

Multilayer Thin Films

Sequential Assembly of Nanocomposite Materials

Edited by

Gero Decher, Joseph B. Schlenoff

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Foreword

Over the last ten years, scientists from varying backgrounds have rallied around a versatile new method for the synthesis of thin films. Because the layer-by-layer assembly method provides opportunities for creative design and application of function-specific films, the field has experienced an initial period of exponential growth. This book, the first on the topic, contains many insightful contributions from leaders in the field that will enable novices and experts to understand the promises and premises of multilayers.

Readers will instantly identify with a particular aspect of the technology, whether it is the design and synthesis of new polymeric or nanoparticulate building blocks, understanding the polymer physical chemistry of multilayers, or characterizing their optical, electrical or biological activities. The reasons for the intense interest in the field are also clearly evident: multilayers bridge the gap between monolayers and spun-on or dip-coated films, and they provide many of the aspects of control found in classical Langmuir-Blodgett (LB) films, yet multilayers are more versatile, in many respects, and easier to create.

This book is an essential and welcome addition to the literature on thin films. Readers with interests in self-assembled systems, supramolecular chemistry, nanocomposites or polymers will find themselves fascinated by the diversity of topics herein. The message that multilayers are making significant inroads into numerous aspects of chemistry, physics and biology is made clear. The editors and authors are to be commended for creating a comprehensive yet readable volume.

Jean-Marie LEHN

Contents

	Foreword	V
	Preface	XV
	List of Contributors	XVII
1	Polyelectrolyte Multilayers, an Overview	1
	<i>G. Decher</i>	
1.1	Why is the Nanoscale so Interesting	1
1.2	From Self-Assembly to Directed Assembly	1
1.3	The Layer-by-Layer Deposition Technique	3
1.3.1	LbL Deposition is the Synthesis of Polydisperse Supramolecular Objects	4
1.3.2	Reproducibility and Deposition Conditions	6
1.3.3	Monitoring Multilayer Buildup	7
1.3.3.1	Ex-situ Characterisation	7
1.3.3.2	In-situ Characterisation	9
1.3.4.	Multilayers by Solution Dipping, Spraying or Spin Coating	12
1.3.5	Post-preparation Treatment of Multilayer Films	12
1.3.5.1	Annealing	12
1.3.5.2	Photopatterning	15
1.4	Multilayer Structure	16
1.4.1	The Zone Model for Polyelectrolyte Films	17
1.4.2	Layered or Amorphous: What Makes Multilayers Unique Supramolecular Species?	20
1.4.3	Soft and Rigid Materials	23
1.4.4	Deviation from Linear Growth Behaviour	24
1.5	Multimaterial Films	24
1.6	Toward Compartmentalized Films: Barrier Layers and Nanoreactors	26
1.7	Commercial Applications	30
1.8	References	31

2	Fundamentals of Polyelectrolyte Complexes in Solution and the Bulk	47
	<i>V. Kabanov</i>	
2.1	Introduction	47
2.2	Interpolyelectrolyte Reactions and Solution Behavior of Interpolyelectrolyte Complexes	48
2.2.1	Kinetics and Mechanism of Polyelectrolyte Coupling and Interchange Reactions	52
2.2.2	Solution Properties of Equilibrated Nonstoichiometric Interpolyelectrolyte Complexes	61
2.2.3	Transformation of Interpolyelectrolyte Complexes in External Salt Solutions	66
2.3	Complexation of Polyelectrolytes with Oppositely Charged Hydrogels	74
2.4	Structural and Mechanical Properties of Interpolyelectrolyte Complexes in the Bulk	76
2.5	Conclusion	82
2.6	References	83
3	Polyelectrolyte Adsorption and Multilayer Formation	87
	<i>J.-F. Joanny and M. Castelnovo</i>	
3.1	Introduction	87
3.2	Polyelectrolytes in Solution	89
3.3	Polyelectrolytes at Interfaces	90
3.4	Polyelectrolyte Complexes	92
3.5	Multilayer Formation	94
3.6	Concluding Remarks	96
3.7	References	97
4	Charge Balance and Transport in Polyelectrolyte Multilayers	99
	<i>J. B. Schlenoff</i>	
4.1	Introduction	99
4.2	Interactions	101
4.2.1	Mechanism: Competitive Ion Pairing	101
4.2.2	Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Charge Compensation	103
4.2.2.1	Key Equilibria	103
4.2.2.2	Swelling and Smoothing: Estimating Interaction Energies	105
4.2.2.3	Multilayer Decomposition	108
4.3	Excess Charge	109
4.3.1	Surface vs. Bulk Polymer Charge	109
4.3.2	Distribution of Surface Charge in Layer-by-Layer Buildup: Mechanism	113
4.3.3	Equilibrium vs. non-Equilibrium Conditions for Salt and Polymer Sorption	117
4.4	Equilibria and Transport	118
4.4.1	Ion Transport through Multilayers: the “Reluctant” Exchange Mechanism	118
4.4.2	Practical Consequences: Trapping and Self-Trapping	126

