

Technical Reference Section: Conductivity/Resistivity

Information in this section addresses frequently asked questions regarding Conductivity (Resistivity) and is provided as REFERENCE ONLY to supplement procedures and recommendations specifically outlined in individual product instruction manuals. All manuals, data sheets, and additional helpful information are available at www.gfpiping.com

Definition of Conductivity and Resistivity

Conductivity is a measure of the ability of a material to convey an electric current. The proper term for this ability of a solution is electrolytic conductivity, since only ions conduct electric current in solution. When dissolved in solution, many substances such as salts, acids and bases dissociate into ions. Electrolytic conductivity (or simply conductivity) is therefore an indirect measure of the ionic concentration of a solution. Generally, conductivity increases and decreases with the concentration of ions.

Unlike pH, which is a specific measure of Hydrogen ion concentration, conductivity is a non-selective measurement of all the dissolved ionic species in a solution. As such, it is a highly utilized parameter in water, wastewater and industrial process analyses. For example, conductivity is used to monitor the salt load of waters entering treatment facilities, to monitor and control the quality of drinking water and ultra-pure water, and to otherwise detect contaminants in industrial processes.

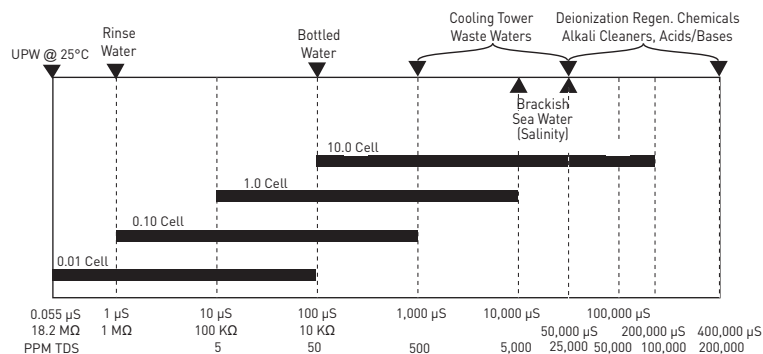
According to the International Standards Organization (ISO) the unit of conductance is the Siemens (S), after Werner von Siemens (1816-1892). However, the following three separate units of measure are commonly used to express conductivity: Siemens/cm (S/cm), mhos/cm, and $\mu\text{S/cm}$.

For any given measurement Siemens/cm and mhos/cm are exactly equal; they are merely different labels for the same value. The denominator in these units (cm) is sometimes truncated but is always assumed to be present.

Ohm•cm is a unit of resistivity (the inverse of conductivity) and is frequently replaced by “ Ω ” the symbol for electrical resistance. Units of resistivity are most commonly associated with ultra-pure water measurements in the millions of ohm•cm, or M Ω (megohms).

Some users will also find it desirable to express conductivity in terms of parts per million (PPM) or parts per billion (PPB) of total dissolved solids (TDS). Signet instruments accommodate this by allowing the entry of a TDS factor to convert from standard units of conductivity. (See the instruction manual of any current Signet conductivity instrument for details.)

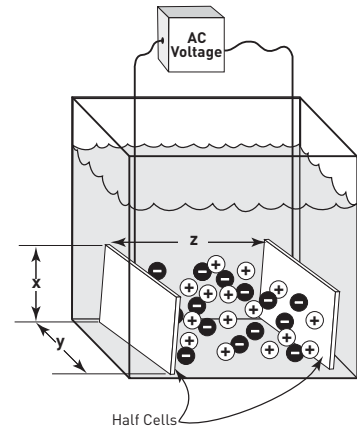
Conductivity is a measurement parameter with a very wide range. For example, ultra-pure water has a theoretical maximum resistivity of approximately 18.2 M Ω , approximately 0.055 μS (microsiemens), whereas concentrated acids and bases can exceed 400,000 μS . Despite the wide-ranging possibilities most applications for conductivity measurement are much narrower. Tap water, for instance, typically measures between 50 and 1,000 μS .



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Principle of operation

Most conductivity electrodes consist of two measuring half-cells. The geometry of the half-cells can be tailored to provide highly accurate measurements over a specific conductivity range. Cell constants help to describe electrode geometry for the purpose of selecting the appropriate electrode for a given application. A cell constant is defined as the length between the two half-cells divided by the area of the cells.



* CSA is cross sectional area.

$$\text{Conductivity Cell Constant} = \frac{\text{Length}}{\text{CSA}^*} = \frac{z}{xy}$$

As an example, When $x = y = z = 1\text{ cm}$ the cell constant becomes $\frac{1\text{ cm}}{1\text{ cm}^2} = 1\text{ cm}^{-1}$

Solutions of very low conductivity (high resistivity) such as ultra-pure water are best measured with half-cells that are very close together (i.e., cell constant = 0.01 cm^{-1}). Highly conductive solutions should be measured with half-cells that are farther apart and have relatively little cross sectional area between them (i.e., cell constant = 20.0 cm^{-1}).

Temperature Compensation

The conductivity of a solution is highly dependent upon temperature. Therefore, conductivity measurements are almost always converted to an equivalent conductivity at the common reference temperature of $25\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ($77\text{ }^\circ\text{F}$). This is accomplished by means of temperature compensation algorithms in the instruments, which require temperature as well as conductivity measurement input. To simplify and facilitate this requirement all Signet conductivity electrodes contain high-quality temperature sensing elements intelligently positioned for quick and accurate response.

Temperature effects on conductivity are more or less linear for normal water-based solutions, hovering around 2% per $^\circ\text{C}$. However, the actual linear relationship varies considerably with the

ionic composition of the solution and can range from less than 1% to more than 3% per $^\circ\text{C}$. This is true of regional ground water sources as well as for other solutions such as brackish water, acids and bases. Signet instruments allow the entry of custom linear compensation coefficients for these applications. See the instruction manual of any Signet conductivity instrument for details.

The conductivity or resistivity of pure water is not a linear function with respect to temperature. In fact, the latest Signet conductivity instruments utilize a sophisticated polynomial to compensate for the peculiar effects. For seamless measurement accuracy all current Signet conductivity instruments switch automatically between linear and pure-water compensation as certain measurement thresholds are crossed.

Temperature Compensation Exception

One exception to the requirement for temperature compensation has been established by USP (United States Pharmacopeia), which prescribes limits of acceptability for ultra-pure water quality based upon non-compensated measurements. This methodology is used to eliminate measurement variances that may result from differences in the pure-water temperature compensation algorithms

used by different manufacturers of conductivity measurement equipment. A more thorough treatment of the USP standard and instrument functionality can be found in the instruction manuals of the following Signet conductivity instruments: Model 8900 Multi-Channel, Multi-Parameter Controller [Appendix D], model 8860 Dual Channel Conductivity/Resistivity Controller.