Selecting a GC Column

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11+ years of service!

did you **know**?

Restek On-The-Road training seminars are full-day courses presented in an engaging multimedia format. They are equally valuable to beginning chromatographers, those who have moderate experience and want a better understanding of the subject matter, and those interested in the "best practices" and latest technologies. **No sales pitch is presented**, just the facts on how to make your chromatography results better. The bulk of each course is lecture, but numerous demonstrations and problem-solving exercises facilitate and reinforce the understanding of important principles. See **page 11** for more information.

Capacity, k

The capacity of the column relates to how much material a column can chromatograph without adversely affecting peak shape. If the amount of a compound (mass) exceeds the capacity of a wall coated open tubular column (WCOT), the peak will front, i.e., the column will exhibit peak symmetry of less than 1, a characteristic "shark fin" shaped peak. The goal is to select a column with sufficient capacity that peak shape will not suffer.

There are two primary column related dimensions that affect capacity, assuming we have selected the proper column phase: column internal diameter (ID), and the phase film thickness (μ).

When selecting column ID, consideration should include the type of injection, the detector being used, and the concentration of sample (amount on-column). The injection technique is an important consideration because the ID of the column may need to be selected based on whether a split, splitless, cool on-column injection, or other sample transfer to the column is being used. The second consideration is how much flow the detector can optimally work under. For example, some MS detectors can only handle column flow up to 1.5mL/min.; therefore, a 0.53mm ID column, which requires higher flows for proper chromatography, is not an option for this detector. The third consideration is sample capacity. If the concentration of the sample exceeds the column capacity, loss of resolution, poor reproducibility, and peak distortion will result. Table III shows several typical column characteristics.

Film thickness (μ) has a direct affect on the retention and elution temperature for each sample component. Extremely volatile compounds should be analyzed on thick-film columns to increase the time the compounds spend in the stationary phase, allowing them to separate. High molecular weight compounds must be analyzed on thinner film columns. This reduces the length of time the analytes stay in the column, and minimizes bleed at required higher elution temperatures. Film thickness also affects the amount of material that can be injected onto the column without overloading. A thicker film column can be used for higher concentration samples, versus a thinner film.

Table III Typical column characteristics

	Column ID				
Characteristic	**0.10mm**	**0.18mm**	**0.25mm**	**0.32mm**	**0.53mm**
Helium Flow (@ 20cm/sec.)	0.05mL/min.	0.3mL/min.	0.7mL/min.	1.2mL/min.	2.6mL/min.
Hydrogen Flow (@ 40cm/sec.)	0.09mL/min.	0.6mL/min.	1.4mL/min.	2.4mL/min.	5.2mL/min.
Sample Capacity (max load per component)	<10ng	<50ng	50–100ng	400–500ng	1000–2000ng
Theoretical Plates/Meter	8000	3700	2700	2100	1300

Efficiency, N

Column efficiency (N) is the column length divided by the height equivalent of a theoretical plate (HETP). The effective theoretical plates are affected by how well the phase has been coated onto the column walls and is measured by how narrow the peaks are when they are eluted at the end of the column. Therefore, the higher the column efficiency (N), the better resolution power the column will have.

Capillary columns are made in various lengths, typically in standard lengths of 10, 15, 30, 60, and 105 meters. Longer columns provide more resolving power, but increase analysis time. Doubling the column length increases resolution by approximately 41% (note: the column length is under the square root function). However, under isothermal conditions, it will double analysis time. In temperature-programmed analyses, retention times are more dependent on temperature than column length, with a marginal increase (approx. 10-20%) in analysis time upon doubling the column length.

reference **pages**

Choosing a Volatiles GC column
see page 563

Table of Contents for Applications
see pages 518-519

Applications by Phase Index, GC
see pages 561-562

Applications by Compound Class Index
see pages 734-735

ordering **note**

Prefer a different column cage?
5-inch column cage/Agilent 6850: add the suffix "6850" to your column catalog number. No additional cost.

Uncaged: add the suffix "051" to your column catalog number. No additional cost.

4-inch column cage (not available for 0.53mm ID columns): add the suffix "280" to your column catalog number. Additional cost

In your cage: add the suffix "031" to your column catalog number. Additional cost