4.5	Conclusions	127
4.6	References	130
5	pH-Controlled Fabrication of Polyelectrolyte Multilayers: Assembly and Applications	133
	<i>M. F. Rubner</i>	
5.1	Introduction	133
5.2	Layer-by-Layer Assembly of Weak Polyelectrolyte Multilayers	134
5.3	Light Emitting Thin Film Devices	137
5.4	Microporous Thin Films	139
5.5	Nanoreactors, Electroless Plating and Ink-jet Printing	141
5.6	Surface Modification via Selective Adsorption of Block Copolymers	144
5.7	Patterning of Weak Polyelectrolyte Multilayers	145
5.7.1	Micro-Contact Printing	146
5.7.2	Ink-jet Printing of Hydrogen-Bonded Multilayers	148
5.8	Conclusions and Future Prospects	152
5.9	References	153
6	Recent Progress in the Surface Sol–Gel Process and Protein Multilayers	155
	<i>I. Ichinose, K. Kuroiwa, Y. Lvov, and T. Kunitake</i>	
6.1	Alternating Adsorption	155
6.1.1	Surface Sol–Gel Process	155
6.1.2	Adsorption of Cationic Compounds on Metal Oxide Gels	157
6.1.3	Multilayer Assembly of Metal Oxides and Proteins	162
6.1.4	Protein/Polyelectrolyte Multilayer Assembly	166
6.2	Recent Topics in Biological Applications	167
6.2.1	Biosensors	168
6.2.2	Nano-filtration	169
6.2.3	Bioreactors	171
6.2.4	Protein Capsule and Protein Shell	173
6.3	References	174
7	Internally Structured Polyelectrolyte Multilayers	177
	<i>K. Glinel, A. M. Jonas, A. Laschwesky, and P. Y. Vuillaume</i>	
7.1	Introduction	177
7.2	Experimental Considerations	179
7.3	Stratified Binary (A/B) _n Organic Multilayers	182
7.4	Stratified Binary (A/B) _n Hybrid Organic/Inorganic Multilayers	188
7.4.1	Initial Studies on Hybrid Assemblies	189
7.4.2	Layered Assemblies from Analogous Poly(diallyl ammonium) Salt Derivatives and Hectorite Platelets	190
7.4.2.1	General Structural Observations	190
7.4.2.2	Detailed Analysis of the Structure of Laponite-Based Hybrid LBL Films	192
7.4.3	Ordering in Hybrid Assemblies Employing Functional Polyions	194
7.4.3.1	Photocrosslinkable Polyelectrolytes	194

7.4.3.2	The Use of Mesomorphic Polyions	195
7.5	Hybrid Superlattices of the $\{(A/B)_m/(C/D)_p\}_n$ Type	196
7.5.1	Literature Survey	197
7.5.2	Hybrid Organic/Inorganic Compartmentalized Multilayers from Clay Platelets	198
7.6	Conclusions	201
7.7	References	202
8	Layer-by-Layer Assembly of Nanoparticles and Nanocolloids: Intermolecular Interactions, Structure and Materials Perspectives	207
	<i>N. A. Kotov</i>	
8.1	Introduction	207
8.2	Layer-by-Layer Assembly of Nanoparticles and Nanocolloids	208
8.3	Structural Factors of Individual Adsorption Layers	217
8.3.1	Intermolecular Interactions in the LBL Process	217
8.3.2	Ionic Conditions	222
8.3.3	Effect of Particle Shape on the Density of the Adsorption Layer	224
8.4	Stratified LBL Assemblies of Nanoparticles and Nanocolloids	225
8.4.1	Self-standing LBL Films	227
8.4.2	Magnetic Properties of the Stratified LBL Assemblies of Nanoparticles	229
8.4.3	Nanorainbows: Graded Semiconductor Films from Nanoparticles	231
8.5	Conclusion	235
8.6	References	236
9	Layer-by-Layer Self-assembled Polyelectrolytes and Nanoplatelets	245
	<i>J. H. Fendler</i>	
9.1	Introduction	245
9.2	Self-assembled Polyelectrolytes and Clay Nanoplatelets	246
9.3	Self-assembled Polyelectrolytes and Graphite Oxide Nanoplatelets	250
9.4	Potential Applications	256
9.4.1	Pollutant Photodestruction	256
9.4.2	Electronic Applications	259
9.4.3	Charge Storage	263
9.5	References	268
10	Chemistry Directed Deposition via Electrostatic and Secondary Interactions: A Nonlithographic Approach to Patterned Polyelectrolyte Multilayer Systems	271
	<i>P. T. Hammond</i>	
10.1	Introduction and Overview	272
10.2	Selective Deposition of Polyelectrolyte Multilayer Systems	273
10.2.1	Selective Deposition of Strong Polyelectrolytes	273
10.2.1.1	Basis of Selective Adsorption and Ionic Strength Effects	273
10.2.1.2	Formation of Complex Multilayer Structures	276
10.2.2	Understanding and Utilizing Secondary Interactions in Selective Deposition	277

