

Recrystallization and Melting Point Determination of Benzoic Acid

Matthew Li* and Tintin Ding

Loomis Chaffee High School, CL Organic Chemistry (Section B4)
Instructor: Mr. Osei-Mensah · December 15, 2025

Abstract: [Write a concise summary of the experiment. Include: (1) the purpose—to purify impure benzoic acid via recrystallization and determine its melting point; (2) brief methods—dissolved in hot water, cooled for crystallization, vacuum filtered, measured melting points; (3) key results—report the melting points of impure and pure samples, and percent recovery; (4) conclusions—comment on the success of purification based on melting point data.]

1. Introduction

Organic compounds are often impure, after synthesized in the laboratory or isolated from natural sources. This contamination needs to be removed before those compounds can be applied and utilized in other applications. One of the most common and important methods of purification, for an organic chemist to know, is **recrystallization**. It is essentially a technique to remove impurities from organic compounds that are solid at room temperature. Because the solubility of a compound in a solvent generally increases with temperature, if we allow the solution containing the compound to cool slowly until the solution becomes saturated, we can obtain relatively pure crystals because molecules in the crystals have a greater affinity for other molecules of the same type. Afterwards, the impurities are left in the solution, and the pure compound is isolated and crystallized.

The purpose of this experiment is to purify impure benzoic acid (C_6H_5COOH) that contains sugar, via recrystallization. Then, we will determine the melting point of both the impure and pure benzoic acid samples to confirm the success of the process of recrystallization and purification. Because the melting point of an impure compound—in this case, benzoic acid with sugar—will typically be a wider range at a higher temperature, and because the purified compound will have a much narrower range at a lower temperature, we can use the melting point to assess the purity of the compound.

Benzoic acid is a white or colorless crystalline organic compound whose structure consists of a benzene ring (C_6H_6) and a carboxyl substituent. The substance occurs naturally in many plants, and salts of benzoic acid are used as food preservatives. It is also an important element for the industrial synthesis of many other organic compounds.^[1]

According to the PubChem Compound Summary for

benzoic acid, the melting point of benzoic acid is around $122.4\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ and its solubility in water is around $3.4\frac{\text{mg}}{\text{mL}}$ at $25\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ^[2]. The melting point of sugar (sucrose) is around $185.5\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ and its solubility in water is around $2.12 \times 10^6 \frac{\text{mg}}{\text{L}}$ at $25\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ^[3].

2. Experimental Details

2.1. Materials and Apparatus

- Impure benzoic acid sample (mass: 1.018 g)
- Deionized (DI) water
- 125 mL Erlenmeyer flask or beaker
- 150 mL beaker
- Hot plate
- Ice bath
- Vacuum filtration apparatus (Büchner funnel, filter flask, vacuum trap)
- Filter paper (mass: 1.099 g)
- Melting point apparatus
- Melting point capillary tubes
- Analytical balance
- Weighing boat

2.2. Procedure

2.2.1. Day 1: Recrystallization

1. Record the melting point of impure benzoic acid
2. Weigh out approximately 1.00 g of impure benzoic acid
3. Heat DI water to near boiling
4. Dissolve the impure benzoic acid in hot water (total volume added: 45 mL)

5. Allow solution to cool slowly to room temperature
6. Place in ice bath to enhance crystallization
7. Collect crystals by vacuum filtration
8. Allow crystals to dry overnight

2.2.2. Day 2: Analysis

1. Retrieve dried crystals from drying oven
2. Record mass of purified benzoic acid
3. Measure melting point of purified benzoic acid

3. Results

3.1. Experimental Data

Data is presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Summary of experimental mass and melting point data for benzoic acid recrystallization.

Measurement	Value	Unit
Mass of impure benzoic acid	1.018	g
Volume of hot deionized water used	45	mL
Mass of filter paper	1.099	g
Mass of filter paper + crystals	1.686	g
Mass of purified benzoic acid	0.587	g

Table 2: Melting point data for impure and purified benzoic acid samples.

