

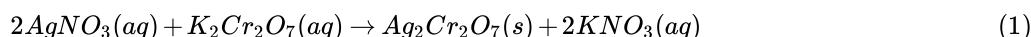
5.6 Representing Aqueous Reactions Molecular and Ionic and Complete Ionic Equations

Learning Objectives

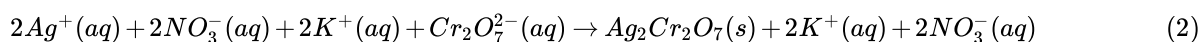
- To understand what information is obtained by each type of ionic equation

The chemical equations discussed earlier showed the identities of the reactants and the products and gave the stoichiometries of the reactions, but they told us very little about what was occurring in solution. In contrast, equations that show only the hydrated species focus our attention on the chemistry that is taking place and allow us to see similarities between reactions that might not otherwise be apparent.

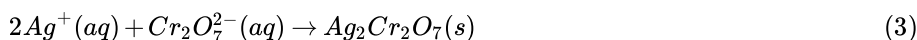
Let's consider the reaction of silver nitrate with potassium dichromate. When aqueous solutions of silver nitrate and potassium dichromate are mixed, silver dichromate forms as a red solid. The overall chemical equation that shows all the reactants and products as undissociated, electrically neutral compounds:



Although Equation 1 gives the identity of the reactants and the products, it does not show the identities of the actual species in solution. Because ionic substances such as $AgNO_3$ and $K_2Cr_2O_7$ are strong electrolytes, they dissociate completely in aqueous solution to form ions. In contrast, because $Ag_2Cr_2O_7$ is not very soluble, it separates from the solution as a solid. To find out what is actually occurring in solution, it is more informative to write the reaction as a **complete ionic equation**, showing which ions and molecules are hydrated and which are present in other forms and phases:

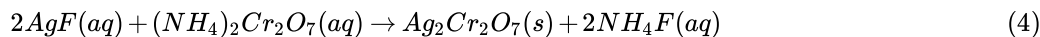


Note that $K^+(aq)$ and $NO_3^-(aq)$ ions are present on both sides of the equation, and their coefficients are the same on both sides. These ions are called **spectator ions** because they do not participate in the actual reaction. Canceling the spectator ions gives the **net ionic equation**, which shows only those species that participate in the chemical reaction:

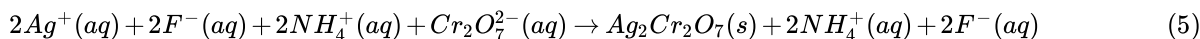


Both mass and charge must be conserved in chemical reactions because the numbers of electrons and protons do not change. For charge to be conserved, the sum of the charges of the ions multiplied by their coefficients must be the same on both sides of the equation. In Equation 3, the charge on the left side is $2(+1) + 1(-2) = 0$, which is the same as the charge of a neutral $Ag_2Cr_2O_7$ formula unit.

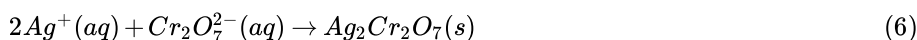
By eliminating the spectator ions, we can focus on the chemistry that takes place in a solution. For example, the overall chemical equation for the reaction between silver fluoride and ammonium dichromate is as follows:



The complete ionic equation for this reaction is as follows:



Because two $NH_4^+(aq)$ and two $F^-(aq)$ ions appear on both sides of Equation 5, they are spectator ions. They can therefore be canceled to give the net ionic equation (Equation 6), which is identical to Equation 3:



If we look at net ionic equations, it becomes apparent that many different combinations of reactants can result in the same net chemical reaction. For example, we can predict that silver fluoride could be replaced by silver nitrate in the preceding reaction without affecting the outcome of the reaction.

Only strong electrolytes can be separated into their component ions. To determine which compounds are strong electrolytes, you first look to see if they are designated as **aqueous**, meaning their formula is followed by the symbol (aq).