10.2.2.1	Establishing the Rules for Weak Polyamine Deposition	277
10.2.2.2	Confirming the Rules of Selective Adsorption: SFM Investigations	279
10.2.2.3	Using the Rules: Side-by-Side Structures	280
10.2.2.4	The Next Steps: Surface Sorting of Multilayers and Other Elements	281
10.3	Polymer-on-Polymer Stamping	282
10.3.1	Fundamental Studies of Polymer-on-Polymer Stamping	284
10.3.1.1	Stamping of Ionic Polymers	285
10.3.1.2	Stamping of Block Copolymers	285
10.3.2	POPS as a Template for Other Materials Deposition	287
10.4	Directed Assembly of Colloidal Particles	289
10.4.1	Selective Deposition and Controlled Cluster Size on Multilayer Templates	290
10.4.2	Surface Sorting with Particles on Multilayer Surfaces	292
10.4.3	Selective Electroless Plating of Colloidal Particle Arrays	293
10.5	Functional Polymer Thin Films for Electrochemical Device and Systems Applications	294
10.5.1	Electrochromic Polyelectrolyte Multilayer Device Constructon	295
10.5.2	Ionically Conducting Multilayers for Electrochemical Device Applications	296
10.6	Summary	297
10.7	References	298

11 Layered Nanoarchitectures Based on Electro- and Photo-active Building Blocks 301

X. Zhang, J. Sun, and J. Shen

11.1	Introduction	301
11.2	Multilayer Assemblies of Electroactive Species of Chemically Modified Electrodes	304
11.2.1	Controlled Fabrication of Multilayers with a Single Active Component	305
11.2.2	Controlled “Cascade” Modification with Binary Active Components	309
11.2.2.1	Bienzyme Assemblies of Glucose Oxidase and Glucoamylase	310
11.2.2.2	Alternating Assemblies of Glucose Oxidase and Polycationic Electron Transfer	313
11.2.3	The Incorporation of Conductive Species to Improve the Performance of the Modified Electrodes	314
11.3	Ionic Self-assembly of Photoactive Materials and the Fabrication of “Robust” Multilayer	318
11.3.1	Ways to Fabricate Covalently Attached Multilayer Assemblies	319
11.3.2	Stable Entrapment of Oligo-charged Molecules Bearing Sulfonate Groups in Multilayer Assemblies	323
11.3.3	Covalently Attached Multilayer Assemblies of Polycationic Diazo-resins and Polymeric Poly(Acrylic Acid)	324

11.3.4	Robust Nanoassemblies with Complex and Hybrid Structures	326
11.4	Summary and Outlook	328
11.5	References	328
12	Coated Colloids: Preparation, Characterization, Assembly and Utilization	331
	<i>F. Caruso and G. Sukhorukov</i>	
12.1	Introduction	331
12.2	Preparation and Characterization of Coated Colloids	333
12.2.1	Layer-by-Layer Adsorption	334
12.2.1.1	Multilayered Coatings	337
12.2.1.2	Coating of Specific Cores	344
12.2.2	Colloid Precipitation	349
12.3	Assembly and Utilization of Coated Colloids	351
12.3.1	Mesosopic Arrangement	351
12.3.1.1	Colloidal Crystals	351
12.3.1.2	Macro- and Mesoporous Materials	351
12.3.2	Enzymatic Catalysis	354
12.3.2.1	Dispersions	354
12.3.2.2.	Thin Films	355
12.3.3	Optical Properties	356
12.3.4	Further Applications	357
12.4	Summary and Outlook	358
12.5	References	359
13	Smart Capsules	363
	<i>H. Möhwald, E. Donath, and G. Sukhorukov</i>	
13.1	Preparation and Structure	364
13.1.1	General Aspects	364
13.1.1.1	Core Materials	364
13.1.1.2	Wall Materials	365
13.1.1.3	Molecular Dynamics	368
13.1.2	Physics and Chemistry of Core Removal	369
13.1.2.1	Core Destruction	369
13.1.2.2	Core Material Release	372
13.1.3	Modification of Walls	375
13.2	Properties and Utilization	376
13.2.1	Permeability Control	376
13.2.1.1	Permeation Mechanisms	377
13.2.1.2	Controlled Release Profiles	378
13.2.1.3	Switchable Release	379
13.2.2.	Stability and Mechanical Properties	380
13.2.2.1	Temperature Dependent Structures	381
13.2.2.2	Capsule Elasticity	382
13.2.2.3	Plasticity, Viscosity and Rupture Strength	385
13.2.3	Chemistry and Physics in Nanovolumes	385

13.2.3.1	Chemical Gradients from Inside to Outside	386
13.2.3.2	Precipitation and Dissolution	387
13.2.3.3	Chemistry in Capsules	389
13.3	Summary and Outlook	390
13.4	References	391
14	Multilayers on Solid Planar Substrates: From Structure to Function	393
	<i>D. G. Kurth, D. Volkmer, and R. v. Klitzing</i>	
14.1	Introduction	393
14.2	Formation and Structure of LbL Multilayers	395
14.2.1	Adsorption Kinetics of Polyelectrolytes	395
14.2.2	LbL Multilayer Formation	397
14.2.3	ζ -potential	398
14.2.4	Effect of Polymer Charge	398
14.2.5	Influence of Ionic Strength	400
14.2.6	Permeability of Polyelectrolyte Multilayer	401
14.2.7	Internal Structure	403
14.3	Implementing Metallsupramolecular Devices in Thin Layered Films	405
14.3.1	Introduction	405
14.3.2	Metallosupramolecular Coordination Polyelectrolytes	408
14.3.3	Polyoxometalate Clusters	415
14.4	Conclusions	421
14.5	References	423
15	Functional Layer-by-Layer Assemblies with Photo- and Electrochemical Response and Selective Transport of Small Molecules and Ions	427
	<i>B. Tieke, M. Pyrasch, and A. Toutianoush</i>	
15.1	Introduction	427
15.2	Photoreactive Assemblies	428
15.2.1	Diacetylene Derivatives	429
15.2.2	Azobenzene Derivatives	434
15.3	Diphenyldiketopyrrolopyrrole Derivatives	438
15.4	Electroactive Assemblies	441
15.4.1	Poly(metal tetrathiooxalates)	441
15.4.2	Prussian Blue and Analogues	442
15.5	Transport of Small Molecules and Ions Across Polyelectrolyte Multilayers	446
15.5.1	Transport of Small Molecules	446
15.5.1.1	Gas Permeation	446
15.5.1.2	Pervaporation Separation of Alcohol/Water Mixtures	447
15.5.2	Transport of Ions	451
15.5.2.1	Uptake of Ions	454
15.6	Summary and Conclusions	456
15.7	References	458