Sample	MP Range	Width
Impure	112–132 °C	20 °C
Purified	122–123 °C	1 °C
Literature*	122.4 °C	—

*Literature melting point from the PubChem Compound Summary for benzoic acid.[2]

3.2. Calculations

3.2.1. Percent Recovery

Before calculating the actual percent recovery from the results, we can first find the theoretical maximum of benzoic acid that can be recovered from the recrystallization. We can do this using the solubility of benzoic acid in water at 25 °C, which is around 3.4 $\frac{\text{mg}}{\text{mL}}$.

Thus,

$$\text{Solubility} = 3.4 \frac{\text{mg}}{\text{mL}}$$

$$\text{Volume of water used} = 45 \text{ mL}$$

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Maximum mass lost to solubility} &= 3.4 \frac{\text{mg}}{\text{mL}} \times 45 \text{ mL} \\ &= 153 \text{ mg} \\ &= 0.153 \text{ g}\end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the theoretical maximum recovery is:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Theoretical max} &= 1.018 \text{ g} - 0.153 \text{ g} \\ &= 0.865 \text{ g}\end{aligned}$$

The percent recovery of benzoic acid was calculated using the following equation:

$$\% \text{ Recovery} = \frac{m_{\text{pure}}}{m_{\text{impure}}} \times 100\% \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Percent Recovery} = \frac{0.587 \text{ g}}{1.000 \text{ g}} \times 100\% = 58.7\%$$

4. Discussion

4.1. Structure and Intermolecular Forces of Benzoic Acid

4.1.1. Structure of Benzoic Acid

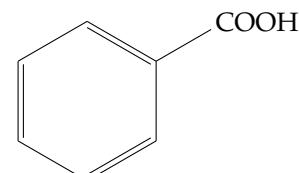


Figure 1: Bond line structure of benzoic acid (C_6H_5COOH).

4.1.2. Intermolecular Forces in Benzoic Acid

- Hydrogen bonding (carboxylic acid group)
- Dipole-dipole interactions
- London dispersion forces

4.1.3. Relationship Between IMFs and Melting Point

With the presence of Hydrogen bonding of the O-H group, where the Hydrogen atom is partially positive and the Oxygen atom is partially negative, Benzoic acid can form relatively strong IMF with its peers, thereby holding molecules together and have a higher melting point. Also, the size of the benzoic acid, and the C=O group, which led to LDF and dipole-dipole interactions, respectively, also plays a role in IMF and the high melting point.

4.2. Analysis of Purification Results

4.2.1. Percent Recovery Analysis

The percent recovery of Benzoic acid from crystallization is 58.7 percent, which is a reasonable yield.

4.2.2. Comparison of Melting Points

The melting point of impure benzoic acid ranges from 112-132 Celsius, with a range of 20 degrees. The melting point of pure benzoic acid, however, are from 122-123 Celsius, with a range of only 1 degree. This drastic decrease in the range of melting point is caused by the increased purity of the substance, where the impure sample has a larger range of melting point than the pure sample. The sugar, which is the impurity in the sample, contributes to the increasing range of the melting point, and by removing the sugars through recrystallization, the pure benzoic acid has a narrower range of MP. Explain the effect of impurities on the melting point of a substance.

4.2.3. Purity Assessment

The melting range is $123.0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C} - 122.0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C} = 1.0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$, which indicates high purity of benzoic acid. The observed melting point is very close to the literature value, which is $122.3\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$, also suggesting that the compound is pure benzoic acid.

4.3. Error Analysis

Factors that might decrease the yield is the solubility of benzoic acid in water at room temperature, which is 3.4 mg/mL. Since 45mL of deionized water is used to dissolve benzoic acid, about 0.153 g of benzoic acid remains in the water during the recrystallization process. Also, another error that possibly occurs during the process of heating the benzoic acid, where the temperature used is too high that evaporates some benzoic acid into air, producing a pungent smell, also resulting a decrease in recovery rate.

5. Conclusion

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References

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- (3) National Center for Biotechnology Information PubChem Compound Summary for CID 5988, Sucrose Accessed 2025-12-06, National Library of Medicine (US), <https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/compound/Sucrose> (accessed 12/06/2025).