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Standard Guide for Establishing Spectrophotometer Performance Tests¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers basic procedures that can be used to develop spectrophotometer performance tests. The guide is intended to be applicable to spectrophotometers operating in the ultraviolet, visible, near-infrared and mid-infrared regions.

1.2 This guide is not intended as a replacement for specific practices such as Practices E275, E925, E932, E958, E1421, or E1683 that exist for measuring performance of specific types of spectrophotometers. Instead, this guide is intended to provide guidelines in how similar practices should be developed when specific practices do not exist for a particular spectrophotometer type, or when specific practices are not applicable due to sampling or safety concerns. This guide can be used to develop performance tests for on-line process spectrophotometers.

1.3 This guide describes univariate level zero and level one tests, and multivariate level A and level B tests which can be implemented to measure spectrophotometer performance. These tests are designed to be used as rapid, routine checks of spectrophotometer performance. They are designed to uncover malfunctions or other changes in instrument operation, but do not specifically diagnose or quantitatively assess the malfunction or change. The tests are not intended for the comparison of spectrophotometers of different manufacture.

1.4 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*²

- E131 Terminology Relating to Molecular Spectroscopy
- E275 Practice for Describing and Measuring Performance of

Ultraviolet and Visible Spectrophotometers

- E387 Test Method for Estimating Stray Radiant Power Ratio of Dispersive Spectrophotometers by the Opaque Filter Method
- E925 Practice for Monitoring the Calibration of Ultraviolet-Visible Spectrophotometers whose Spectral Bandwidth does not Exceed 2 nm
- E932 Practice for Describing and Measuring Performance of Dispersive Infrared Spectrometers
- E958 Practice for Measuring Practical Spectral Bandwidth of Ultraviolet-Visible Spectrophotometers
- E1421 Practice for Describing and Measuring Performance of Fourier Transform Mid-Infrared (FT-MIR) Spectrometers: Level Zero and Level One Tests
- E1655 Practices for Infrared Multivariate Quantitative Analysis
- E1683 Practice for Testing the Performance of Scanning Raman Spectrometers

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For terminology relating to molecular spectroscopic methods, refer to Terminology E131.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *action limit, n*—the limiting value from an instrument performance test, beyond which the spectrophotometer is expected to produce potentially invalid results.

3.2.2 *check sample, n*—a single pure compound, or a known, reproducible mixture of compounds whose spectrum is constant over time such that it can be used in a performance test.

3.2.3 *level A test, n*—a pass/fail spectrophotometer performance test in which the spectrum of a check or test sample is compared against historical spectra of the same sample via a multivariate analysis.

3.2.4 *level B test, n*—a pass/fail spectrophotometer performance test in which the spectrum of a check or test sample is analyzed using a multivariate model, and the results of the analysis are compared to historical results for prior analyses of the same sample.

3.2.5 *level one (1) test, n*—a simple series of measurements designed to provide quantitative data on various aspects of spectrophotometer performance and information on which to base the diagnosis of problems.

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E13 on Molecular Spectroscopy and Separation Science and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E13.03 on Infrared and Near Infrared Spectroscopy.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

3.2.6 *level zero (0) test, n*—a routine check of spectrophotometer performance, which can be done in a few minutes, designed to visually detect significant changes in instrument performance and provide a database to determine instrument performance over time.

3.2.7 *optical reference filter, n*—an optical filter or other device which can be inserted into the optical path in the spectrophotometer or probe producing an absorption spectrum which is known to be constant over time such that it can be used in place of a check or test sample in a performance test.

3.2.8 *test sample, n*—a process or product sample, or a mixture of process or product samples which has a constant spectrum for a finite time period and which can be used in a performance test. Test samples and their spectra are generally not reproducible in the long term.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 If ASTM Committee E13 has not specified an appropriate test procedure for a specific type of spectrophotometer, or if the sample specified by a Committee E13 procedure is incompatible with the intended spectrophotometer operation, then this guide can be used to develop practical performance tests.

4.1.1 For spectrophotometers which are equipped with permanent or semi-permanent sampling accessories, the test sample specified in a Committee E13 practice may not be compatible with the spectrophotometer configuration. For example, for FT-MIR instruments equipped with transmittance or IRS flow cells, tests based on polystyrene films are impractical. In such cases, these guidelines suggest means by which the recommended test procedures can be modified so as to be performed on a compatible test material.