16	Self-assembly and Characterization of Electro-optic Materials	461
	<i>R. Claus, Y.-X. Wang, L. Zhang, and K. Cooper</i>	
16.1	Nonlinear Optical Polymers	462
16.1.1	Design, Synthesis and Characterization of Polydyes	462
16.1.2	ESA Fabrication of NLO Thin Films and Their Characterization	464
16.1.3	Nonlinear Optical Measurements	467
16.2	Electrostatic Self-assembly of CLD-1 Thin Films	471
16.2.1	Modification of CLD-1 and Fabrication of CLD-1 Thin Films	471
16.2.2	Measurements of Electro-optic Properties	472
16.3	Electrostatic Self-assembly of CdSe/PDDA Thin Films	474
16.3.1	Fabrication and Characterization	475
16.3.2	Electro-optic Modulation Measurements	477
16.3.2.1	Linear Electro-optic Modulation Measurement	477
16.3.2.2	Quadratic Electro-optic Modulation	481
16.4	Summary	484
16.5	References	485
17	Controlling the Ion-Permeability of Layered Polyelectrolyte Films and Membranes	487
	<i>M. Bruening</i>	
17.1	Introduction	487
17.2	Electrochemical Studies of the Permeability of MPFs	488
17.2.1	As-deposited MPFs	488
17.2.2	Cross-linked PAA/PAH Films	490
17.2.3	Derivatized Polyelectrolyte Films	493
17.3	MPFs as Ion-Separation Membranes	495
17.3.1	Membrane Formation	495
17.3.2	Permeability of PAH/PSS and PAH/PAA Membranes	496
17.3.3	Cross-linked PAA/PAH Membranes	499
17.3.4	Hybrid PSS/PAH + PAA/PAH Membranes	500
17.3.5	Controlling the Charge Density in MPMs	503
17.3.5.1	Use of Cu ²⁺ Complexes to Imprint Charged Sites into PAA/PAH Films	503
17.3.5.2	Control of Intrinsically Compensated Charge Through Derivatization and Photocleavage	504
17.3.6	Highly Selective Ultrathin Polyimide Membranes Formed from Layered Polyelectrolytes	505
17.3.7	Modeling of Selective Transport Through Layered Polyelectrolyte Membranes	506
17.4	Conclusions	508
17.5	References	509
	Index	511

Preface

When a new field is growing exponentially, as judged by the number of publications, presentations and patents, when is the “right” time to assemble a volume of contributed chapters from some of the acknowledged leaders in the field? What if every potential contributor is incredibly busy, following up an ever-expanding plethora of ideas and experiments? It was in this harried atmosphere that our colleagues carved out the time to write their contributions. We are extremely grateful to them for gathering their thoughts and accomplishments into chapters.

The idea for this book came together following a very successful symposium at the ACS in San Francisco 2000, which we organized. No volume on the topic had yet been published, but there was already a large store of knowledge that had been created as groups had responded enthusiastically to the promise of the first few papers appearing in the early 90’s. Multilayers had gathered a great deal of momentum, flourishing in the more “informal” space of papers, preprints, talks and word-of-mouth. By 2000, the field had simply outgrown informality.

We had been riding the wave of this activity, enjoying a growing number of colleagues. We were fully aware of the infectious nature of multilayers research, which is like a good mystery novel – hard to put down once you start. We are honored to have been in the thick of things during the early years. Every experiment was significant and the results suggested several more experiments. This dizzying atmosphere pervades even today: ask any multilayerer!

We are pleased to have edited this book. Our object was not only to document what is known about multilayers, but also to promote the potential of these versatile thin films and to facilitate the adoption of the technology by others. The field is new. We are proud of its ability to catalyze interdisciplinary thought and action. In this regard, multilayers represent a model platform for promoting modern research. Also, the intellectual distance between concept and application is minimal. Commercial applications have already been realized.

We hope the message of abundant research opportunities is made loud and clear. It is easy to get started. Easy to get “hooked.” This book is essential in showing you how. We look forward to more elegant and complex multilayered architectures and functionalities, as well as significant expansion at the biological/biomedical interface.

Finally, we would like to express our thanks to Jean-Marie Lehn for his support in writing the forward. His “big-picture” viewpoint is sincerely appreciated.

