1.1. Photon detectors

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Most detectors in high-energy, nuclear, and astrophysics rely on the detection of photons in or near the visible range, $100\,\mathrm{nm} \lesssim \lambda \lesssim 1000\,\mathrm{nm}$, or $E \approx$ a few eV. This range covers scintillation and Cherenkov radiation as well as the light detected in many astronomical observations.

Generally, photodetection involves generating a detectable electrical signal proportional to the (usually very small) number of incident photons. The process involves three distinct steps:

1. Generation of a primary photoelectron or electron-hole (e-h) pair by an incident photon by the photoelectric or photoconductive effect,
2. Amplification of the p.e. signal to detectable levels by one or more multiplicative bombardment steps and/or an avalanche process (usually), and,
3. Collection of the secondary electrons to form the electrical signal.

The important characteristics of a photodetector include the following in statistical averages:

1. Quantum efficiency (QE or ϵ_Q): the number of primary photoelectrons generated per incident photon ($0 \le \epsilon_Q \le 1$; in silicon more than one e-h pair per incident photon can be generated for $\lambda \lesssim 165$ nm),
2. Collection efficiency (CE or ϵ_C): the overall acceptance factor other than the generation of photoelectrons ($0 \le \epsilon_C \le 1$),
3. Gain (G): the number of electrons collected for each photoelectron generated,
4. Dark current or dark noise: the electrical signal when there is no photon,
5. Energy resolution: electronic noise (ENC or N_e) and statistical fluctuations in the amplification process compound the Poisson distribution of n_γ photons from a given source:

   $$\frac{\sigma(E)}{\langle E\rangle} = \sqrt{\frac{f_N}{n_\gamma \epsilon_Q \epsilon_C} + \left(\frac{N_e}{G n_\gamma \epsilon_Q \epsilon_C}\right)^2}\,, \tag{1.1}$$

   where f_N, or the excess noise factor (ENF), is the contribution to the energy distribution variance due to amplification statistics [10],
6. Dynamic range: the maximum signal available from the detector (this is usually expressed in units of the response to noise-equivalent power, or NEP, which is the optical input power that produces a signal-to-noise ratio of 1),
7. Time dependence of the response: this includes the transit time, which is the time between the arrival of the photon and the electrical pulse, and the transit time spread, which contributes to the pulse rise time and width, and
8. Rate capability: inversely proportional to the time needed, after the arrival of one photon, to get ready to receive the next.

The QE is a strong function of the photon wavelength (λ), and is usually quoted at maximum, together with a range of λ where the QE is comparable to its maximum. Spatial uniformity and linearity with respect to the number of photons are highly desirable in a photodetector's response.

Optimization of these factors involves many trade-offs and vary widely between applications. For example, while a large gain is desirable, attempts to increase the gain for a given device also increases the ENF and after-pulsing ("echos" of the main pulse). In solid-state devices, a higher QE often requires a compromise in the timing properties. In other types, coverage of large areas by focusing increases the transit time spread.

Other important considerations also are highly application-specific. These include the photon flux and wavelength range, the total area to be covered and the efficiency required, the volume available to accommodate the detectors, characteristics of the environment such as chemical composition, temperature, magnetic field, ambient background, as well ambient radiation of different types and, mode of operation (continuous or triggered), bias (high-voltage) requirements, power consumption, calibration needs, aging, cost, and so on. Several technologies employing different phenomena for the three steps described above, and many variants within each, offer a wide range of solutions to choose from. The salient features of the main technologies and the common variants are described below. Some key characteristics are summarized in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Representative characteristics of some photodetectors commonly used in particle physics. The time resolution of the devices listed here vary in the 10–2000 ps range.