Not all aqueous species can be separated into ions, be no species that are not aqueous can be separated into ions.

Once you have identified the aqueous species, you need to see if the substance is either

a) an ionically-bonded compound

or

b) one of the six strong acids: HCl, HBr, HI, HNO₃, HClO₄, or H₂SO₄.

Only those aqueous compounds that fall into either category a) or b) can be separated into ions.

Thus, as you learned previously, most covalently-bonded compounds, even if they are aqueous, will not be separated into ions.

Example 1

Write the overall chemical equation, the complete ionic equation, and the net ionic equation for the reaction of aqueous barium nitrate with aqueous sodium phosphate to give solid barium phosphate and a solution of sodium nitrate.

Given: reactants and products

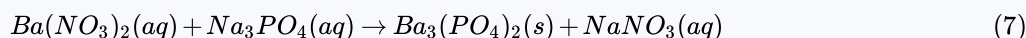
Asked for: overall, complete ionic, and net ionic equations

Strategy:

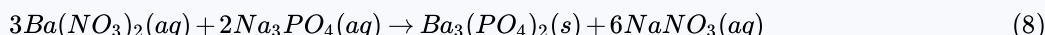
Write and balance the overall chemical equation. Write all the soluble reactants and products in their dissociated form to give the complete ionic equation; then cancel species that appear on both sides of the complete ionic equation to give the net ionic equation.

Solution:

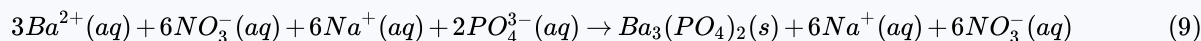
From the information given, we can write the unbalanced chemical equation for the reaction:



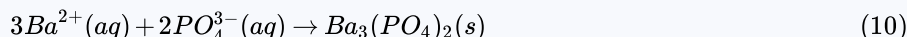
Because the product is Ba₃(PO₄)₂, which contains three Ba²⁺ ions and two PO₄³⁻ ions per formula unit, we can balance the equation by inspection:



This is the overall balanced chemical equation for the reaction, showing the reactants and products in their undissociated form. To obtain the complete ionic equation, we write each soluble reactant and product in dissociated form:



The six NO₃⁻(aq) ions and the six Na⁺(aq) ions that appear on both sides of the equation are spectator ions that can be canceled to give the net ionic equation:

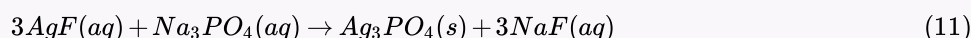


Exercise 1

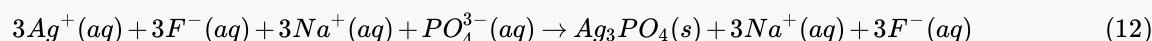
Write the overall chemical equation, the complete ionic equation, and the net ionic equation for the reaction of aqueous silver fluoride with aqueous sodium phosphate to give solid silver phosphate and a solution of sodium fluoride.

Answer:

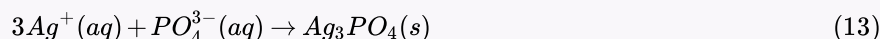
overall chemical equation:



complete ionic equation:



net ionic equation:



Summary

The chemical equation for a reaction in solution can be written in three ways. The **overall chemical equation** shows all the substances present in their undissociated forms; the **complete ionic equation** shows all the substances present in the form in which they actually exist in solution; and the **net ionic equation** is derived from the complete ionic equation by omitting all **spectator ions**, ions that occur on both sides of the equation with the same coefficients. Net ionic equations demonstrate that many different combinations of reactants can give the same net chemical reaction.

Key Takeaway

- A complete ionic equation consists of the net ionic equation and spectator ions.

Conceptual Problem

1. What information can be obtained from a complete ionic equation that cannot be obtained from the overall chemical equation?

Contributors

- Modified by [Joshua Halpern](#) ([Howard University](#))

5.6 Representing Aqueous Reactions Molecular and Ionic and Complete Ionic Equations is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.