

# Prism Spectrometer

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## Abstract

In this experiment, we utilize a prism spectrometer—an optical device that separates light into its constituent frequencies—to measure the refractive index of a prism. A collimator with a slit is used to produce a parallel beam of light emitted by a mercury lamp, which is then passed through the prism. The light is then refracted and dispersed into its constituent frequencies. The angle of deviation of the light is measured and used to calculate the refractive index of the prism using a special relation. A graph of the index of refraction versus wavelength is also plotted. The results are compared to the theoretical values and the limitations of the experiment are discussed.

## 1 Introduction

The visible spectrum is the portion of electromagnetic radiation that is visible to the human eye. It is composed of light with wavelengths between 380 and 780 nm. Each wavelength, or frequency of light is perceived as a different color by the human eye[1]. Spectrum analysis is the study of measure and interpretation of electromagnetic spectra. It is used in various fields such as physics, chemistry, and astronomy. One of the most important tools in spectrum analysis is the prism spectrometer.

A prism spectrometer is an optical device, and it is composed of a collimator, a prism, and a telescope. The collimator is a device that produces a parallel beam of light. It is composed of an adjustable slit on one end and a converging lens on the other. The slit is used to control the width of the entering light, and the lens is used to focus the light into a parallel beam. As the beam exits the collimator, it impinges on the prism. The prism rests on a rotatable table, and it is used to refract and disperse the light into its constituent colors. The telescope is used to observe the dispersed light, and it is composed of a lens and an eyepiece. The set of parallel beams of different wavelengths form images of the slit. The telescope can be rotated with the aid of the reticle to position the images for each spectral line. The instrument that is used throughout the experiment to measure the angles is called a vernier scale.

In this experiment, we use the spectrometer to measure the refractive index of the prism. The refractive index of a prism is a measure of how much the light

is bent as it passes through the prism. Examine Figure 1. As you can see,  $\delta$  is the angle of deviation of the light—the angle between the incident and emergent beams of light, and  $\alpha$  is the apex angle of the prism—the angle between two faces of the prism. The deviation angle is dependent on the wavelength of the light. As we vary the incident angle, the deviation angle changes, and we can

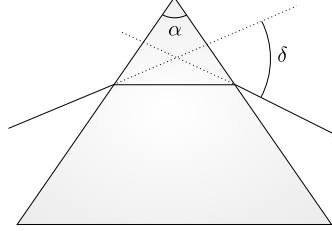


Figure 1: Refraction of light through a prism.

obtain its minimum value. This happens when the angle of incidence is equal to the angle of emergence. Hence, in this case, the refractive index of the prism is given by the relation

$$n = \frac{\sin((\delta_{min} + \alpha)/2)}{\sin(\alpha/2)}, \quad (1)$$

which is derived from Snell's law,

$$n_1 \sin(\theta_1) = n_2 \sin(\theta_2), \quad (2)$$

where  $n_1$  and  $n_2$  are the refractive indices of the two media, and  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  are the angles of incidence and refraction, respectively. Note that the light is refracted twice as it enters and exits the prism.

## 2 Data & Results

Calculations for table 1:

Calculations for table 2:

$$\delta_{min}(\text{Violet}) = 360.00^\circ - 351.80^\circ + 29.82^\circ = 38.02^\circ \quad (3)$$

$$\delta_{min}(\text{Blue}) = 360.00^\circ - 351.80^\circ + 29.51^\circ = 38.31^\circ \quad (4)$$

$$\delta_{min}(\text{Green}) = 360.00^\circ - 351.80^\circ + 27.63^\circ = 40.19^\circ \quad (5)$$

$$\delta_{min}(\text{Orange}) = 360.00^\circ - 351.80^\circ + 28.64^\circ = 39.18^\circ \quad (6)$$

And the refractive index is given by

$$n = \frac{\sin\left(\frac{\delta_{min} + \alpha}{2}\right)}{\sin\left(\frac{\alpha}{2}\right)}, \quad (7)$$

where  $\alpha$  is the angle of the prism. Hence, the refractive index for each wavelength is given by

$$n_{\text{Violet}} = \frac{\sin\left(\frac{38.02^\circ + 59.87^\circ}{2}\right)}{\sin\left(\frac{59.87^\circ}{2}\right)} = 1.77 \quad (8)$$

$$n_{\text{Blue}} = \frac{\sin\left(\frac{38.31^\circ + 59.87^\circ}{2}\right)}{\sin\left(\frac{59.87^\circ}{2}\right)} = 1.78 \quad (9)$$

$$n_{\text{Green}} = \frac{\sin\left(\frac{40.19^\circ + 59.87^\circ}{2}\right)}{\sin\left(\frac{59.87^\circ}{2}\right)} = 1.79 \quad (10)$$

$$n_{\text{Orange}} = \frac{\sin\left(\frac{39.18^\circ + 59.87^\circ}{2}\right)}{\sin\left(\frac{59.87^\circ}{2}\right)} = 1.78 \quad (11)$$

The angle of prism is given by

$$\alpha = \frac{\text{position 1} + \text{position 2}}{2} \quad (12)$$

Position #1	Position #2	$\alpha_i$
52°46'	293°01'	59.86°
52°52'	293°05'	59.88°
52°48'	293°03'	59.86°
		$\bar{\alpha} = 59.87^\circ$

Table 1: Data for the prism angle,  $\alpha$ .

$\lambda$ (nm)	Position #1	Position #2	$\delta_{min}$	$n$
404.6 Violet	351°48'	29°49'	38.02	1.77
435.8 Blue	351°48'	29°28'	38.31	1.78
546.1 Green	351°48'	27°40'	40.19	1.79
579.1 Orange	351°48'	28°41'	39.18	1.78

Table 2: Data for the refractive index versus wavelength.

### 3 Discussion & Conclusion

#### References

- [1] Robert T. Marcus. *The Measurement of Color*. Vol. 1. AZimuth. North-Holland, 1998, pp. 31–96. ISBN: 978-0-444-82825-6. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1387-6783\(98\)80005-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1387-6783(98)80005-6).