

## 5.6: The Lewis Model - Representing Valence Electrons with Dots

### Learning Objectives

- To use Lewis electron dot symbols to predict the number of bonds an element will form.

Why are some substances chemically bonded molecules and others are an association of ions? The answer to this question depends upon the electronic structures of the atoms and nature of the chemical forces within the compounds. Although there are no sharply defined boundaries, chemical bonds are typically classified into three main types: ionic bonds, covalent bonds, and metallic bonds. In this chapter, each type of bond will be discussed and the general properties found in typical substances in which the bond type occurs

1. Ionic bonds results from **electrostatic forces that exist between ions of opposite charge**. These bonds typically involves a metal with a nonmetal
2. Covalent bonds **result from the sharing of electrons between two atoms**. The bonds typically involves one nonmetallic element with another
3. Metallic bonds These bonds are found in solid metals (copper, iron, aluminum) with each metal bonded to several neighboring groups and bonding electrons free to move throughout the 3-dimensional structure.

Each bond classification is discussed in detail in subsequent sections of the chapter. Let's look at the preferred arrangements of electrons in atoms when they form chemical compounds.

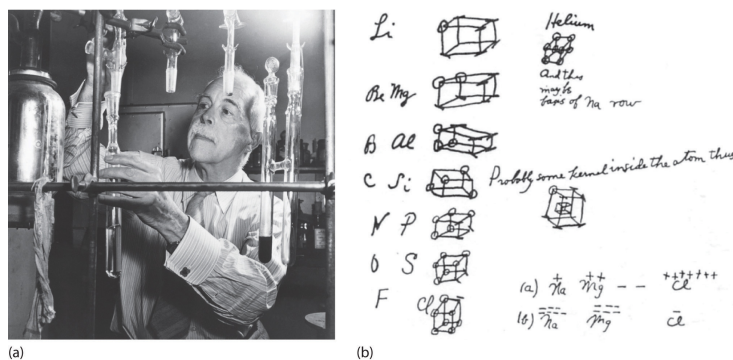


Figure 5.6.1: G. N. Lewis and the Octet Rule. (a) Lewis is working in the laboratory. (b) In Lewis's original sketch for the octet rule, he initially placed the electrons at the corners of a cube rather than placing them as we do now.

### Lewis Symbols

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American chemist G. N. Lewis (1875–1946) devised a system of symbols—now called *Lewis electron dot symbols* (often shortened to *Lewis dot symbols*) that can be used for predicting the number of bonds formed by most elements in their compounds. Each Lewis dot symbol consists of the chemical symbol for an element surrounded by dots that represent its valence electrons.

#### Lewis Dot symbols:

- convenient representation of valence electrons
- allows you to keep track of valence electrons during bond formation
- consists of the chemical symbol for the element plus a dot for each valence electron

To write an element's Lewis dot symbol, we place dots representing its valence electrons, one at a time, around the element's chemical symbol. Up to four dots are placed above, below, to the left, and to the right of the symbol (in any order, as long as elements with four or fewer valence electrons have no more than one dot in each position). The next dots, for elements with more than four valence electrons, are again distributed one at a time, each paired with one of the first four. For example, the electron configuration for atomic sulfur is  $[\text{Ne}]3s^23p^4$ , thus there are **six** valence electrons. Its Lewis symbol would therefore be:



Fluorine, for example, with the electron configuration  $[\text{He}]2s^22p^5$ , has seven valence electrons, so its Lewis dot symbol is constructed as follows:

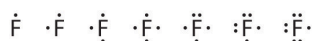


Figure 8.1.2.

Lewis used the unpaired dots to predict the number of bonds that an element will form in a compound. Consider the symbol for nitrogen in Figure 8.1.2. The Lewis dot symbol explains why nitrogen, with three unpaired valence electrons, tends to form compounds in which it shares the unpaired electrons to form three bonds. Boron, which also has three unpaired valence electrons in its Lewis dot symbol, also tends to form compounds with three bonds, whereas carbon, with four unpaired valence electrons in its Lewis dot symbol, tends to share all of its unpaired valence electrons by forming compounds in which it has four bonds.

Element	Electron config.	Electron dot symbol
Li	$[\text{He}]2s^1$	Li ·
Be	$[\text{He}]2s^2$	·Be·
B	$[\text{He}]2s^22p^1$	·B·
C	$[\text{He}]2s^22p^2$	·C·
N	$[\text{He}]2s^22p^3$	·N·
O	$[\text{He}]2s^22p^4$	·O·
F	$[\text{He}]2s^22p^5$	·F·
Ne	$[\text{He}]2s^22p^6$	·Ne·

Figure 5.6.2: Lewis Dot Symbols for the Elements in Period 2

Li has one dot on the right, Be has one dot on the left and right, B has one dot on the left, right, and above. C has one dot above, below, on the left and on the right. N has one dot above, below, on the left and two dots on the right. O has two dots on the left and right and one dot above and below. F has two dots above, on the left, on the right and on dot below. Ne has two dots above, below, on the right, and on the left.



## The Octet Rule

In 1904, Richard Abegg formulated what is now known as *Abegg's rule*, which states that the difference between the maximum positive and negative valences of an element is frequently eight. This rule was used later in 1916 when Gilbert N. Lewis formulated the "octet rule" in his cubical atom theory. The **octet rule** refers to the tendency of atoms to prefer to have eight electrons in the *valence shell*. When atoms have fewer than eight electrons, they tend to react and form more stable compounds. Atoms will react to get in the most stable state possible. A complete octet is very stable because all orbitals will be full. Atoms with greater stability have less energy, so a reaction that increases the stability of the atoms will release energy in the form of heat or light ;reactions that decrease stability must absorb energy, getting colder.

