

Light emission: luminescence

Spontaneous light photon emission by electrons when they return from their excited state to their original (ground) state of lower energy

Prior to emission, the electrons need to be excited

There are several ways to excite electrons

Ways to excite electrons:

- by photon absorption: **photoluminescence**
- by the energy of a chemical reaction: **chemoluminescence**
- by collision with charged particles accelerated in electric field: **electroluminescence**
- by mechanical deformation: **triboluminescence**
- thermal excitation: **thermoluminescence**

„return” means one discrete step

from energy level E_m to energy level E_n

Emitted photon energy: $hf = E_m - E_n$

The emitted photon energy (just like the absorbed) is characteristic for the electronic orbitals, thus for the atom or molecule.

singlet states: sum of the spin quantum numbers (+1/2, -1/2) of the electrons is **zero**

De-excitation by photon emission **between singlet** states is called **fluorescence (S-S)**

triplet states: sum of the spin quantum numbers of the electrons is **1**

De-excitation by photon emission between triplet and **singlet** states is called **phosphorescence (T-S)**

Lifetime of excited states

Exponential decay with time

The **lifetime** (τ) of singlet excited states is some **ns**

The **lifetime** of triplet excited states is **long**, varies in a broad range: **metastable excited state**

Why does it take so long to return to the ground state when it is energetically favorable?

The excited electron needs to change its spin state back to the original, otherwise it can not return to the original level with an electron of identical spin (Pauli's exclusion principle). This requires interactions with neighboring molecules what takes time.

Fluorescence labeling is widely used in research within topics of life sciences, also in medical diagnostics

Light sources

The most important light source is the Sun. (6000 K)

Maximum is close to the highest sensitivity of vision.

Tungsten has high melting point (3000 K). Halogen content reduces the evaporation of metal.

Light sources based on luminescence

Metal vapour (e.g. Hg) lamps

low pressure mercury lamp with emission in the UV (254 nm) absorption maximum of DNA photochemical degradation of genetic material (in bacteria).

Thin layer coating on the wall to produce fluorescence when excited by UV light

Light Emitting Diodes: **LED**

Lasers

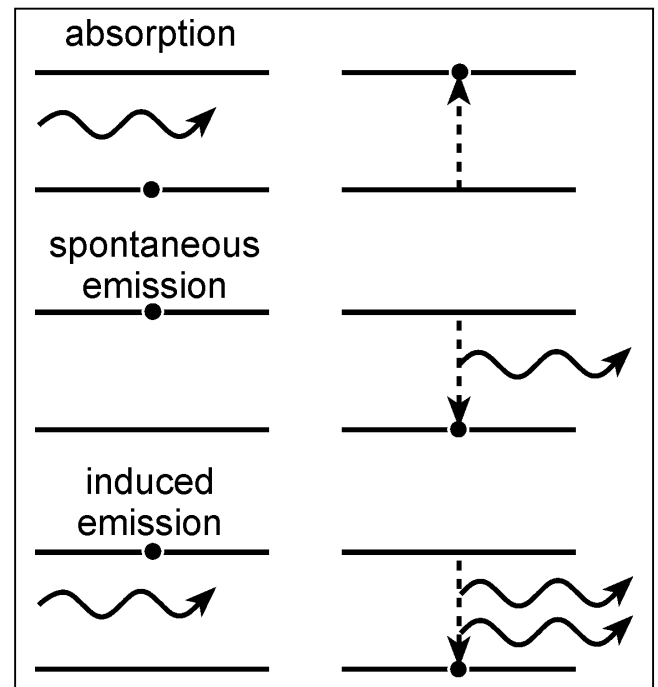
Light

Amplification by the
Stimulated
Emission of
Radiation

Light amplification

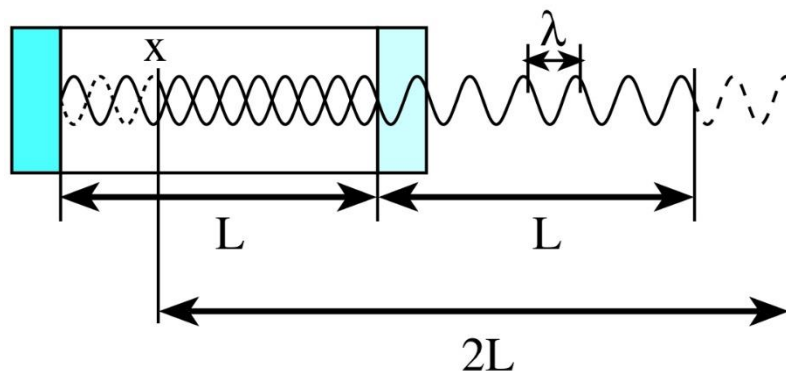
$$\mu = K(N_1 - N_2)$$

Population inversion ($N_1 < N_2$)



Conditions for LASER operation

1. proper material (electronic excited state of metastable character)
 - at least 3 energy level materials
2. intensive excitation of electrons or pumping
3. positive feedback
4. optical resonator (standing waves)



Properties of laser light:

1. monochromatic ("single wavelength")
2. coherent (synchronized phase of light)
3. collimated (parallel nature of the beam)
4. high intensity (refers to the power of the laser per unit area)