

MEMBRANE SEPARATIONS TECHNOLOGY
PRINCIPLES & APPLICATIONS

Membrane Science and Technology Series, 2

MEMBRANE SEPARATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Principles and Applications

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Preface

The field of membrane separation technology is presently in a state of rapid growth and innovation. Many different membrane separation processes have been developed during the past half century and new processes are constantly emerging from academic, industrial, and government laboratories. Microfiltration, which is very similar to conventional filtration, is probably the oldest and still the most widely used of these processes. Almost all other membrane separation processes found significant industrial applications only after the 'breakthrough' development of asymmetric polymer membranes by Loeb and Sourirajan in the early 1950s. Thus, ultrafiltration and reverse osmosis (sometimes called hyperfiltration) reached maturity in the 1960s, whereas membrane processes for the separation of gas mixtures started to be used on an industrial scale in the late 1970s and in the 1980s. Huge membrane plants for the separation of the uranium isotopes ^{235}U and ^{238}U by 'gaseous diffusion' were built in the United States much earlier, during the 1940s. However, the products of these plants were intended for military purposes.

Pervaporation and vapor permeation are the latest membrane separation processes to become economically competitive for some industrial applications. The first large-scale industrial pervaporation plant started operation in 1985 in Karlsruhe-Maxau (Germany) and another shortly thereafter in Betheniville (France). Both plants are being used for the dehydration of 94% ethanol. The first commercial vapor permeation plant, also designed for ethanol dehydration, became operative in September 1989 in Heilbron (Germany). Promising new applications are expected in future years for facilitated-transport membranes and catalytic membrane reactors.

While new membrane separation processes are being conceived with remarkable frequency, existing processes are also being constantly improved in order to enhance their economic competitiveness. Significant improvements are currently being made in many aspects of membrane separation technology: in the development of new membrane materials with higher selectivity and/or permeability, in the fabrication methods for high-flux asymmetric or composite membranes (whether in flat-sheet, hollow fiber, or tubular form), in membrane module construction and in process design (e.g., of hybrid separation processes).

Membrane separation technology is presently being used in an impressive variety of applications and has generated businesses totalling over one billion U.S. dollars annually. It is not surprising, therefore, that it has been the subject

of many monographs, books and review papers, and that an entire journal, the *Journal of Membrane Science* (Elsevier), is dedicated to it. The main objective of the present text is to present the principles and applications of a variety of membrane separation processes from the unique perspectives of investigators who have made important contributions to their fields. Another objective is to provide the reader with an authoritative resource on various aspects of this rapidly growing technology. The text can be used by someone who wishes to learn about a general area of application as well as by the knowledgeable person seeking more detailed information. The various chapters differ significantly in length, emphasis, and detail. No uniformity has been sought in the presentation of the subject matter or in nomenclature in order to preserve the perspective and personal style of the contributors. Also, very little editing has been done on the chapters whose authors used English as a second language, in order to avoid possible errors of interpretation or changes in emphasis.

The chapters in this text cover a wide variety of topics. Some of the authors have chosen to cover all aspects of certain membrane separation processes. Other authors have preferred to discuss specific topics in greater detail, such as process and module design, process economics, special applications of industrial or biotechnological interest, and emerging applications. It is hoped that the present text will not only provide readers interested in membrane separation technology with useful data and information, but also with the insights of well-known investigators who have contributed to its development and promise.

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>List of contributors</i>	xix

