
**Surface chemical analysis — X-ray
photoelectron spectroscopy — Procedures
for assessing the day-to-day performance
of an X-ray photoelectron spectrometer**

*Analyse chimique des surfaces — Spectroscopie de photoélectrons
X — Modes opératoires d'évaluation de la performance au jour le jour
d'un spectromètre de photoélectrons X*

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Contents	Page
Foreword	iv
Introduction	v
1 Scope	1
2 Terms and definitions	1
3 Initial approach	1
4 Initial instrument calibration, alignment and assessment	1
5 Test specimen selection	2
5.1 General information	2
5.2 The conductive specimen	2
5.3 The non-conductive specimen	2
5.4 Specimen for assessing the X-ray source	4
6 Collection of reference data	4
6.1 General information	4
6.2 Rapid test of the instrument using a conductive specimen	4
6.3 Rapid test of the instrument using a non-conductive specimen	8
6.4 Rapid test of the X-ray source using a phosphor specimen	8
6.5 Rapid test of the X-ray source using a uniform conductive specimen	8
7 Collection of subsequent performance data	9
8 Analysis of the performance data	9
8.1 General information	9
8.2 Survey spectrum	9
8.3 High-resolution spectrum from the conductive specimen	10
8.4 High-resolution spectrum from the non-conductive specimen	10
8.5 Images from the phosphor specimen	10
8.6 Images from the uniform conductive specimen	10
8.7 Spectrum ratios	10
9 Control charts	15
Bibliography	18

Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

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Introduction

XPS instruments are complex, and unsatisfactory performance is not always obvious to an operator. It is therefore necessary to provide a test for the correct operation of the system that can be performed regularly and frequently without interfering excessively with the normal work of the laboratory.

A full diagnostic test can require many hours or even days; such a test can be appropriate only when the instrument is known to have a fault that needs to be remedied or following a major maintenance procedure. Data acquired before a problem is uncovered become suspect if the spectrometer has not been routinely tested, leading to a loss of confidence in those data. If a regular check of the instrument is made, changes in performance can be monitored and corrective action taken in good time to ensure that the data supplied are fit-for-purpose. In the event that a serious fault is uncovered, then only the data since the last check can be in doubt and need to be repeated.

The purpose of this document is to provide a user with a procedure which is not excessively time-consuming so that it is capable of being completed on a regular and frequent basis, daily if required. The user will then gain an awareness of the current characteristics of the instrument so that a decision can be made as to whether or not a more complete and time-consuming action is required to return the instrument to a satisfactory level of performance.

This procedure is intended to be applied to an XPS instrument that has been correctly calibrated and aligned in accordance with ISO standards or manufacturer's instructions. It is designed to highlight aspects of the instrument's characteristics that differ significantly from those that were measured immediately following the calibration procedure. The procedure does not show how the instrument can be returned to its original state. Instead, it guides the user to possible areas of concern. The procedure provides data that can be used in control charts, allowing trends to be observed and acted upon before data quality deteriorates to an unacceptable level for the needs of the analyst.

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Surface chemical analysis — X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy — Procedures for assessing the day-to-day performance of an X-ray photoelectron spectrometer

1 Scope

This International Standard is designed to allow the user to assess, on a regular basis, several key parameters of an X-ray photoelectron spectrometer. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive performance check, but instead provides a rapid set of tests that can be conducted frequently. Aspects of instrument behaviour covered by this International Standard include the vacuum, measurements of spectra of conductive or non-conductive test specimens and the current state of the X-ray source. Other important aspects of the instrument performance (e.g. lateral resolution) fall outside the scope of this International Standard. The standard is intended for use with commercial X-ray photoelectron spectrometers equipped with a monochromated Al K α X-ray source or with an unmonochromated Al or Mg K α X-ray source.

2 Terms and definitions

For definitions of the spectroscopy terms used in this International Standard, the reader is referred to ISO 18115-1^[10].

The following abbreviations are used:

FWHM	full width at half maximum
PET	poly(ethylene terephthalate) ISO 16129:2012
PTFE	polytetrafluoroethylene d6ba94d21d45/iso-16129-2012
XPS	X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy

3 Initial approach

Most instruments are fitted with a vacuum gauge or gauges. These shall be read frequently and the reasons for large variations understood. A large increase in the pressure can be due to the properties of a test specimen inside the instrument, a fault in the pumping system, an increase in the temperature of the vacuum system or a leak.

Similarly, most instruments have status indicators, either for the system as a whole or for sub-systems or modules. Examples of such indicators include water flow rate, data system communications status and electrical power. These can be visible as part of the instrument hardware itself or on screen through an instrument control (data acquisition) system. Such indicators again shall be carefully monitored, along with any measured values that are reported.