Type	λ (nm)	$\epsilon_Q\,\epsilon_C$	Gain	Risetime (ns)	Area (mm^2)	1-p.e noise (Hz)	HV (V)	Price (USD)
PMT*	115–1100	0.15–0.25	10^3–10^7	0.7–10	10^2–10^5	10–10^4	500–3000	100–5000
MCP*	100–650	0.01–0.10	10^3–10^7	0.15–0.3	10^2–10^4	0.1–200	500–3500	10–6000
HPD*	115–850	0.1–0.3	10^3–10^4	7	10^2–10^5	10–10^3	$\sim 2\times10^4$	~600
GPM*	115–500	0.15–0.3	10^3–10^6	$O(0.1)$	$O(10)$	10–10^3	300–2000	$O(10)$
APD	300–1700	~0.7	10–10^8	$O(1)$	10–10^3	1–10^3	400–1400	$O(100)$
SiPM	400–550	0.15–0.3	10^5–10^6	~ 1	1–10	$O(10^6)$	30–60	$O(10)$
VLPC	500–600	~0.9	$\sim 5\times10^4$	~ 10	1	$O(10^4)$	~7	~1

∗These devices often come in multi-anode configurations. In such cases, area, noise, and price are to be considered on a "per readout-channel" basis.

1.1.1. ***Vacuum photodetectors***: Vacuum photodetectors can be broadly subdivided into three types: photomultiplier tubes, microchannel plates, and hybrid photodetectors.

1.1.1.1. *Photomultiplier tubes:* A versatile class of photon detectors, vacuum photomultiplier tubes (PMT) has been employed by a vast majority of all particle physics experiments to date [10]. Both "transmission-" and "reflection-type" PMT's are widely used. In the former, the photocathode material is deposited on the inside of a transparent window through which the photons enter, while in the latter, the photocathode material rests on a separate surface that the incident photons strike. The cathode material has a low work function, chosen for the wavelength band of interest. When a photon hits the cathode and liberates an electron (the photoelectric effect), the latter is accelerated and guided by electric fields to impinge on a secondary-emission electrode, or dynode, which then emits a few (~ 5) secondary electrons. The multiplication process is repeated typically 10 times in series to generate a sufficient number of electrons, which are collected at the anode for delivery to the external circuit. The total gain of a PMT depends on the applied high voltage V as $G = AV^{kn}$, where $k \approx 0.7$–0.8 (depending on the dynode material), n is the number of dynodes in the chain, and A a constant (which also depends on n). Typically, G is in the range of 10^5–10^6. Pulse risetimes are usually in the few nanosecond range. With *e.g.* two-level discrimination the effective time resolution can be much better.

A large variety of PMT's, including many just recently developed, covers a wide span of wavelength ranges from infrared (IR) to extreme ultraviolet (XUV) [11]. They are categorized by the window materials, photocathode materials, dynode structures, anode configurations, *etc.* Common window materials are borosilicate glass for IR to near-UV, fused quartz and sapphire (Al_2O_3) for UV, and MgF_2 or LiF for XUV. The choice of photocathode materials include a variety of mostly Cs- and/or Sb-based compounds such as CsI, CsTe, bi-alkali (SbRbCs, SbKCs), multi-alkali ($SbNa_2KCs$), GaAs(Cs), GaAsP, *etc.* Sensitive wavelengths and peak quantum efficiencies for these materials are summarized in Table 1.3. Typical dynode structures used in PMT's are circular cage, line focusing, box and grid, venetian blind, and fine mesh. In some cases, limited spatial resolution can be obtained by using a mosaic of multiple anodes.

PMT's are vulnerable to magnetic fields—sometimes even the geomagnetic field causes large orientation-dependent gain changes. A high-permeability metal shield is often necessary. However, proximity-focused PMT's, *e.g.* the fine-mesh types, can be used even in a high magnetic field (≥ 1 T) if the electron drift direction is parallel to the field.