Chapter 1. MICROFILTRATION AND ULTRAFILTRATION

William Eykamp

1.1	Introduction	1
1.1.1	Historical	2
1.2	The Membrane Filtration Process	5
1.2.1	Crossflow	5
1.2.2	Throughput and Driving Force	6
1.2.3	Conventional Filtration	7
1.2.4	Crossflow Filtration	7
1.2.5	Mass Transfer	8
1.2.6	Turbulent Mass Transfer	9
1.2.7	Turbulent Boundary Layer	11
1.2.8	Effect of Flow on Flux	12
1.2.9	Pressure Drop	13
1.2.10	Energy Consumption	14
1.2.11	Laminar Mass Transfer	14
1.2.12	Other Depolarization Schemes	15
	1.2.12.1 Taylor Vortex	15
	1.2.12.2 Vibratory	15
1.3	Separation Membranes	16
1.3.1	Membrane Ratings	19
	1.3.1.1 Microfiltration	20
	1.3.1.2 Ultrafiltration	21
	1.3.1.3 Complications from Fouling	22
1.4	Membrane Modules	26
1.4.1	Background	27
1.4.2	Spiral Wound	27
1.4.3	Capillary	28
1.4.4	Plate and Frame	28
1.4.5	Cartridges	28
1.5	Fouling	29
1.5.1	Prompt Fouling	29
1.5.2	Cumulative Fouling	29
1.5.3	Destructive Fouling	30
1.5.4	Frequency of Fouling	30

1.6	Applications	31
1.6.1	Microfiltration	31
1.6.2	Ultrafiltration	35
1.7	Economics	38
1.7.1	Energy	38
References		40

Chapter 2. POLARIZATION PHENOMENA AND MEMBRANE FOULING

M.H.V. Mulder

2.1	Introduction	45
2.2	Adsorption	48
2.3	Concentration Polarization	49
2.4	Model Description of Concentration Polarization	54
2.5	Resistance Models	55
2.6	Gel Polarization Model	59
2.7	Osmotic Pressure Model	61
2.8	Concentration Polarization in Pervaporation	63
2.9	Membrane Fouling	65
2.10	Fouling Models	70
2.11	Control of Fouling and Concentration Polarization	73
2.11.1	Pretreatment	73
2.11.2	Membrane properties	74
2.11.3	Cleaning	75
2.11.3.1	Hydraulic Cleaning	75
2.11.3.2	Mechanical Cleaning	75
2.11.3.3	Chemical Cleaning	75
2.11.3.4	Electric Cleaning	76
2.11.4	Improvement of Operating Conditions	76
2.11.4.1	Solution Hydrodynamics	76
2.11.4.2	Module-related Methods	77
Symbols		81
References		82

Chapter 3. VAPOR PERMEATION

Y. Cen and R.N. Lichtenthaler

3.1	Introduction	85
3.2	Basic Principles and Classification	86
3.2.1	Vapor Permeation in Comparison with Gas Permeation and Pervaporation	86
3.2.2	Classification of Vapor Permeation	87
3.3	Material Transport through Membranes	87
3.3.1	Porous Membranes	88
3.3.2	Nonporous Membranes	89
3.4	Specific Investigations and Applications	92
3.4.1	Removal of Vapors from Gas/Vapor Mixtures	93

3.4.1.1	Specific Investigations	93
3.4.1.2	Industrial Applications	95
3.4.2	Separation of Vapor Mixtures	95
3.4.2.1	Specific Investigations of the Effect of Operating Parameters	97
3.4.2.2	Engineering Aspects	104
3.4.2.3	Industrial Applications	106
3.5	Conclusions	108
3.6	Final remark	108
	Acknowledgement	108
	References	109

Chapter 4. REVERSE OSMOSIS

C.J.D. Fell

4.1	Introduction	113
4.2	Reverse Osmosis Membranes	115
4.3	Theory of Reverse Osmosis	119
4.3.1	Membrane Transport	119
4.3.2	Concentration Polarisation	120
4.4	Design of Reverse Osmosis Modules	121
4.4.1	Conventional Module Types	121
4.4.2	Optimal Module Design	125
4.4.3	Spacer Design in Spiral Wound Modules	127
4.5	Assembly of Reverse Osmosis Plant	127
4.5.1	Module Arrangement	127
4.5.2	Minimizing Energy Costs by Energy Recovery	129
4.5.3	Plant Process Control	129
4.6	Operation of Reverse Osmosis Plant	129
4.6.1	Feed Pretreatment	131
4.6.2	Plant Operation	132
4.6.3	Membrane Fouling	132
4.7	Major Reverse Osmosis Desalination Plants	133
4.7.1	Major Installations	134
4.7.2	Economics of Desalination	135
4.8	Applications Other than Desalination	136
4.9	Conclusions	138
	Some Useful Conversion Factors	139
	Nomenclature	139
	References	140