4 Initial instrument calibration, alignment and assessment

Before undertaking the procedure described in the following clauses, it is essential that the instrument be calibrated and aligned to an optimum performance level. This is achieved by following the relevant International Standards (References [5] to [9]) or the manufacturer's instructions. Choose the two settings of the instrument operating conditions that are needed to obtain survey spectra and high-resolution spectra. These should be settings that you regularly use and will be described in Clause 6. Since this is a rapid check, only these two settings are chosen, but these can show faults that are common to all settings. These settings shall always be used in future checks unless they are later found to be less effective than other settings. If the designated settings are changed, data at both the new and old settings shall be recorded at the time of change.

5 Test specimen selection

5.1 General information

Three types of test specimen are required for the full procedure described in this International Standard: a conductive specimen, a non-conductive specimen and a specimen suitable for assessing the quality of the X-ray beam (e.g. X-ray spot size, shape and uniformity). The conductive specimen provides information that the basic energy and intensity calibrations of the instrument are consistent from day to day. When using a non-monochromatic X-ray source having more than one anode material, the survey spectrum shall be examined to check for peaks arising from specimen irradiation from the anode that is not currently being used (this is due to “cross-talk” within the X-ray source). Similarly, when anode coatings wear, X-rays can be emitted from the substrate material, which is often copper. The survey spectrum shall be examined for peaks arising from X-rays produced from the substrate material. When using a magnesium anode, there can be peaks due to radiation from O K α arising from oxidation of the anode coating. These peaks are often called ghost peaks. Table 1 shows the approximate positions of commonly encountered ghost peaks when acquiring an XPS spectrum from silver using Mg K α radiation.

Table 1 — Examples of approximate positions, on the binding-energy scale, of frequently encountered ghost peaks in a silver spectrum collected using a magnesium anode
(The photon energy of Mg K α radiation is 1 253,6 eV)

Radiation giving rise to ghost peaks	Photon energy eV	Possible origin of radiation	Peak position on the binding-energy scale eV
Al K α	1 486,6	From second anode in a twin anode source	135
O K α	524,9	From oxide on the surface of the magnesium anode.	1 097
Cu L α	929,7	From anode substrate	692

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The non-conductive specimen is required to confirm that the charge compensation system is operating satisfactorily when non-conducting specimens are being analysed. The nature of the specimen that is required for assessing the X-ray beam depends upon the type of instrument being used. If the analysis position is visible during the normal operation of the instrument, the quality of the focus and the alignment of the X-ray beam from a monochromated source can be assessed using a phosphor specimen. If the analysis position is not visible in normal operation and the instrument is capable of imaging, a uniform (there should be no features visible in an image of the specimen when the instrument is in its optimum condition), conductive specimen can be used; this can be the conductive specimen mentioned above. All specimens used shall be large enough to completely fill the defined analysis region of the spectrometer.

5.2 The conductive specimen

A suitable conductive specimen shall be selected. This should be a material that produces several peaks in the photoelectron spectrum. Preferably, these peaks should be widely spaced in binding energy. The specimen shall be one whose surface can be cleaned easily by sputtering with noble-gas ions.

A pure ($\geq 99,8\%$) specimen of silver foil is suitable for this measurement and is recommended. If, however, a different material is commonly analysed in the user’s laboratory and conforms to the above criteria, this may be used instead. For convenience, it is assumed here that silver has been selected as the conductive reference material. The same conductive specimen shall be used for all measurements.

5.3 The non-conductive specimen

Non-conductive specimens, and conductive specimens with a non-conductive surface layer, charge under the X-ray flux, resulting in shifts in the peak binding energies relative to the uncharged state.

