



**FIGURE 1** Each of the salt crystals shown here contains exactly 39.34% sodium and 60.66% chlorine by mass.

analysis of chemical reactions. Aided by improved balances, investigators began to accurately measure the masses of the elements and compounds they were studying. This led to the discovery of several basic laws. One of these laws was the **law of conservation of mass**, which states that mass is neither created nor destroyed during ordinary chemical reactions or physical changes. This discovery was soon followed by the assertion that, regardless of where or how a pure chemical compound is prepared, it is composed of a fixed proportion of elements. For example, sodium chloride, also known as ordinary table salt, *always* consists of 39.34% by mass of the element sodium, Na, and 60.66% by mass of the element chlorine, Cl. *The fact that a chemical compound contains the same elements in exactly the same proportions by mass regardless of the size of the sample or source of the compound is known as the law of definite proportions.*

It was also known that two elements sometimes combine to form more than one compound. For example, the elements carbon and oxygen form two compounds, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. Consider samples of each of these compounds, each containing 1.00 g of carbon. In carbon dioxide, 2.66 g of oxygen combine with 1.00 g of carbon. In carbon monoxide, 1.33 g of oxygen combine with 1.00 g of carbon. The ratio of the masses of oxygen in these two compounds is 2.66 to 1.33, or 2 to 1. This illustrates the **law of multiple proportions**: *If two or more different compounds are composed of the same two elements, then the ratio of the masses of the second element combined with a certain mass of the first element is always a ratio of small whole numbers.*

## Dalton's Atomic Theory

In 1808, an English schoolteacher named John Dalton proposed an explanation for the law of conservation of mass, the law of definite proportions, and the law of multiple proportions. He reasoned that elements were composed of atoms and that only whole numbers of atoms can combine to form compounds. His theory can be summed up by the following statements.

1. All matter is composed of extremely small particles called atoms.
2. Atoms of a given element are identical in size, mass, and other properties; atoms of different elements differ in size, mass, and other properties.
3. Atoms cannot be subdivided, created, or destroyed.
4. Atoms of different elements combine in simple whole-number ratios to form chemical compounds.
5. In chemical reactions, atoms are combined, separated, or rearranged.

According to Dalton's atomic theory, the law of conservation of mass is explained by the fact that chemical reactions involve merely the combination, separation, or rearrangement of atoms and that during these processes atoms are not subdivided, created, or destroyed. This