When discussing the octet rule, we do not consider *d* or *f* electrons. Only the *s* and *p* electrons are involved in the octet rule, making it a useful rule for the *main group elements* (elements not in the transition metal or inner-transition metal blocks); an octet in these atoms corresponds to an electron configurations ending with  $s^2p^6$ .

### Definition: Octet Rule

A stable arrangement is attained when the atom is surrounded by eight electrons. This octet can be made up by own electrons and some electrons which are shared. Thus, an atom continues to form bonds until an octet of electrons is made. This is known as octet rule by Lewis.

1. Normally two electrons pair up and forms a bond, e.g.,  $H_2$
2. For most atoms there will be a maximum of eight electrons in the valence shell (octet structure), e.g.,  $CH_4$

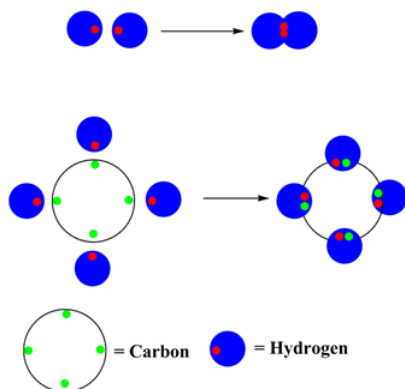


Figure 1: Bonding in  $H_2$  and methane ( $CH_4$ )

A hydrogen bonds with each of the four valence electrons of a carbon meaning that four hydrogens can bond with one carbon.

The other tendency of atoms is to maintain a neutral charge. Only the noble gases (the elements on the right-most column of the periodic table) have zero charge with filled valence octets. All of the other elements have a charge when they have eight electrons all to themselves. The result of these two guiding principles is the explanation for much of the reactivity and bonding that is observed within atoms: atoms seek to share electrons in a way that minimizes charge while fulfilling an octet in the valence shell.

The noble gases rarely form compounds. They have the most stable configuration (full octet, no charge), so they have no reason to react and change their configuration. All other elements attempt to gain, lose, or share electrons to achieve a noble gas configuration.

### ✓ Example 5.6.1: Salt

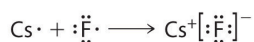
The formula for table salt is  $NaCl$ . It is the result of  $Na^+$  ions and  $Cl^-$  ions bonding together. If sodium metal and chlorine gas mix under the right conditions, they will form salt. The sodium loses an electron, and the chlorine gains that electron. In the process, a great amount of light and heat is released. The resulting salt is mostly unreactive — it is stable. It will not undergo any explosive reactions, unlike the sodium and chlorine that it is made of. Why?

#### Solution

Referring to the octet rule, atoms attempt to get a noble gas electron configuration, which is eight valence electrons. Sodium has one valence electron, so giving it up would result in the same electron configuration as neon. Chlorine has seven valence electrons, so if it takes one it will have eight (an octet). Chlorine has the electron configuration of argon when it gains an electron.

The octet rule could have been satisfied if chlorine gave up all seven of its valence electrons and sodium took them. In that case, both would have the electron configurations of noble gases, with a full valence shell. However, their charges would be much higher. It would be  $Na^{7-}$  and  $Cl^{7+}$ , which is much less stable than  $Na^+$  and  $Cl^-$ . Atoms are more stable when they have no charge, or a small charge.

Lewis dot symbols can also be used to represent the ions in ionic compounds. The reaction of cesium with fluorine, for example, to produce the ionic compound  $CsF$  can be written as follows:



No dots are shown on  $\text{Cs}^+$  in the product because cesium has lost its single valence electron to fluorine. The transfer of this electron produces the  $\text{Cs}^+$  ion, which has the valence electron configuration of Xe, and the  $\text{F}^-$  ion, which has a total of eight valence electrons (an octet) and the Ne electron configuration. This description is consistent with the statement that among the main group elements, ions in simple binary ionic compounds generally have the electron configurations of the nearest noble gas. The charge of each ion is written in the product, and the anion and its electrons are enclosed in brackets. This notation emphasizes that the ions are associated electrostatically; no electrons are shared between the two elements.

*Atoms often gain, lose, or share electrons to achieve the same number of electrons as the noble gas closest to them in the periodic table.*

As you might expect for such a qualitative approach to bonding, there are exceptions to the octet rule, which we describe elsewhere. These include molecules in which one or more atoms contain fewer or more than eight electrons.

## Summary

Lewis dot symbols can be used to predict the number of bonds formed by most elements in their compounds. One convenient way to predict the number and basic arrangement of bonds in compounds is by using **Lewis electron dot symbols**, which consist of the chemical symbol for an element surrounded by dots that represent its valence electrons, grouped into pairs often placed above, below, and to the left and right of the symbol. The structures reflect the fact that the elements in period 2 and beyond tend to gain, lose, or share electrons to reach a total of eight valence electrons in their compounds, the so-called **octet rule**. Hydrogen, with only two valence electrons, does not obey the octet rule.

## Contributors and Attributions

- Mike Blaber (Florida State University)
- Wikipedia
- National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (India)

5.6: The Lewis Model - Representing Valance Electrons with Dots is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- [8.1: Chemical Bonds, Lewis Symbols, and the Octet Rule](#) is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#).