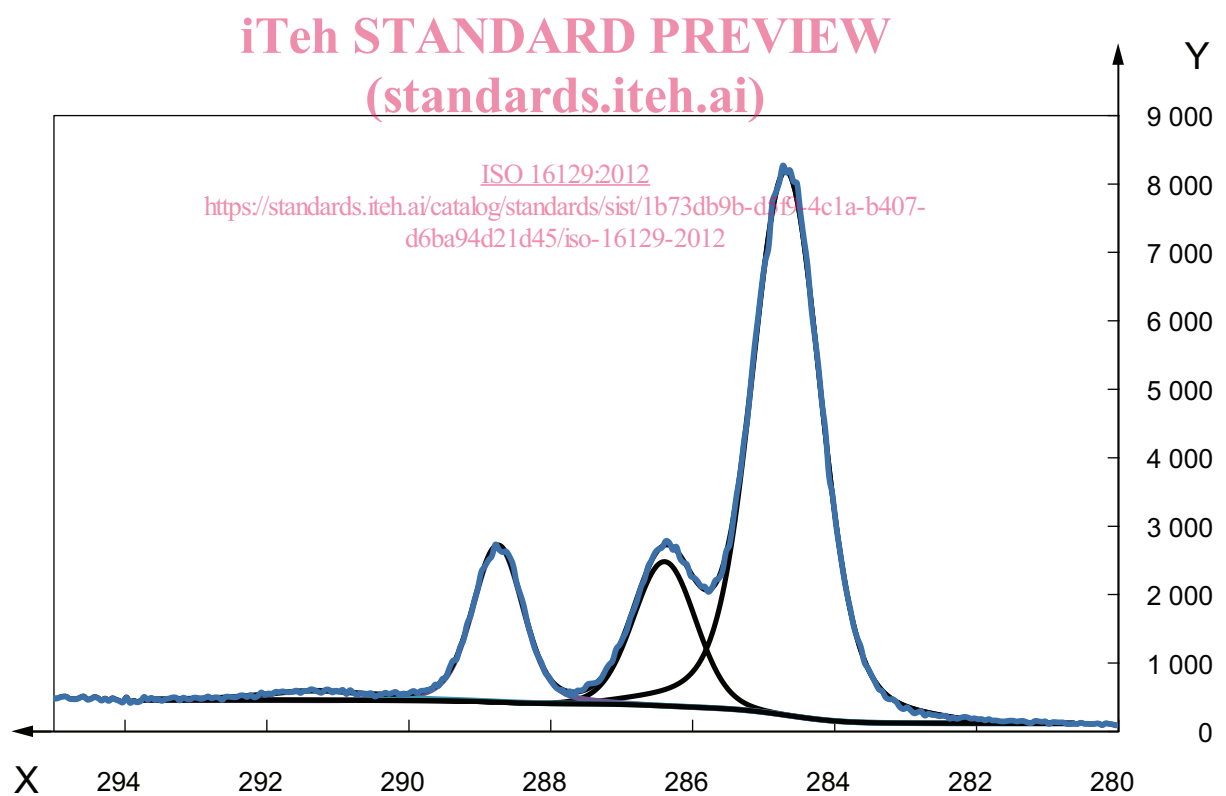
Select a non-conductive material often studied in your laboratory, for which you have a good stock and which is capable of being maintained with a surface in a reproducible state. If you are unsure of a material to use, examples that have been found to be useful for tests of instrumental performance are shown in Table 2. Examples are given with different forms. You might wish to select a specimen with a form similar to that of the specimens most commonly analysed with the instrument. Care shall be taken to select a material which does not exhibit degradation under the X-ray beam during the analysis.

Table 2 — Examples of non-conductive specimens that may be used for this procedure

Material	Form	Cleaning
PET	Sheet or fibre	Not required
Laboratory filter paper	Sheet	Not required

Poly(ethylene terephthalate) (PET) has long been used to evaluate both the energy resolution and the effectiveness of charge control in XPS. It shows a structure of three C 1s peaks together with shake-up intensity. The minimum between the peak at the lowest binding energy and the adjacent peak at a separation of ~1,5 eV is highly sensitive to the combination of the instrumental resolution and the uniformity of the charge correction. The ease of achieving suitable and consistent energy resolution will depend on both the operator and the instrumental capability.

An example of the C 1s spectrum from PET is shown in Figure 1.



Key

- X binding energy (eV)
- Y number of counts

Figure 1 — Example of a C 1s spectrum from PET

More recently, careful studies on cellulose-based materials (paper) have indicated that these are suitable materials for use in this test (see References [1] and [2]). It has been shown that laboratory filter paper¹⁾ provides reproducible XPS spectra. If using paper, avoid releasing loose fibres into the instrument as they can cause a deterioration in performance.

Alternatively, the specimen can be one with which the user is familiar. It shall be a material that provides a reliably reproducible spectrum with little or no specimen preparation.

5.4 Specimen for assessing the X-ray source

A phosphor specimen is suitable for those instruments that are fitted with a monochromatic X-ray source and in which the analysis position is visible, preferably with a microscope and camera. The phosphor specimen should be as flat and uniform as possible and produce easily visible light under the X-ray bombardment.

Not all phosphor specimens are vacuum-compatible and not all phosphor materials are designed for optimum excitation by X-rays. Ensure that a phosphor specimen of suitable quality is obtained from the supplier of the instrument or from another reputable supplier.²⁾

The uniform conductive specimen shall be used if an optical image of the analysis position is not available during the normal operation of the instrument and the instrument is capable of producing X-ray-induced images. The specimen shall be flat and of uniform composition over an area greater than the maximum area that is imaged in the instrument. The silver specimen described in 5.2 would be suitable for this purpose.