1.1.1.2. *Microchannel plates:* A typical Microchannel plate (MCP) photodetector consists of one or more $\sim$2 mm thick glass plates with densely packed $O(10\ \mu\text{m})$-diameter cylindrical holes, or "channels", sitting between the transmission-type photocathode and anode planes, separated by $O(1\ \text{mm})$ gaps. Instead of discrete dynodes, the inner surface of each cylindrical tube serves as a continuous dynode for the entire cascade of multiplicative bombardments initiated by a photoelectron. Gain fluctuations can be minimized by operating in a saturation mode, whence each channel is only capable of a binary output, but the sum of all channel outputs remains proportional to the number of photons received so long as the photon flux is low enough to ensure that the probability of a single channel receiving more than one photon during a single time gate is negligible. MCP's are thin, offer good spatial resolution, have excellent time resolution (∼20 ps), and can tolerate random magnetic fields up to 0.1 T and axial fields up to ∼ 1 T. However, they suffer from relatively long recovery time per channel and short lifetime. MCP's are widely employed as image-intensifiers, although not so much in HEP or astrophysics.

1.1.1.3. *Hybrid photon detectors:* Hybrid photon detectors (HPD) combine the sensitivity of a vacuum PMT with the excellent spatial and energy resolutions of a Si sensor [19]. A single photoelectron ejected from the photocathode is accelerated through a potential difference of ∼20 kV before it impinges on the silicon sensor/anode. The gain nearly equals the maximum number of e-h pairs that could be created from the entire kinetic energy of the accelerated electron: $G \approx eV/w$, where e is the electronic charge, V is the applied potential difference, and $w \approx 3.7$ eV is the mean energy required to create an e-h pair in Si at room temperature. Since the gain is achieved in a single step, one might expect to have the excellent resolution of a simple Poisson statistic with large mean, but in fact it is even better, thanks to the Fano effect discussed in Sec. 1.11.

Low-noise electronics must be used to read out HPD's if one intends to take advantage of the low fluctuations in gain, *e.g.* when counting small numbers of photons. HPD's can have the same $\epsilon_Q\,\epsilon_C$ and window geometries as PMT's and can be segmented down to ∼50 μm. However, they require rather high biases and will not function in a magnetic field. The exception is proximity-focused devices (⇒ no (de)magnification) in an axial field. Current applications of HPD's include the CMS hadronic calorimeter and the RICH detector in LHCb.

Table 1.3: Properties of photocathode and window materials commonly used in vacuum photodetectors [11].

Photocathode material	λ (nm)	Window material	Peak ϵ_Q (λ/nm)
CsI	115–200	MgF_2	0.15 (135)
CsTe	115–240	MgF_2	0.18 (210)
Bi-alkali	300–650	Borosilicate	0.27 (390)
	160-650	Quartz	0.27 (390)
Multi-alkali	300–850	Borosilicate	0.20 (360)
	160-850	Quartz	0.23 (280)
GaAs(Cs)*	160–930	Quartz	0.23 (280)
GaAsP(Cs)	300-750	Borosilicate	0.42 (560)

*Reflection type photocathode is used.

1.1.2. ***Gaseous photon detectors***: In gaseous photomultipliers (GPM) a photoelectron in a suitable gas mixture initiates an avalanche in a high-field region, producing a large number of secondary impact-ionization electrons. In principle the charge multiplication and collection processes are identical to those employed in gaseous tracking detectors such as multiwire proportional chambers, micromesh gaseous detectors (Micromegas), or gas electron multipliers (GEM). These are discussed in Sections 1.7 and 1.8.

The devices can be divided into two types depending on the photocathode material. One type uses solid photocathode materials much in the same way as PMT's. Since it is resistant to gas mixtures typically used in tracking chambers, CsI is a common choice. In the other type, photoionization occurs on suitable molecules vaporized and mixed in the drift volume. Most gases have photoionization work functions in excess of 10 eV, which would limit their sensitivity to wavelengths far too short. However, vapors of TMAE (tetrakis dimethyl-amine ethylene) or TEA (tri-ethyl-amine), which have smaller work functions (5.3 eV for TMAE and 7.5 eV for TEA), are suited for XUV photon detection [12]. Since devices like GEM's offer sub-mm spatial resolution, GPM's are often used as position-sensitive photon detectors. They can be made into flat panels to cover large areas ($O(1\ \mathrm{m}^2)$), can operate in high magnetic fields, and are relatively inexpensive. Many of the ring imaging Cherenkov (RICH) detectors to date have used GPM's for the detection of Cherenkov light [13]. Special care must be taken to suppress the photon-feedback process in GPM's. It is also important to maintain high purity of the gas as minute traces of O_2 can significantly degrade the detection efficiency.