August 2002

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1

Polyelectrolyte Multilayers, an Overview

G. DECHER

1.1

Why is the Nanoscale so Interesting?

In our research team, we strongly believe that the functionality of any object (on any length scale) arises from the intricate interplay of its constituents. In complex systems, new properties appear that are not observed for each individual component. While it is trivial that electrons and nuclei form atoms (sub-ångstrom scale), that atoms form molecules (ångstrom scale) or that monomers can be transformed into polymers (early nanometer scale), we are just beginning to explore the potential of supramolecular assemblies or of large multifunctional objects (e.g. copolymers of complex architecture). While nature plays with the full range of objects on the length scale from femtometers to parsecs, mankind is somewhat limited to the length scale between subatomic particles and the size of our planet. Although the range accessible to man is already reduced, we hardly master more than a fraction of what is available to us. A particularly interesting length scale is, of course, the nanoscopic organization of matter. Taking life as the most fascinating and complex property of matter, nature clearly shows that the minimum size of a lifeform (in the definition of life as we know it) is of nanoscopic to microscopic dimension. It is exactly this length scale that is just being touched but not mastered by either bottom up (chemical synthesis) or top down (miniaturization) approaches. Fig. 1.1 summarizes our philosophy and motivation for working on the synthesis, properties and fabrication of complex nanoorganized and nanocomposite materials.

1.2

From Self-Assembly to Directed Assembly

Suppose you do not like the way materials end up being arranged after carrying out a self-assembly experiment and obtaining equilibrium. The obvious pathway for improvements seems to be to re-engineer the chemical structure of the molecules involved and to hope to obtain a more suitable structure with the new molecules. This is often time-consuming as several optimization cycles are frequently required.

LENGTH SCALES OF COMPLEXITY IN MATTER

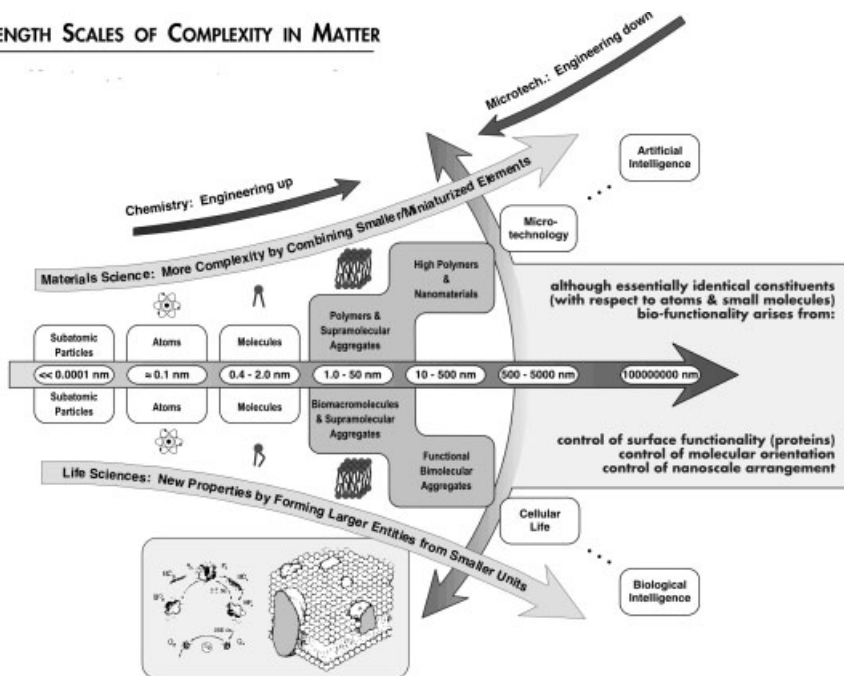


Fig. 1.1 Complexity as a function of length scale. Materials Science is not yet as far advanced as the evolutionary developments present everywhere in nature. The photosystem

is just one example of the precise spatial assembly of a functional molecular machine. The drawing is adapted from [1].

Another possible route to a desired target structure is to use an assembly procedure that prevents equilibrium by trapping every compound kinetically in a predetermined spatial arrangement. At present there are only very few approaches in this direction. Most of the work has been carried out for the simplest case, in which different materials are put in one-dimensional order in a multilayer film. For about 65 years the molecularly controlled fabrication of nanostructured films has been dominated by the conceptually elegant Langmuir-Blodgett (LB) technique, in which monolayers are formed on a water surface and subsequently transferred onto a solid support [2, 3]. The pioneering work on synthetic nanoscale multicomposites of organic molecules was carried out by Kuhn and colleagues in the late 1960s using the LB technique [4]. His experiments with donor and acceptor dyes in different layers of LB films provided direct proof of distance-dependent Förster energy transfer on the nanoscale. These were also the first true nanomanipulations as they allowed for mechanical handling of individual molecular layers such as separation and contact formation with ångström precision [5]. Unfortunately the LB technique is rather limited with respect to the set of molecular components suitable for LB deposition, and molecules are often not firmly trapped and frequently rearrange after or even during deposition.