Chapter 5. PERVAPORATION

J. Néel

5.1	Introduction	143
5.2	Characterization of Pervaporation Membranes	149
5.2.1	Pervaporation Flux and Selectivity	149

5.2.2	Concentration Dependence of Pervaporation Flux and Selectivity . . .	150
5.2.3	Average Characteristics of Operating Pervaporation Membranes . . .	154
5.2.4	Expected Performance of a Continuous-flow Pervaporator	155
5.2.5	Influence of Downstream Pressure on Membrane Performance . . .	156
5.3	Mechanism of Pervaporation Mass Transport	158
5.3.1	Mass Transport Through an Unevenly Swollen Polymer Film . . .	158
5.3.2	Sorption and Diffusion Selectivities	159
5.3.3	Modeling of Pervaporation Mass Transport	165
5.3.3.1	Vacuum Pervaporation Transport of Pure Liquids	165
5.3.3.2	Vacuum Pervaporation of Binary Liquid Mixtures	166
5.3.3.3	The Stefan–Maxwell Approach	169
5.3.3.4	Pervaporation Mass Transport Through Semicrystalline Polymer Films	172
5.3.3.5	Coupling Effects in Pervaporation	176
5.3.3.6	Origin of Downstream Diffusion Selectivity	178
5.4	Engineering of Pervaporation	180
5.4.1	Equations Governing Continuous-flow Pervaporation	181
5.4.2	Application to a Typical Case: Dehydration of Ethanol	183
5.4.3	Side Effects in Pervaporation Engineering	185
5.4.3.1	Concentration Polarization in Pervaporation	185
5.4.3.2	Residence Time Distribution in Pervaporation Modules	188
5.4.3.3	Pressure Loss in Pervaporation Modules	188
5.4.3.4	Pervaporation and Vapor Permeation	189
5.4.3.5	Integrated Systems Involving Pervaporation	190
5.5	Manufacture of Pervaporation Membranes	193
5.5.1	Hydrophilic Pervaporation Membranes	193
5.5.2	Organophilic Pervaporation membranes	197
5.5.3	Pervaporation Membranes for Organic–Organic Separation	199
5.6	Present State of Art of Pervaporation	201
	References	204

Chapter 6. ELECTRODIALYSIS AND RELATED PROCESSES

H. Strathmann

6.1	Introduction: Historical Development	213
6.2	Fundamentals of Electromembrane Processes	215
6.2.1	Principle of Electrodialysis and Related Processes	215
6.2.2	Properties of Ion-Exchange Membranes	217
6.2.3	Mass Transfer in Electrodialysis	221
6.2.4	Membrane Permselectivity	224
6.2.5	Energy Requirements in Electrodialysis	224
6.3	Preparation and Characterization of Ion-exchange Membranes	231
6.3.1	Preparation of Ion-Exchange Membranes	233
6.3.2	Characterization of Ion-Exchange Membranes	242
6.4	Electrodialysis Process and Equipment Design	249
6.4.1	Electrodialysis Stack Design	249

6.4.2	The Process Design	251
6.4.3	Process Parameter Evaluation and Operational Problems	253
6.4.4	Process Design and Economics	258
6.5	Application of Electrodialysis	262
6.5.1	Desalination of Brackish Water by Electrodialysis	263
6.5.2	Production of Table Salt	263
6.5.3	Electrodialysis in Waste Water Treatment	263
6.5.4	Concentration of Reverse Osmosis Brines	264
6.5.5	Electrodialysis in the Chemical, the Food and the Drug Industry	264
6.5.6	Production of Ultrapure Water	265
6.6	Other Electro-membrane Processes	266
6.6.1	Diffusion Dialysis	266
6.6.2	Donnan Dialysis	267
6.6.3	Chlorine-Alkaline Electrolysis	268
6.6.4	Acids and Base Production by Electrodialytic Water Dissociation	269
6.7	Conclusions	275
	Notation	275
	References	277

Chapter 7. LIQUID MEMBRANES (LIQUID PERTRACTION)