1.1.3. ***Solid-state photon detectors***: In a phase of rapid development, solid-state photodetectors are competing with vacuum- or gas-based devices for many existing applications and making way for a multitude of new ones. Compared to traditional vacuum- and gaseous photodetectors, solid-state devices are more compact, lightweight, rugged, tolerant to magnetic fields, and often cheaper. They also allow fine pixelization, are easy to integrate into large systems, and can operate at low electric potentials, while matching or exceeding most performance criteria. They are particularly well suited for detection of γ- and X-rays. Except for applications where coverage of very large areas or dynamic range is required, solid-state detectors are proving to be the better choice. Some hybrid devices attempt to combine the best features of different technologies while applications of nanotechnology are opening up exciting new possibilities.

Silicon photodiodes (PD) are widely used in high-energy physics as particle detectors and in a great number of applications (including solar cells!) as light detectors. The structure is discussed in some detail in Sec. 1.11. In its simplest form, the PD is a reverse-biased *p*-*n* junction. Photons with energies above the indirect bandgap energy (wavelengths shorter than about 1050 nm, depending on the temperature) can create *e*-*h* pairs (the photoconductive effect), which are collected on the *p* and *n* sides, respectively. Often, as in the PD's used for crystal scintillator readout in CLEO, L3, Belle,BaBar, and GLAST, intrinsic silicon is doped to create a *p*-*i*-*n* structure. The reverse bias increases the thickness of the depleted region; in the case of these particular detectors, to full depletion at a depth of about 100 μm. Increasing the depletion depth decreases the capacitance (and hence electronic noise) and extends the red response. Quantum efficiency can exceed 90%, but falls toward the red because of the increasing absorption length of light in silicon. The absorption length reaches 100 μm at 985 nm. However, since $G = 1$, amplification is necessary. Optimal low-noise amplifiers are slow, but, even so, noise limits the minimum detectable signal in room-temperature devices to several hundred photons.

Very large arrays containing $O(10^7)$ of $O(10\ \mu\mathrm{m}^2)$-sized photodioides pixelizing a plane are widely used to photograph all sorts of things from everyday subjects at visible wavelengths to crystal structures with X-rays and astronomical objects from infrared to UV. To limit the number of readout channels, these are made into charge-coupled devices (CCD), where pixel-to-pixel signal transfer takes place over thousands of synchronous cycles with sequential output through shift registers [14]. Thus, high spatial resolution is achieved at the expense of speed and timing precision. Custom-made CCD's have virtually replaced photographic plates and other imagers for astronomy and in spacecraft. Typical QE's exceed 90% over much of the visible spectrum, and "thick" CCD's have useful QE up to $\lambda = 1\ \mu$m. Active Pixel Sensor (APS) arrays with a preamplifier on each pixel and CMOS processing afford higher speeds, but are challenged at longer wavelengths. Much R&D is underway to overcome the limitations of both CCD and CMOS imagers.

In avalanche photodiodes (APD), an exponential cascade of impact ionizations initiated by the initial photogenerated *e*-*h* pair under a large reverse-bias voltage leads to an avalanche breakdown [15]. As a result, detectable electrical response can be obtained from low-intensity optical signals down to single photons. Excellent junction uniformity is critical, and a guard ring is generally used as a protection against edge breakdown. Well-designed APD's, such as those used in CMS' crystal-based electromagnetic calorimeter, have achieved $\epsilon_Q\,\epsilon_C \approx 0.7$ with sub-ns response time. The sensitive wavelength window and gain depend on the semiconductor used. The gain is typically 10–200 in linear and up to 10^8 in Geiger mode of operation. Stability and close monitoring of the operating temperature are important for linear-mode operation, and substantial cooling is often necessary. Position-sensitive APD's use time information at multiple anodes to calculate the hit position.