4.1.2 For spectrophotometers used in process measurements, the choice of test materials may be limited due to process contamination and safety considerations. These guidelines suggest means of developing performance tests based on materials which are compatible with the intended use of the spectrophotometer.

4.2 Tests developed using these guidelines are intended to allow the user to compare the performance of a spectrophotometer on any given day with prior performance. The tests are intended to uncover malfunctions or other changes in instrument operation, but they are not designed to diagnose or quantitatively assess the malfunction or change. The tests are not intended for the comparison of spectrophotometers of different manufacture.

5. Test Conditions

5.1 When conducting the performance tests, the spectrophotometer should be operated under the same conditions as will be in effect during its intended use. Sufficient warm-up time should be allowed before the commencement of any measurements.

5.1.1 If possible, the optical configuration used for measurements of test and check samples should be identical to that used for normal operations. If identical optical configurations are

not possible, the user should recognize that the performance tests may not measure the performance of the entire instrument.

5.1.2 Data collection and computation conditions should generally be identical to those used in normal operation. Spectral data used in performance tests should be date and time stamped, and the results of the tests should be stored in a historical database.

6. Samples Used for Performance Testing

6.1 The sample used for performance testing is chosen to be compatible with the spectrophotometer configuration, and to provide spectral features which are adequate for the tests being performed.

6.1.1 The sample used for performance testing should generally be in the same physical state (gas, liquid, or solid) as the samples to be analyzed during normal operation of the spectrophotometer.

6.1.2 The sample used for performance testing should be physically and chemically compatible with the samples analyzed during normal operation.

6.1.3 The sample used for performance is chosen such that its spectrum is similar to the spectra which will be collected during normal operation.

6.1.4 The sample used for performance testing should have several significant absorbances ($0.3 < \text{absorbance} < 1.0$) across the spectral range used for normal operation of the spectrophotometer.

6.1.5 In order to adequately determine the photometric linearity of the instrument, the peak absorbance for at least one absorption band of the sample should be similar to and preferably slightly greater than the largest absorbance expected for samples measured during normal operation.

6.2 *Check Samples*—Check samples are generally used for conducting performance tests. Check samples are single pure compounds or mixtures of compounds of definite composition.

6.2.1 If mixtures are utilized as check samples, they must be prepared in a repeatable manner and, if stored, stored such that the mixture is stable over long periods of time. In preparing mixtures, components should be accurately pipetted or weighed at ambient temperature. It is recommended that mixtures be independently verified for composition prior to use.

6.2.2 While mixtures can be used as check samples, their spectra may be adversely affected by temperature sensitive interactions that may manifest themselves by wavelength (frequency) and absorbance changes.

6.3 *Test Samples*—A test sample is a process or product sample or a mixture of process or product samples whose spectrum is expected to be constant for the time period it is used in performance testing. The test sample must be stored in bulk quantities in controlled conditions such that the material is stable over time.

6.3.1 Since test samples are often complex mixtures which cannot be synthetically reproduced, they can only be used for performance testing for limited time periods. If test samples are used for this purpose, collection of historical data on a new test sample should be initiated before previous test samples are

depleted. It is recommended that new test samples be analyzed sequentially with old test samples at least 15 times before they are used to replace the old test sample. The 15 analyses must be performed over a time period that does not exceed one month in duration.

6.4 Optical Filters—An optical reference filter is an optical filter or other optical device located in the spectrophotometer or in a fiber optic sample probe which produces an absorption spectrum which is known to be constant over time. This filter may be automatically inserted into the optical path to allow instrument performance tests to be performed.

6.4.1 Optical filters are used principally with on-line process spectrophotometers equipped with fiber optic probes when removal of the probe is inconvenient, precluding the use of check or test samples for routine instrument performance testing.

6.4.2 If an optical filter is used routinely to check or correct the spectral data collection or computation, then the same filter is preferably not used for instrument performance testing. If the same filter is used, then the part of the filter spectrum used in the performance testing should preferably differ from that part used to check or correct the instrument. For example, polystyrene filters are used to standardize (continuously check and correct) the wavelength scale of some dispersive NIR spectrophotometers. For such systems, polystyrene filters are preferably not to be employed for wavelength stability performance testing. If polystyrene filters are used, then the peaks used for wavelength stability testing should be different from those used for standardizing the wavelength scale.

7. Univariate Measures of Spectrophotometer Performance

7.1 Energy Level Tests—Energy level tests are intended to detect changes in the radiant power in the spectrophotometer beam. Decreases in energy levels may be associated with deterioration of the spectrophotometer source, with contamination or misalignment of optical surfaces in the light path, or with malfunctions of the detector.