L. Boyadzhiev and Z. Lazarova

7.1	Introduction	283
7.1.1	Principle of Liquid Pertraction	284
7.1.2	Comparison of Liquid Membranes and Solid Membranes	284
7.1.3	Comparison of Liquid Pertraction and Liquid-Liquid Extraction	285
7.2	Transfer mechanisms	285
7.2.1	Simple Transfer Mechanisms	286
7.2.2	Facilitated Transfer Mechanisms	287
7.2.3	Other Transfer Mechanisms	288
7.3	Pertraction Techniques	288
7.3.1	Techniques Without Phase Dispersion	289
7.3.1.1	Bulk (Two-cell) Techniques	289
7.3.1.2	Supported Liquid Membranes (SLM)	290
7.3.1.3	Liquid Film Pertraction (LFP)	293
7.3.2	Methods with Phase Dispersion	294
7.3.2.1	Emulsion Liquid Membrane Method (ELM)	295
7.3.2.2	Other Methods with Phase Dispersion	296
7.3.3	Comparison of Various Pertraction Techniques	298
7.4	Mathematical Modelling of Pertraction Processes	299
7.4.1	Modelling of SLM Processes	300
7.4.2	Modelling of ELM Processes	302
7.4.3	Modelling of LFP Processes	304
7.5	Application of Liquid Pertraction	305
7.5.1	Separation of Hydrocarbons	305
7.5.2	Pertraction of Metals	308

7.5.2.1	Alkaline and Earth Alkaline Metals	308
7.5.2.2	Noble Metals	309
7.5.2.3	Rare-earth and Radioactive Metals	310
7.5.2.4	Copper	313
7.5.2.5	Other Valuable or Toxic Metals	318
7.5.3	Pertraction of Inorganic Substances	323
7.5.4	Pertraction of Organic Substances	326
7.5.5	Biotechnological and Medical Applications	329
7.5.5.1	Special Case: Liquid-Membrane Enzyme Reactors	332
7.5.6	Process Economics and Industrial Application of Liquid Pertraction	334
7.6	Conclusion	336
	List of Symbols and Abbreviations	337
	References	339

Chapter 8. MEMBRANE BIOSEPARATIONS

Stephen L. Matson

8.1	Introduction	353
8.1.1	Historical Perspectives	353
8.1.2	Current Status	354
8.1.3	Chapter Organization	355
8.2	Biotechnology and Bioseparations: An Overview	355
8.2.1	Representative Bioproducts	357
8.2.1.1	Low-Molecular-Weight Products	357
8.2.1.2	Macromolecular Products	358
8.2.1.3	Cell Biomass	359
8.2.2	Principal Bioproduction Systems	359
8.2.2.1	Fermentation	360
8.2.2.2	Cell Culture	363
8.3	Implications for Membrane Bioseparations	366
8.3.1	Feedstream Characteristics and Process Constraints	366
8.3.1.1	Diluteness	367
8.3.1.2	Mixture Complexity	367
8.3.1.3	Molecular Complexity and Instability	368
8.3.1.4	High In-Process Value	369
8.3.1.5	Scale of Bioprocessing	370
8.3.1.6	Nature of Bioreactor Operation	370
8.3.1.7	Purity Requirements	371
8.3.1.8	Nature of Bioprocess Development and Regulatory Issues	371
8.3.1.9	Contamination Control and Containment	372
8.3.1.10	Economic Considerations	372
8.3.2	Bioseparation Process Design	373
8.3.2.1	Process Flowsheets	373
8.3.2.2	General Principles and Guidelines	374

8.4	Microfiltration and Ultrafiltration in Cell Harvesting and Clarification . . .	375
8.4.1	General Considerations	375
8.4.1.1	Rationale for Cross-Flow Filtration	375
8.4.1.2	Membrane Characteristics	377
8.4.2	Separation of Microbial Cells	378
8.4.2.1	Microfiltration	378
8.4.2.2	Ultrafiltration	381
8.4.3	Separation of Mammalian Cells	383
8.4.4	Generalizations and Design Guidance	391
8.5	Protein Recovery and Concentration by UF	392
8.5.1	Design Equations	393
8.5.1.1	Concentration by Ultrafiltration	393
8.5.1.2	Purification by Ultrafiltration	393
8.5.1.3	Purification by Diafiltration	394
8.5.2	Typical Applications	395
8.6	Flux-limiting Phenomena in Membrane Bioseparations	399
8.6.1	Concentration Polarization in MF and UF	399
8.6.2	Membrane Fouling	401
8.7	Other Membrane Bioseparations	403
8.7.1	Microsolute Concentration and Purification	403
8.7.2	Sterile Filtration and Contaminant Removal	405
8.7.3	Affinity Membranes	405
	List of Symbols	407
	References	408