1.3

The Layer-by-Layer Deposition Technique

The so-called layer-by-layer (LbL) deposition technique [6–14] (Fig. 1.2) also falls into the category of template assisted assembly. Template assisted assembly is much faster than self-assembly/chemical modification cycles whose outcome is often uncertain or difficult to predict. For the case of LbL-deposition, it can be tailored to even allow multimaterial assembly of several compounds without special chemical modifications [15–19], thus giving access to multilayer films whose complex functionality can fall into the two following categories:

1. Tailoring of surface interactions: Every object interacts with its environment via its surface. Thus all properties depending on this interaction are dictated by surface functionality which can be tailored for many needs (e.g. corrosion protection [20], antireflective coatings [21], antistatic coatings, stickiness or non-stickiness [22], surface induced nucleation [23–26], antifouling [27–29], hydrophilicity or hydrophobicity, biocompatibility [30, 31], antibacterial properties, molecular recognition, chemical sensing or biosensing [32–46], microchannel flow control [47, 48]...).

2. Fabrication of surface based devices: The sequence of deposition of different materials defines the multilayer architecture and thus the device properties. One may call this knowledge based (or programmed, or directed, or controlled, or template assisted) assembly, in contrast to self-assembly. It leads to property engineering by controlling the mostly one-dimensional spatial arrangement of functionality in multimaterial layered nanocomposites (membrane reactors [49–51], photonic devices such as light emitting diodes [52–75] or complex waveguides, compartmentalized films with barrier layers or separation membranes [34, 44, 75–83],...).

The fabrication of multicomposite films by the LbL procedure means literally the nanoscopic assembly of hundreds of different materials in a single device using environmentally friendly, ultra-low-cost techniques. The materials can be small organic molecules or inorganic compounds [7, 61, 84–99], macromolecules [12, 39, 53, 55, 76, 86, 100–116, 117–125], biomacromolecules such as proteins or DNA [15–18, 30, 32, 49, 50, 126–151] or even colloids (metallic or oxidic colloids or latex particles) [18, 21, 75, 79, 98, 108, 121, 142, 152–198]. The technique can be applied to solvent accessible surfaces of almost any kind and any shape, the more exotic ones being microcapsules, colloids or biological cells [104, 122, 199–206].

Note that the list of references above is intended to give some introductory information on some recent developments of layer-by-layer assembly. Since many groups have provided reviews of their excellent work for this book, a complete reference list to all of their work is not needed in this overview chapter. A more detailed history of LbL deposition, the principle of which was apparently first described by Iler [207], is found in a recent review [208]. In the last eight years the field has been reviewed on several occasions outlining the concepts behind and the potential of the LbL technology [208–215]. The approach has spread from our laboratory to the international community and kindled research of physicists, che-

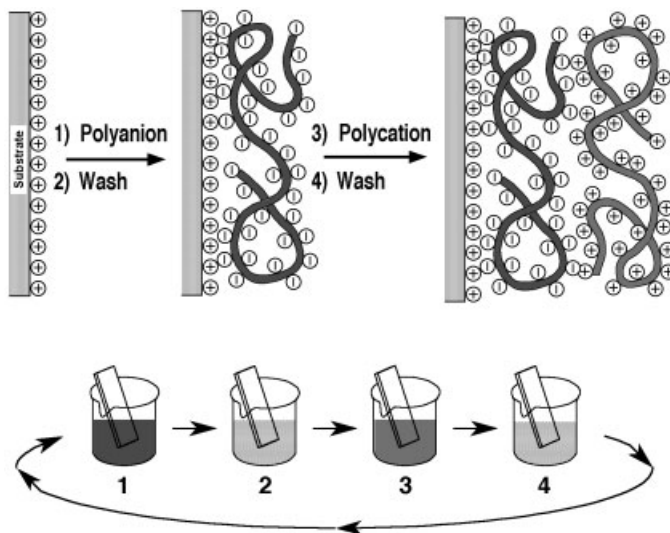


Fig. 1.2 Top: Simplified molecular concept of the first two adsorption steps depicting film deposition starting with a positively charged substrate. The polyanion conformation and layer interpenetration are an idealization of the surface charge reversal with each adsorption step which is the basis of the electrostatically driven multilayer buildup depicted here. Counterions are omitted for clarity. Bottom: Schematic of the film deposition process

using glass slides and beakers. Steps 1 and 3 represent the adsorption of a polyanion and polycation respectively, and steps 2 and 4 are washing steps. The four steps are the basic buildup sequence for the simplest film architecture $(A/B)_n$ where n is the number of deposition cycles. The construction of more complex film architectures requires additional beakers and an extended deposition sequence.

mists and of scientists in the biomedical field, because it is extremely powerful yet simple to use and because it challenges theory at the level of polyelectrolyte adsorption.

1.3.1

LbL Deposition is the Synthesis of Polydisperse Supramolecular Objects

For most cases an LbL film has a unique layer sequence that depends strictly on the deposition sequence. This points to the fact that LbL deposition should be considered as an analogue to a chemical reaction sequence (Fig. 1.3). While a chemical reaction takes place between different synthons and typically yields a unique molecule after each synthetic step, layer-by-layer deposition involves the adsorption of a single species in each adsorption step and yields a multilayer film with a defined layer sequence. While molecules are synthesized in several consecutive reaction steps, a multicomposite film is fabricated in several adsorption steps.

