-world understanding of how graphene can be made, what can be expected in terms of material structure and what the limiting factors are for each approach. We have included Chapter 4 as summarising methods for getting graphene in your hands. It covers the Manchester 'Scotch-tape' mechanical exfoliation, solution-phase chemical exfoliation, bottom-up chemical methods using molecular precursors, chemical-vapour deposition and silicon carbide. A section on how to transfer graphene to arbitrary substrates is included as this is an essential part of getting graphene where you want it, which is often on an insulating substrate or partially suspended like a drum-skin.

Too often, when reviewing papers for journals, poor characterisation has limited the chance of the work being accepted for publication. Effective characterisation is the key for proving you have what you claim, and then being able to draw the right conclusions about from the results. We encourage the use of multiple techniques, with each one providing a piece of the jigsaw that you can fit together for a solid and robust conclusion. We could not cover all characterisation techniques, and recommend further reading on angular-resolved photoemission spectroscopy and X-ray photoemission spectroscopy for graphene characterisation, which are not covered in this book.

The final chapter presents an overview of seven key application areas that graphene has shown promise in: electronic devices, spintronics, transparent

conducting electrodes (TCE), Nano-Electro-Mechanical Systems (NEMS), free-standing membranes, energy and super-strong composites. Whilst it was the outstanding properties of graphene in electronic devices that received the most attention, this area is seen as one of the most challenging in terms of developing a commercial product that will replace silicon electronics due to the absence of an appreciable band-gap. It seems that the niche area of high-frequency electronics may be more suitable for graphene than logic-based transistors. Graphene TCEs have already been used to make touch-screens and outperform Indium Tin Oxide (ITO) on flexible substrates in terms of durability. The major limiting factor here is that the sheet resistance of graphene is still too high. Further advancements in materials design through substitutional doping, intercalation and multilayering will solve this problem in the near future.

We hope this book serves well to get you started and leads to more activity in graphene research. Time will tell whether graphene can live up to its promise, but right now, graphene research is at its pinnacle, and it is never too late to join in the fun.

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# The Atomic Structure of Graphene and Its Few-layer Counterparts

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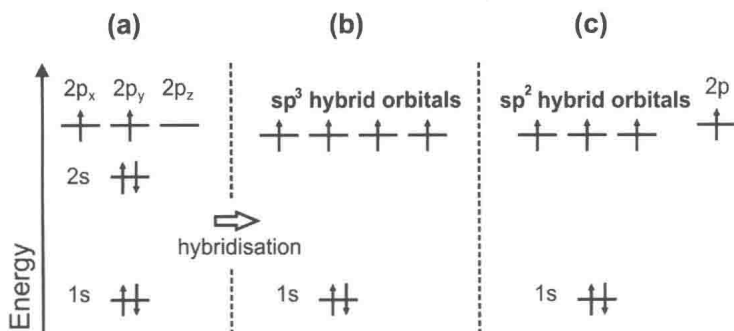
## 2.1. GRAPHENE

In order to understand the atomic structure of graphene, it is helpful to first gain an understanding of the peculiarities of elemental carbon as well as its three-dimensional (3D) allotropes. The general interest in carbon arises from the variety of structural forms in which this element is available. This variety results from a special electron configuration of carbon that provides the ability to form different types of valence bonds to various elements, including other carbon atoms, through atomic orbital hybridisation. Carbon has the atomic number 6 and therefore, electrons occupy the  $1s^2$ ,  $2s^2$ ,  $2p_x^1$  and  $2p_y^1$  atomic orbitals as illustrated in Fig. 2.1a (ground state). It is a tetravalent element, i.e. only the four exterior electrons participate in the formation of covalent chemical bonds.

When forming bonds with other atoms, carbon promotes one of the 2s electrons into the empty  $2p_z$  orbital, resulting in the formation of hybrid orbitals. In diamond the 2s-energy level hybridises with the three 2p levels to form four energetically equivalent  $sp^3$ -orbitals that are occupied with one electron each (Fig. 2.1b). The four  $sp^3$ -orbitals are oriented with largest possible distance from each other; they therefore point towards the corners of an imaginary tetrahedron. The  $sp^3$ -orbitals of one carbon atom overlap with the  $sp^3$ -orbitals of other carbon atoms, forming the 3D diamond structure. The high hardness of diamond results from the strong binding energy of the C–C bonds.

In graphite only two of the three 2p-orbitals partake in the hybridisation, forming three  $sp^2$ -orbitals (Fig. 2.1c). The  $sp^2$ -orbitals are oriented perpendicular to the remaining 2p-orbital, therefore lying symmetrically in the X–Y plane at  $120^\circ$  angles. Thus,  $sp^2$ -carbon atoms form covalent in-plane bonds





**FIGURE 2.1** Atomic orbital diagram of a carbon atom. The four electrons in the doubly occupied spherical 2s orbital and the half occupied dumbbell-shaped 2p-orbitals participate in the chemical bonding of carbon. (a) Ground state, (b) sp<sup>3</sup>-hybridised as in diamond and (c) sp<sup>2</sup>-hybridised as in graphite and graphene.

affecting the planar hexagonal “honeycomb” structure of graphite. While the in-plane  $\sigma$ -bonds within the graphene layers (615 kJ/mol) are even stronger than the C–C bonds in sp<sup>3</sup>-hybridised diamond (345 kJ/mol), the interplane  $\pi$ -bonds, formed by the remaining 2p-orbitals, have a significantly lower binding energy, leading to an easy shearing of graphite along the layer plane. A single layer of graphite (the so-called graphene layer) has a lattice constant  $a = \sqrt{3}a_0$  where  $a_0 = 1.42 \text{ \AA}$  is the nearest neighbour interatomic distance (Haering, 1958). The interplane distance between two adjacent graphene layers in AB stacked graphite is 3.35 Å (Haering, 1958).

The term ‘graphene’ is often incorrectly used for ultrathin graphite layers. Strictly it only refers to a quasi-two-dimensional isolated monolayer of carbon atoms that are arranged in a hexagonal lattice (Novoselov et al., 2005a). As will be discussed in detail in chapter 3, the electronic properties of graphene depend strongly on the number of graphene layers (Geim and Novoselov, 2007). Only single-layer graphene (SLG) and bilayer graphene (BLG) are zero-gap semiconductors with only a single type of electrons and holes, respectively. In the case of the so-called few-layer graphene (FLG, 3 to <10 layers), the conduction and valence bands start to overlap, and several charge carriers appear (cf. Section 3.1) (Morozov et al., 2005; Partoens and Peeters, 2006). Thicker graphene structures are considered as thin films of graphite.

The hexagonal lattice of graphene is shown in Fig. 2.2a with an armchair and a zigzag edge highlighted in grey. The unit cell of graphene is a rhombus (grey) with a basis of two nonequivalent carbon atoms (A and B). The black and white circles represent sites of the corresponding A and B triangular sublattices. In cartesian coordinates the real space basis vectors of the unit cell  $\mathbf{a}_1$  and  $\mathbf{a}_2$  are written as

$$\mathbf{a}_1 = \begin{pmatrix} \sqrt{3}a/2 \\ a/2 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbf{a}_2 = \begin{pmatrix} \sqrt{3}a/2 \\ -a/2 \end{pmatrix} \quad (2.1)$$