Chapter 9. FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY APPLICATIONS

Munir Cheryan and Jose R. Alvarez

9.1	Introduction	415
9.2	Dairy Industry	416
9.2.1	Milk	419
9.2.1.1	Concentration by Reverse Osmosis	419
9.2.1.2	Milk Fractionation by Ultrafiltration	424
9.2.1.3	Milk Microfiltration	435
9.2.2	Cheese Whey	439
9.2.2.1	Concentration by Reverse Osmosis	440
9.2.2.2	Whey Fractionation by Ultrafiltration	441
9.2.2.3	Microfiltration of Whey	444
9.2.2.4	Demineralization	445
9.3	Fruit Juices and Extracts	446
9.3.1	Clarification	446
9.3.1.1	Apple Juice	448
9.3.1.2	Other Juices	451
9.3.2	Concentration	452
9.3.2.1	Apple Juice	452

9.3.2.2	Orange Juice	452
9.3.2.3	Tomato Juice	457
9.3.2.4	Maple Syrup	458
9.3.2.5	Other Juices	453
9.3.3	Electrodialysis	459
9.4	Pigments and Colorants	459
9.5	Conclusions	460
	References	460

Chapter 10. MEMBRANE CONTACTORS

Bradley W. Reed, Michael J. Semmens and Edward L. Cussler

10.1	What Are Membrane Contactors?	467
10.2	Quantitative Description of Contractors	470
10.2.1	Key Equations	470
10.2.2	Mass-Transfer Correlations	472
10.3	Past Efforts	477
10.3.1	Advantages of Membrane Contactors	477
10.3.2	Disadvantages of Contractors	481
10.4	Specific Examples	484
10.5	Bibliography of Membrane Contactor Applications	496

Chapter 11. ANALYSIS AND DESIGN OF MEMBRANE PERMEATORS FOR GAS SEPARATION

Amitava Sengupta and Kamalesh K. Sirkar

11.1	Introduction	499
11.2	Scope of This Chapter	500
11.3	Governing Equations and Useful Definitions	501
11.4	Process Design Options and Separation Schemes	504
11.5	Important Considerations in Permeation Analysis	508
11.6	Literature Review of Permeator Analysis and Design	514
11.7	Completely Mixed Flow for a Multicomponent System	516
11.8	Common Assumptions in Analysis and Design	518
11.9	Hollow-fiber Permeators for Binary System	519
11.10	Spirally Wound Permeators for Binary System	529
11.11	Design Approaches for Hollow-fiber Permeators	531
11.12	Hollow-fiber Permeators for Multicomponent Systems	532
11.13	Permeation in Presence of Sweep Gas	534
11.14	Numerical Techniques for Solution	535
11.15	Multimembrane Module Configurations	537
11.16	Recycle and Reflux	540
11.17	Shortcut Analysis and Design Methods	541
11.18	General Comments on Separation Behavior	545
11.19	Notation	546
	References	550