The reagents in classic synthesis are typically molecules, in layer-by-layer deposition they can be chosen from a wide range of materials. This is represented schematically in Fig. 1.4. While today most of the multilayer films have been fabri-

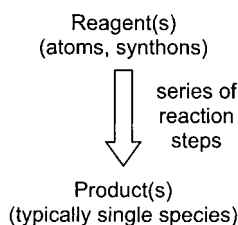
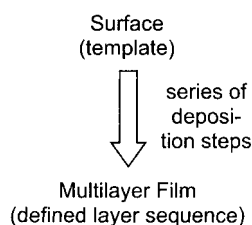
Classic Synthesis**LbL - Deposition**

Fig. 1.3 Analogy of chemical multistep synthesis and multilayer deposition, both leading to a unique molecular and supramolecular species (multilayer film).

cated using mainly electrostatic attraction as the driving force for multilayer build-up, this is by no means a prerequisite. There are many other interactions that have been used successfully for multilayer deposition including: donor/acceptor interactions [216-218], hydrogen bonding [173, 219-224], adsorption/drying cycles [225, 226], covalent bonds [11, 14, 45, 227-238], stereocomplex formation [239-241] or specific recognition [6, 17, 126, 128, 132, 139, 242-246].

In general one needs just any interaction (this may be one or several different interactions) between two species “reagents” in order to incorporate them into a multilayer film. The interaction can easily be tested in solution prior to carrying out the deposition if both film constituents are soluble in the same solvent. When

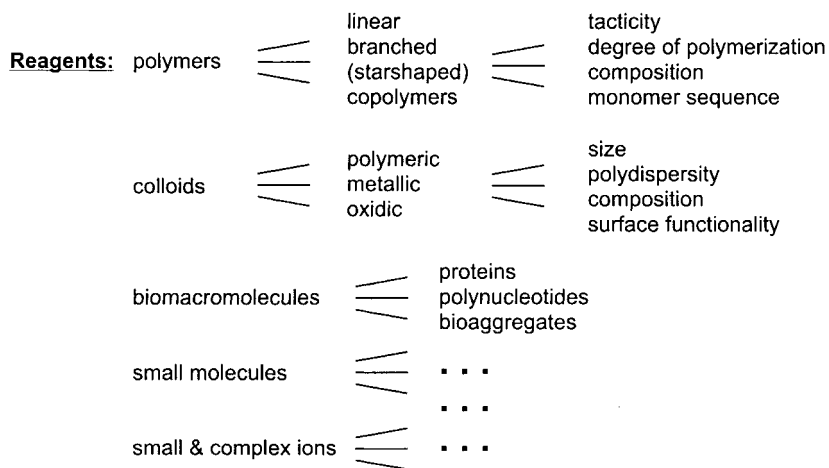


Fig. 1.4 Reagents for layer-by-layer deposition. Some details on composition and structural properties are shown for polymers and colloids. To keep the schematic simple, this level of detail is not carried through for the last three types of reagents. One should also note that small molecules and complex ions are sometimes more difficult to incorporate into multilayer films in a regular way than, for example, charged macromolecules.

Advantages:	deposition on surfaces of almost any kind and any shape
	broad processing window
many control parameters:	concentration
	adsorption time
	ionic strength
	solvent composition
	temperature
	...

Fig. 1.5 Summary of some of the advantages of layer-by-layer deposition. While the structure and properties of each layer depend on certain control parameters as mentioned above, the deposition is highly reproducible if these parameters are maintained strictly constant.

both solutions are mixed and flocculation occurs it is a good sign that multilayer fabrication will be possible. This is only a very crude test: multilayer formation may also be possible in the absence of flocculation.

Given the large set of materials which are easily incorporated into multilayer films, layer-by-layer deposition is a rather general approach for the fabrication of complex surface coatings. It combines several advantages as shown in Fig. 1.5. It is possible to coat almost any solvent-accessible surface starting with sub-micron objects [104, 122, 199–202, 204–206] up to the inside of tubings or even objects with a surface of several square meters. Like a chemical reaction, the precise structure of each layer depends on a set of control parameters such as concentration, adsorption times, ionic strength (e.g. [9]), pH (e.g. [247]), or temperature (e.g. [248]), but in general the processing window is rather broad.

1.3.2

Reproducibility and Deposition Conditions

The question of reproducibility arises immediately when we draw the analogy between a chemical reaction and layer-by-layer adsorption. At first sight one may say that molecules are unique species and multilayer films are “only” ill-defined supramolecular objects. This is essentially the same argument that has downgraded macromolecular chemistry for years in comparison to organic chemistry. Today it is generally accepted that “ill-defined” macromolecules are also unique species that can indeed be well described by distributions and average properties like polydispersity or degree of polymerisation. The situation is similar for multilayer films as they are characterised by a sequence of layers in which each layer has its individual structure and properties. While the sequence of layers is as strict as the arrangement of atoms in a molecule, the properties of each layer can only be described as an average over a certain area. The most obvious property of an individual layer is its thickness, which is dependent on the nature of the underlying surface and on the deposition conditions. Parameters presumed to be important with respect to the underlying surface are, for example, the nature and density of charged groups, their local mobility (in the case of a polymeric surface) and the

surface roughness. The most important reaction parameters or deposition conditions are mentioned in Fig. 1.5. However, the list is somewhat longer including: solvent, concentration of adsorbing species, adsorption time, temperature, nature and concentration of added salt, rinsing time, humidity of the surrounding air, drying, agitation during adsorption or rinsing, dipping speed and so forth. While the LbL technique generally works very well due to the fact that the processing window is rather large, it is highly recommended to keep the deposition conditions as constant as possible in order to get highly reproducible results. If this is done rigorously, one obtains films composed of tens of layers whose thickness for example, differs by about one percent. When comparing data, one should not overlook that it is not sufficient only to maintain the deposition conditions exactly, but also the conditions under which the measurements were taken. Fig. 1.6 shows an example of how the film thickness of a (PSS/PAH)₈ multilayer film, for which both polyions were deposited from solutions containing 2 M sodium chloride, depends on the temperature and on the relative humidity at the time of the measurement.