6 Collection of reference data

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6.1 General information

Once fully calibrated and functioning correctly at the designated settings described in Clause 4, the instrument shall be used to collect a set of reference data. The specimens and the way in which data shall be collected are described in this clause. If the spectrometer is routinely used for conductive specimens, follow the procedure described in 6.2 regularly and that in 6.3 occasionally, whereas for instruments used mainly for insulating specimens follow the procedure described in 6.3 regularly and that in 6.2 occasionally. The interpretation of “regular” and “occasional” depends on the use of the instrument and its behaviour. If data are critical, “regular” might need to be interpreted as daily. For modern instruments used daily in normal use, “regular” may be interpreted as “an interval of one week” and “occasionally” as “a period of one month”, but it must be stressed that the appropriate interval does depend on the instrument and its intended use. Document your reasons for your choice of the intervals. The control charts of Clause 9 will also be useful in determining the frequency at which checks should be made.

All electron optics have an optimum focal point. The specimens shall be at the common focal point of the analyser, the ion gun (if used), the neutralizer (if used) and the X-ray source. If the spectrometer is equipped with an X-ray source whose height above the specimen is adjustable, the X-ray source shall be in the same position for each test.

6.2 Rapid test of the instrument using a conductive specimen

6.2.1 Specimen mounting and pre-treatment

Mount the specimen on an appropriate specimen holder. It is important that the specimen be in good electrical contact with the specimen holder. Place the specimen in the optimum analysis position in the spectrometer.

1) A suitable type of filter paper is S&S 589 Blue Ribbon Ashless, which can be obtained from Whatman plc, Springfield Mill, James Whatman Way, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 2LE, UK, or one of this company’s international distributors. This information is given for the convenience of users of this International Standard and does not constitute an endorsement by ISO of this product.

2) Suitable phosphor specimens can be obtained from a number of suppliers, including TMS Vacuum Components, Unit 21 Stirling Road, Castleham Industrial Estate, Hastings, East Sussex, TN38 9NP, UK. This information is given for the convenience of users of this International Standard and does not constitute an endorsement by ISO of this supplier.

Take care to follow the manufacturer's recommendations for positioning the specimen at the focal point, or use whatever documented procedure is required for analysis. Ensure that all specimen stage parameters (X, Y, Z, rotation and tilt) are correctly set.

If the instrument is fitted with a noble-gas ion gun, the specimen surface shall be cleaned by ion etching, using conditions commonly found to be successful for this purpose and which remove a minimum amount of material. A typical sputtering fluence for cleaning silver is 20 A·s/m². A typical value for the ion energy is 3 keV. Excessive sputtering leads to significant roughening of the specimen so that it needs frequent replacement.

6.2.2 Survey spectrum

A survey or wide-scan spectrum shall be collected over the binding-energy range from -10 eV to a value within 50 eV of the value of the photon energy used to irradiate the specimen (e.g. a binding energy of 1 437 eV for Al K α X-rays) or to whatever maximum range is available. The analyser shall be operated in the constant analyser energy (CAE) mode. The data shall be collected in energy steps no wider than 0,5 eV. The dwell time at each energy step shall be sufficient to collect at least 10⁵ counts in at least one energy channel in an XPS peak. In the case of silver, this will be the Ag 3d_{5/2} peak at ~368 eV binding energy. Bear in mind that it is the number of counts that is important here, not the count rate. The acquisition time depends upon the sensitivity of the instrument, so the minimum dwell time per channel is given by 10⁵ counts divided by the signal strength in counts per second. On modern instruments, such a spectrum will be collected in a few minutes. Care shall be taken to avoid selecting conditions that would result in count rates that are high enough to induce nonlinearity in the detector.

The pass energy of the analyser used for this spectrum should be the same as that typically used for a survey spectrum. If using monochromatic Al K α X-rays, it is likely that the pass energy chosen would result in a full width at half-maximum (FWHM) amplitude of between 1,5 eV and 2,5 eV for the Ag 3d_{5/2} peak from a clean silver foil. If using non-monochromatic Al or Mg K α X-rays, it is likely that the pass energy chosen would result in an FWHM of between 1,5 eV and 3,0 eV.

The anode power in the X-ray source should be the same as that typically used for analysis.

Once collected, the spectrum shall be examined first to ensure that there is a tolerably low level of detectable contamination present on the surface. The presence of a significant quantity of adventitious carbon indicates that the surface is contaminated. The height of the peak due to C 1s should be less than 1 % of the height of the peak due to Ag 3d_{5/2}. If the carbon peak is too intense, the cleaning procedure shall be repeated and the spectrum collected again. Such a spectrum is shown in Figure 2. In this spectrum, the FWHM of the Ag 3d_{5/2} peak is 2,4 eV.