Chapter 12. GAS SEPARATION USING INORGANIC MEMBRANES

Klaas Keizer, Robert J.R. Uhlhorn and Ton J. Burggraaf

12.1	Introduction	553
12.2	Membrane Structure, Preparation and Modification	556
12.2.1	Membrane Structure	556
12.2.2	Membrane Preparation	557
12.2.3	Membrane Modification	560
12.3	Transport of Gases Through Membranes	561
12.3.1	Pore size $d_p > 50$ nm	562
12.3.2	Pore Size 2 nm $< d_p < 50$ nm	564
12.3.3	Pore Size $d_p < 2$ nm	569
12.3.4	Dense Membranes; Pore Size $d_p = 0$ nm	572
12.4	Gas Separation Using Inorganic Membranes	576
12.4.1	Types of Gas Separation	576
12.4.2	Separation of Permanent Gases at Room Temperature	577
12.4.3	Separation of Condensable Gases at Room Temperature	577
12.4.4	Separation of Condensable Gases at Temperatures between 100 and 300°C	578
12.4.5	Separation of H_2 or O_2 at Temperatures Above 250°C	578
12.4.6	Nonseparative Applications in High-Temperature Membrane Reactors	580
12.5	Conclusions and Evaluation	581
	List of Symbols	583
	References	584

Chapter 13. ECONOMICS OF GAS SEPARATION MEMBRANE PROCESSES

Robert Spillman

13.1	Introduction	589
13.2	Applications and Technology Background	591
13.3.1	Commercial Applications and Suppliers	591
13.2.2	Gas Separation Membrane Technology	592
13.2.2.1	Membrane Classes	592
13.2.2.2	Principles	594
13.2.2.3	Module Configurations	595
13.3	Principles of Membrane Process Design	596
13.3.1	Basic Performance Principles	596
13.3.1.1	Product is the Residue Gas Stream	596
13.3.1.2	Product is the Permeate Stream	599
13.3.1.3	General Conclusions	601
13.3.2	Design Trade-offs	602
13.4	Membrane Process Designs	603
13.4.1	Definitions	603
13.4.2	Assumptions	604
13.4.3	Single-Stage Membrane Processes	607
13.4.3.1	Single-Stage with Feed Compression	607

13.4.3.2	Single-Stage with Permeate Vacuum or Diluent Gas . . .	608
13.4.3.3	Single-Stage with Recycling	609
13.4.3.4	Single- vs. Multistage Processes	611
13.4.4	Two-Stage Membrane Processes	611
13.4.4.1	Two-Stage Membrane Series	611
13.4.4.2	Two-Stage Membrane Series with Recycling	614
13.4.4.3	Two-Stage Membrane Cascade	615
13.4.4.4	Two-Stage Cascade with Recycling	615
13.4.4.5	Ideal Two-Stage Cascade with Recycling	617
13.4.5	Three-Stage	617
13.4.5.1	Two-Stage Recycle Cascade with Premembrane	617
13.4.5.2	Two-Stage Cascade with Postmembrane	617
13.4.6	Other Membrane Process Designs	619
13.4.6.1	Continuous Membrane Columns	619
13.4.6.2	Designs Utilizing Different Membranes	619
13.4.7	Hybrid Systems	621
13.4.7.1	Membrane/Solvent Treating	621
13.4.7.2	Membrane/Cryogenic Distillation	621
13.4.7.3	Membrane/Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA)	622
13.4.7.4	Membrane/Condensers	622
13.4.7.5	Membrane/Inert Gas Combustors	622
13.4.7.6	Other	623
13.4.8	Membrane Process Optimization	623
13.5	Case Studies of Membrane Applications	623
13.5.1	Overview	623
13.5.2	Oxygen/Nitrogen Separation	624
13.5.2.1	Nitrogen Production	625
13.5.2.2	Oxygen Production	629
13.5.3	Hydrogen Separations	632
13.5.3.1	Ammonia Purge Gas	633
13.5.3.2	Refinery Hydrogen Recovery	635
13.5.3.3	Petrochemical Applications	640
13.5.3.4	Hydrogen Production	642
13.5.4	Carbon Dioxide Separations	644
13.5.4.1	Natural Gas Treating	644
13.5.4.2	Carbon Dioxide Enhanced Oil Recovery	649
13.5.4.3	Landfill Gas and Digester Gas Upgrading	652
13.5.4.4	Flue Gas Recovery	653
13.5.5	Water Vapor Removal	654
13.5.5.1	Air Dehumidification	654
13.5.5.2	Dryer Exhaust Dehumidification	654
13.5.5.3	Natural Gas Dehumidification	655
13.5.5.4	Vehicle Exhaust Moisture Recovery	656
13.5.6	Other Applications	656
13.5.6.1	Helium Separations	656