

5.7: Net Ionic Equations

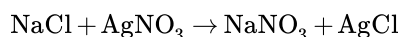
Learning Objectives

- Write ionic and net ionic equations for chemical reactions involving ions.

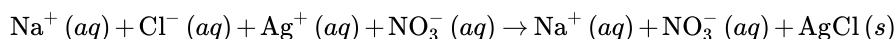
At sports events around the world, a small number of athletes fiercely compete on fields and in stadiums. They get tired, dirty, and sometimes hurt as they try to win the game. Surrounding them are thousands of spectators watching and cheering. Would the game be different without the spectators? Definitely! Spectators provide encouragement to the team and generate enthusiasm. Although the spectators are not playing the game, they are certainly a part of the process.

Net Ionic Equations

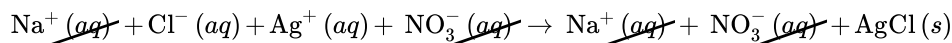
We can write a molecular equation for the formation of silver chloride precipitate:



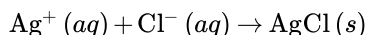
The corresponding **ionic equation** is written to show the *ions* that are dissolved in solution:



If you look carefully at the ionic equation, you will notice that the sodium ion and the nitrate ion appear unchanged on both sides of the equation. When the two solutions are mixed, neither the Na^+ nor the NO_3^- ions participate in the reaction. They can be eliminated from the reaction.



A **spectator ion** is an ion that does not take part in the chemical reaction and is found in solution both before and after the reaction. In the above reaction, the sodium ion and the nitrate ion are both spectator ions. The equation can now be written without the spectator ions:



The **net ionic equation** is the chemical equation that shows only those elements, compounds, and ions that are directly involved in the chemical reaction. Notice that in writing the net ionic equation, the positively-charged silver cation was written first on the reactant side, followed by the negatively-charged chloride anion. This is somewhat customary because that is the order in which the ions must be written in the silver chloride product. However, it is not absolutely necessary to order the reactants in this way.

Net ionic equations must be balanced by both mass and charge. Balancing by mass means ensuring that there are equal masses of each element on the product and reactant sides. Balancing by charge means making sure that the overall charge is the same on both sides of the equation. In the above equation, the overall charge is zero, or neutral, on both sides of the equation. As a general rule, if you balance the molecular equation properly, the net ionic equation will end up being balanced by both mass and charge.

5.7.1 Example

When aqueous solutions of copper (II) chloride and potassium phosphate are mixed, a precipitate of copper (II) phosphate is formed. Write a balanced net ionic equation for this reaction.

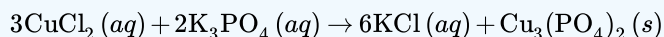
Solution

Step 1: Plan the problem.

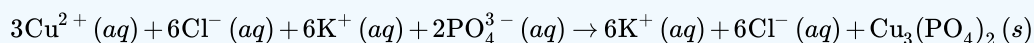
Write and balance the molecular equation first, making sure that all formulas are correct. Then write the ionic equation, showing all aqueous substances as ions. Carry through any coefficients. Finally, eliminate spectator ions and write the net ionic equation.

Step 2: Solve.

Molecular equation:

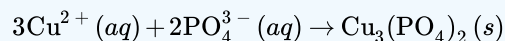


Ionic equation:



Notice that the balance of the equation is carried through when writing the dissociated ions. For example, there are six chloride ions on the reactant side because the coefficient of 3 is multiplied by the subscript of 2 on the copper (II) chloride formula. The spectator ions, K^{+} and Cl^{-} , can be eliminated.

Net ionic equation:



Step 3: Think about your result.

For a precipitation reaction, the net ionic equation always shows the two ions that come together to form the precipitate. The equation is balanced by mass and charge.

Summary

- A spectator ion is an ion that does not take part in the chemical reaction and is found in solution both before and after the reaction.
- The net ionic equation is the chemical equation that shows only those elements, compounds, and ions that are directly involved in the chemical reaction.
- An example of writing a net ionic equation is outlined.

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