7.1.1 For single beam spectrophotometers where background and sample spectra are measured separately at different times, energy level tests are generally conducted on a background spectrum. For double beam spectrophotometers where the ratio of background and sample beam intensities is measured directly, energy levels can be measured if it is possible to block the sample beam.

7.1.2 Energy levels should be measured at at least three fixed frequencies (wavelengths), one each in the upper, middle and lower third of the spectral range. The frequencies (wavelengths) at which energy levels are measured should be chosen to avoid interferences due to atmospheric components (for example, absorptions of water vapor and carbon dioxide) and from interferences due to optical components (for example, OH absorptions in SiO₂ cells and fibers). Preferably, regions where the background spectrum is relatively flat and slowly varying should be used for this test.

7.1.3 To minimize the effects of photometric noise on the energy level measurement, it is preferable to average the energy over a narrow frequency (wavelength) window.

Typically, the intensity at five points centered on the test frequency are averaged.

7.2 Photometric Noise Tests—Photometric noise is measured at the same frequencies (wavelengths) used for the energy level tests. Preferably, photometric noise tests are conducted on a 100 % line spectrum. Alternatively, photometric noise tests may be conducted on the spectrum of a check or test sample at regions where the spectrum is relatively flat and the sample absorbance is minimal (<0.1).

7.2.1 For single beam spectrophotometers where background and sample spectra are measured separately at different times, a 100 % line spectrum is obtained by ratioing two successive background measurements to obtain a transmittance spectrum. If, during normal operation of the spectrophotometer, backgrounds are collected with a reference material in the optical path, then this same configuration should be used for performance testing. Photometric noise calculations are preferably done directly on the transmittance spectrum. Alternatively, the transmittance spectrum may be converted to an absorption spectrum by taking the negative log₁₀ before the photometric noise calculations.

7.2.2 For double beam spectrophotometers, a 100 % line spectrum is measured when the two beams are both empty, both contain empty matched cells, or both contain reference samples in matched cells.

7.2.3 Photometric noise is measured by fitting a line to the spectrum over a short spectral region centered on the test frequency (wavelength). The region should contain at least 11 data points, preferably contains 101 data points, and should not exceed 2 % of the spectral range. The line is subtracted from the spectral data, and the RMS noise is calculated as the square root of the mean square residual.

7.2.3.1 If T_i is the transmittance at the frequency ν_i , then the slope, m , and intercept, b , of a line through the n data points centered at test frequency ν_0 are given by the following:

$$m = \frac{n \sum i T_i - \sum T_i \sum i}{n \sum i^2 - (\sum i)^2} \quad (1)$$

$$b = \frac{\sum i^2 \sum T_i - \sum i \sum i T_i}{n \sum i^2 - (\sum i)^2} \quad (2)$$

The photometric noise is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Noise}_{\text{RMS}} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (T_i - (mi + b))^2}{n - 2}} \quad (3)$$

The index i in Eq 1-3 runs from $-(n - 1)/2$ to $(n - 1)/2$ (n must be odd). The intercept represents the transmittance at test frequency ν_0 .

7.2.3.2 If photometric noise is calculated on absorbance spectra, the absorbance values, A_i , are used in place of the transmittance values, T_i , in Eq 1-3. If the abscissa for the spectral data is wavelength, then wavelength values, λ_i , are used in place of the frequency values, ν_i , in Eq 1-3. Calculations should be consistently performed on the same data types.

7.2.4 Increases in the photometric noise can indicate a misalignment of optical components, a source malfunction, or a malfunction in the detector or electronics.

7.3 Short Term Baseline Stability Test—The transmittance is monitored at each of the test frequencies (wavelengths) used in the energy level and photometric noise tests. The intercept calculated in Eq 2 represents the transmittance averaged over the n points around test frequency ν_0 . Deviation from 100 % transmittance is an indication of short term baseline instability and may indicate a malfunction of the spectrophotometer.

7.3.1 If the tests are conducted on absorbance spectra, deviations from zero absorbance is used as an indication of baseline instability.

7.3.2 If photometric noise tests are conducted on the spectrum of a check or test sample, then variations in the absorbance spectrum at the test frequencies are taken as an indication of short term baseline instability.

7.4 Optical Contamination Tests—The single beam background scan which was used for the energy tests is examined for absorptions which might indicate contamination of optical surfaces in the beam path.