Often it is said that polyelectrolyte multilayer films are independent of the underlying substrate. This is an oversimplified statement, of course there is a dependence on the underlying surface as stated above. However, since polyanion and polycation adsorption is repeated consecutively, each polyanion adsorbs onto a polycation-covered surface and vice versa. This means that, after a few layers, the structure and properties of each layer are governed by the choice of polyanion/polycation pair and by the deposition conditions and that the influence of the substrate is typically lost after a few deposition cycles. The issue of the substrate is examined again when discussing soft and rigid materials later.

1.3.3

Monitoring Multilayer Buildup

1.3.3.1 Ex-situ Characterisation

The easiest way to follow multilayer buildup is probably by UV/Vis spectroscopy, which works for all colored materials. Fig. 1.7 is an example for poly(styrene sulfonate)/poly(allyl amine) (PSS/PAH) films which constitute probably the best characterised system at present.

Equivalent to measuring the optical absorbance, one can also determine the film thickness by ellipsometry or X-ray reflectometry as shown in Fig. 1.8. The reflectivity traces on the left were taken on a dry specimen at various stages of multilayer buildup. Each trace corresponds to a single data point in the diagram on the right. In this case PSS was deposited from aqueous solutions containing different amounts of salt, while PAH was deposited from pure water. One clearly sees that the film thickness is slightly, but very precisely, increased with increasing salt concentrations [9]. This effect would be much stronger if both polyions were deposited from solutions containing salt. The fact that only interference fringes resulting from the total film thickness are observed in such samples will be discussed in the section on the structure of multilayer films. The salt concen-

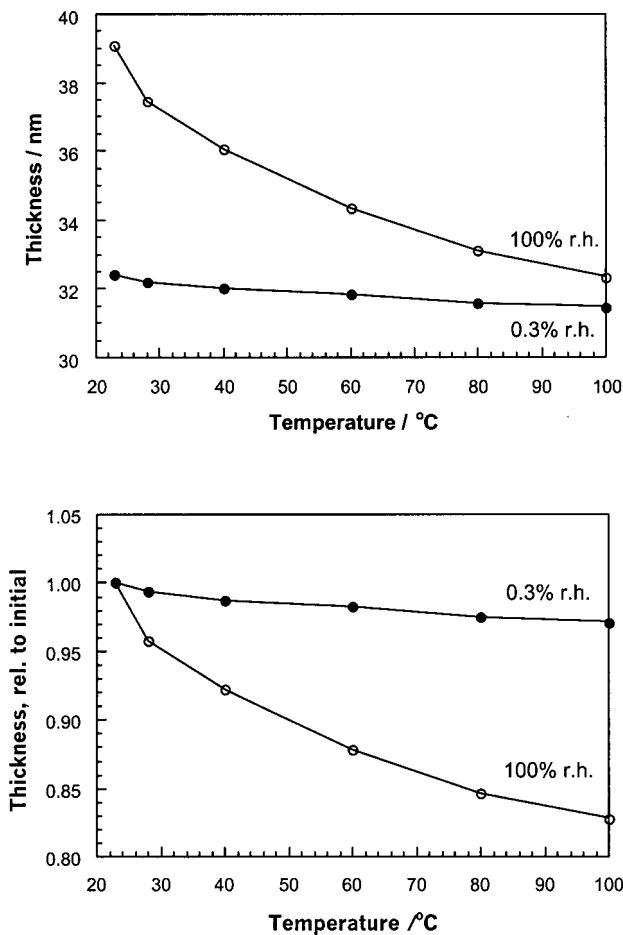


Fig. 1.6 Top: Film thickness of the same multilayer specimen as a function of temperature and of relative humidity (r.h.). The differences in thickness at identical temperatures are entirely due to a difference in water content within the film and not due to a negative thermal expansion coefficient. This difference becomes less pronounced at elevated temperature, when the water is driven out of the

film. Bottom: The same data as above, but normalised with respect to the initial film thickness. It becomes obvious that even small differences in temperature or humidity can easily account for changes in film thickness of the order of 5–10% depending on the swellability of the film. (G. Sukhorukov, J. Schmitt and G. Decher, unpublished results.)

tration is not the only parameter that allows one to control the thickness of individual layers. Rubner has shown that, for the case of weak polyelectrolytes, layer thickness can be precisely controlled by pH [247].

While the two methods above are simple but sufficient to get some preliminary ideas on the deposition behaviour, there are numerous additional characterization methods described in the other chapters of this book. Very recently, nuclear mag-