

Atomic Physics

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Chapter 1

EOS

Chapter 2

Ionization

Chapter 3

Opacities

Consider a beam of photons passing through a material. Multiple processes would ensue:

- Atomic transitions
 - Bound-bound excitation
 - Bound-free photo-ionization
 - Free-free photo-absorption
- Scattering
 - Thompson scattering
 - Compton scattering
 - Rayleigh scattering
- Pair production

Each of the above would attenuate the beam of photons passing through the material. The cross-sections of each process, which would depend on the incoming photon frequency ν , can be added up to obtain a total cross section $\sigma = \sigma(\nu)$. From the definition of a cross section, σ can be used to determine how many photons keep their course as they traverse through the material and how many do not. Consider the material under consideration to have the shape of a thick slab, which starts at $x = 0$ and continues on for a definite length along $x > 0$. We want to know how $I(x)$, the number of photons crossing the material at any location x , decreases as we travel along the x direction. Let's focus on an infinitesimal thin lamina within the slab, of width dx and located at some arbitrary location x . The number of target particles in that lamina will be ndx , where n is the number volume density of particles in the target material. Then, the number of incident photons after crossing the lamina would be

$$I(x + dx) = I(x) - \sigma I(x) ndx. \quad (3.1)$$

This leads to the ODE $dI(x)/dx = -\sigma I(x)n$, which has as solution

$$I(x) = I(0) \exp(-\sigma nx). \quad (3.2)$$

The attenuation coefficient is defined as σn [1/cm]. The mass attenuation coefficient, also referred to as opacity, is then given by $\kappa = \sigma n / \rho$ [cm²/g]. $\Lambda = 1/\sigma n$ is referred to as the attenuation length.