7.4.1 Failure to clean cell or probe windows, IRS surfaces, etc., are the most common source of optical contamination. Frequencies (wavelengths) at which typical samples exhibit maximum absorbance should generally be examined. For example, for IR systems used in hydrocarbon analysis, the regions where the C-H stretching vibrations occur should be examined. Significant increases above a nominal background level may indicate contamination of windows and surfaces.

7.4.2 Spectrophotometer optical surfaces can be contaminated by impurities in purge gases. For systems equipped with flow cells or circulating liquid temperature control, leaks in connecting lines can expose an optical surface to contamination. Users should consider possible sources of contamination and determine appropriate frequencies at which absorptions would result.

7.5 Purge Contamination Tests—For spectrophotometers which are purged to minimize absorptions due to atmospheric components, the single beam spectrum used for energy tests should be checked for variations in purge quality. Frequencies (wavelengths) at which potential contaminants absorb should be identified, as should baseline points where contaminant absorption would be minimal. The absorbance for contaminants is calculated as the negative \log_{10} of the ratio of the peak intensity to the baseline intensity.

7.6 Frequency (Wavelength) Stability Tests—Frequency (wavelength) stability tests are conducted by monitoring the peak positions of several peaks across the absorption spectrum of the check or test sample or optical filter. At least three peaks are used for the test. If possible, the peaks should be in the upper, middle and lower third of the spectral range.

7.6.1 The absorption for peaks used in this test are preferably in the range from 0.37 to 0.75. For peak absorptions outside this range, the wavelength stability measurement may show greater sensitivity to photometric noise.

7.6.2 Peaks used for the frequency stability test are preferably symmetric in shape and well resolved from neighboring peaks. If such peaks are not available in the spectrum of the check/test sample or optical filter, the user should be aware that changes in spectrophotometer resolution will affect the measured peak position.

7.6.3 It is recommended that the peak position be determined by the following steps:

7.6.3.1 Compute the first derivative of the spectrum by applying the appropriate digital filter to the spectrum. A commonly used filter has been defined by Savitzki and Golay (1)³ with corrections by Steiner, Termonia, and Deltour (2), with application criteria discussed by Willson and Polo (3). The latter reference discusses optimum filter parameters based upon the relationship between spectral bandwidth and digitization interval. A cubic filter is recommended. The number of points used in the filter should be the quotient of the full-width-at-half-maximum of the peak being measured divided by the digital resolution, and rounded up to the nearest odd integer.

7.6.3.2 Identify the zero crossing associated with the peak absorbance and compute its location by linear interpolation between the two adjacent points straddling the zero crossing. The zero crossing is taken as a measure of the peak position.

NOTE 1—Other peak finding algorithms can be used provided that they accurately track peak position. The procedure described in Annex A1 should be used to test peak finding algorithms to determine if they are appropriate for this application. It is the users responsibility to demonstrate that the peak finding algorithm is appropriate for monitoring spectrophotometer frequency (wavelength) stability.

7.7 Resolution Stability Tests—The resolution stability of the spectrophotometer is monitored by measuring the bandwidths of several absorption peaks in the absorption spectrum of the check/test sample or optical filter. At least three peaks are used for the test. If possible, the peaks should be in the upper, middle and lower third of the spectral range. Variations in the measured bandwidths are taken as an indication that the optical resolution of the spectrophotometer is varying, suggesting a malfunction.

7.7.1 The absorption for peaks used in this test are preferably in the range from 0.37 to 0.75. For peak absorptions outside this range, the resolution stability measurement may show increased sensitivity to photometric noise.

7.7.2 Peaks used for the resolution stability test are preferably symmetric in shape and well resolved from neighboring peaks. If such peaks are not available in the spectrum of the check/test sample or optical filter, the results of the resolution stability test may be variable.

7.7.3 It is recommended that the peak bandwidth be determined by the following steps:

7.7.3.1 Compute the second derivative of the spectrum by applying the appropriate digital filter to the spectrum. A commonly used filter has been defined by Savitzki and Golay (1) with corrections by Steiner, Termonia, and Deltour (2), with application criteria discussed by Willson and Polo (3). The latter reference discusses optimum filter parameters based upon the relationship between spectral bandwidth and digitization interval. A cubic filter is recommended. The number of points used in the filter should be the quotient of the full-width-at-half-maximum of the peak being measured divided by the digital resolution, and rounded up to the nearest odd integer.

7.7.3.2 Identify the zero crossing on each side of the peak absorbance and compute their locations by linear interpolation

³ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the list of references at the end of this guide.