One of the most promising recent developments in the field is that of devices consisting of large arrays ($O(10^3)$) of tiny APD's packed over a small area ($O(1\ \mathrm{mm}^2)$) and operated in a limited Geiger mode [16]. Of the many names for this class of photodetectors, "SiPM" (for "Silicon PhotoMultiplier") seems to be the most common at the moment. Although each cell only offers a binary output, linearity with respect to the number of photons is achieved by summing the cell outputs in the same way as with a MCP in saturation mode (see above). While SiPM's have yet to go into commercial production, prototypes are being studied by the thousands for various purposes including medical imaging, *e.g.* positron emission tomography (PET). These compact, rugged, and economical devices allow auto-calibration through decent separation of photoelectron peaks and offer gains of $O(10^6)$ at a moderate bias voltage (~50 V). However, the single-photoelectron noise of a SiPM, being the logical "or" of $O(10^3)$ Geiger APD's, is rather large: $O(1\ \mathrm{MHz/mm}^2)$ at room temperature. Also, the recovery time for each cell can be several microseconds. SiPM's are particularly well-suited for applications where triggered pulses of 10 or more photoelectrons are expected over a small area, *e.g.* fiber-guided scintillation light. Intense R&D is expected to lower the noise level and improve the device-to-device uniformity, resulting in coverage of larger areas and wider applications. Attempts are being made to combine the fabrication of the sensors and the front-end electronics (ASIC) in the same process with the goal of making SiPMs and other finely pixelized solid-state photodetectors extremely easy to use.

Of late, much R&D has been directed to *p-i-n* diode arrays based on thin polycrystalline diamond films formed by chemical vapor deposition (CVD) on a hot substrate (~1000 K) from a hydrocarbon-containing gas mixture under low pressure (~100 mbar). These devices have maximum sensitivity in the extreme- to moderate-UV region [17]. Many desirable characteristics, including high tolerance to radiation and temperature fluctuations, low dark noise, blindness to most of the solar radiation spectrum, and relatively low cost make them ideal for space-based UV/XUV astronomy, measurement of synchrotron radiation, and luminosity monitoring at (future) lepton collider(s).

Visible-light photon counters (VLPC) utilize the formation of an impurity band only 50 meV below the conduction band in As-doped Si to generate strong ($G \approx 5 \times 10^4$) yet sharp response to single photons with $\epsilon_Q \approx 0.9$ [18]. The smallness of the band gap considerably reduces the gain dispersion. Only a very small bias (~7 V) is needed, but high sensitivity to infrared photons requires cooling below 10 K. The dark noise increases sharply and exponentially with both temperature and bias. The Run 2 DØ detector uses 86000 VLPC's to read the optical signal from its scintillating-fiber tracker and scintillator-strip preshower detectors.

1.2. Organic scintillators

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Organic scintillators are broadly classed into three types, crystalline, liquid, and plastic, all of which utilize the ionization produced by charged particles (see Sec. **@Sec.ionizationenergyloss@**) of this *Review*) to generate optical photons, usually in the blue to green wavelength regions [20]. Plastic scintillators are by far the most widely used. Crystal organic scintillators are practically unused in high-energy physics.

Densities range from 1.03 to 1.20 g cm^{-3}. Typical photon yields are about 1 photon per 100 eV of energy deposit [21]. A one-cm-thick scintillator traversed by a minimum-ionizing particle will therefore yield $\approx 2 \times 10^4$ photons. The resulting photoelectron signal will depend on the collection and transport efficiency of the optical package and the quantum efficiency of the photodetector.

Plastic scintillators do not respond linearly to the ionization density. Very dense ionization columns emit less light than expected