

# Care and Use of the Compound Light Microscope

## Time Estimates for Completing this Lab

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The activities in this laboratory exercise can be completed in 2 to 2.5 hours. Extra time will be required to complete the review sheets at the end, or they may be assigned as homework. Times listed are only estimates.

**Activity 2.1:** Learning the Parts of a Light Microscope  
20 minutes

**Activity 2.2:** Viewing a Specimen with a Compound Microscope  
30 minutes

**Activity 2.3:** Inversion of Image: Viewing the Letter *e*  
20 minutes

**Activity 2.4:** Perceiving Depth of Field  
20 minutes

**Activity 2.5:** Determining the Diameter of the Field of View  
30 minutes

## List of Materials

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This list of materials shows the quantities needed for a standard 24-seat lab, with six tables and four seats at each table. [Note: Other than the microscopes, if resources or space is limited, this lab could be set up with one set of all other items per pair of students, or even one set per table. This would reduce the quantities needed from 24 of each item to 12 of each if shared in pairs, or to 6 of each if shared per table.]

- 24 compound light microscopes
- 24 sets of prepared microscope slides of various tissues
- 24 prepared microscope slides of the letter “e”
- 24 prepared microscope slides of intersecting colored threads
- 24 clear millimeter rulers
- 24 pads of lens paper

## To Do in Advance

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- ✓ \_\_\_\_ 1. Set up equipment and supplies on all laboratory tables.

- √ \_\_\_\_ 2. Familiarize yourself with the particular model (or models) of microscope your students will be using.
- √ \_\_\_\_ 3. Be sure all microscopes are clean and the lowest power objective is in place.
- √ \_\_\_\_ 4. Perform Activity 2.4 in advance so you know the correct order of the threads on the particular slides that your students are using.

## Tips and Trouble Spots

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### Introduction

Take time at the beginning of your laboratory session to discuss the section “Care and Use of the Compound Microscope” with your students. This step can help you avoid many problems, including potential damage to both the microscopes and the slides.

You may begin by polling the class to see which students do and do not have microscope experience. Those lacking experience will require more hands-on guidance from you while doing the exercise. If you do not regularly check on your students’ progress, they may skip steps or not realize they are not using the equipment appropriately. If many students are lacking experience, it may be worthwhile to provide a class demonstration, showing your students the location of the specific parts of the microscope.

### Activity 2.1: Learning the Parts of a Light Microscope

Be familiar with the microscopes in your laboratory. They may not have a mechanical stage. Instead, they may have two movable stage clips. If so, these should be swung out to the side, the slide positioned between them, then the clips rotated in to secure the slide. Students should not lift the stage clips as they will become bent and useless with time.

If more than one model of microscope is in use in your lab, be sure students are aware of any differences and become familiar with them.

Objective lenses may have two numbers stamped on them. The magnification may not have an “X,” but typical magnifications are 3X or 4X for a scanning objective, 10X for low, 40X to 45X for high, and 100X for oil immersion. Other numbers, if present, are usually DIN numbers, which refer to the optical standards used for the lens.

Students often have trouble distinguishing between the iris diaphragm and the condenser lens. They may need assistance with this.

### Activity 2.2: Viewing a Specimen with a Compound Microscope

Stress to your students the importance of always starting on the lowest power because they can more easily locate the specimen and should not (usually) be able to plow through the slide. Be sure they know to only use the fine-focus adjustment knob when moving to high power so they do not damage the slide.

Students working with a binocular microscope may need assistance in positioning the two eyepieces so they get a single image. Watch for students closing one eye and using only one eyepiece and help them make the needed adjustment.

### Activity 2.3: Inversion of Image: Viewing the Letter e

Students may be unclear on how to position the slide on the stage. Tell them to place the slide so the letter “e” appears as it would if they were reading their book.

## Activity 2.4: Perceiving Depth of Field

Students should be reminded to only use the fine adjustment knob when they move to high power and to proceed slowly and cautiously. Too often they forget this during this activity and crack the slide while exploring the order of the three threads.

Colored thread slides from different manufacturers may have the threads in different orders. Be sure to check the slides your students will be using in advance so you know the correct order of the threads from top to bottom.

## Activity 2.5: Determining the Diameter of the Field of View

Students may be unclear on how to place the ruler through the field of view. Draw or show an example on the screen or a board so students see the importance of centering the scale to measure the diameter, and the importance of placing a number at the left edge. Students also need to be reminded that if the diameter falls between marks on the ruler, they estimate the additional distance, not just go by the last whole number. Thinner rulers are best for this activity.

Students get frustrated when moving to high power as they mostly see part of one of the number marker lines. It becomes almost impossible to estimate millimeters with high power, but that helps reinforce the need for other units, such as micrometers, for microscopic measurement.

## Exercise 2 Answers

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### Before You Begin, Consider This...

Answers will vary.

### Activity 2.1 Answers

- A 1. ▶ Answers will vary.
- 2. ▶ One knob moves the stage forward and backward, and the other moves the stage left and right.
- 6. ▶ Turning the coarse adjustment knob clockwise lowers the stage; turning the knob counterclockwise raises the stage.
- B ▶  $10X \cdot 40X = 400X$  total magnification
- ▶ MAKING CONNECTIONS: The fine adjustment knob is designed for very precise and very small changes in focus to bring an already focused object into the sharpest focus, and thus one complete revolution will barely move the stage. In contrast, the coarse adjustment knob is designed for rapid initial focusing and thus produces much more movement per revolution.

### Activity 2.2 Answers

- C 3. ▶ Moving the condenser lens will increase or decrease both the total illumination and the resolution of the field of view.
- D 4. ▶ Moving to higher magnification decreases the overall size of the field of view.
  - ▶ Moving to higher magnification decreases the field of view, and thus less light is seen.
- ▶ MAKING CONNECTIONS: The entire specimen is illuminated from below. Only the light passing through the particular part of the specimen in the field of view reaches the eye.

When moving to higher power, the field of view is reduced. Less of the specimen is in the field of view, so less light is transmitted.

### Activity 2.3 Answers

- A 1. ▶ e  
 2. ▶ e  
 ▶ The image is upside down and reversed.  
 3. ▶ As the slide moves to the right, the image appears to move left.  
 ▶ As the slide moves away, the image appears to move closer.  
 ▶ MAKING CONNECTIONS: The image appears to be inverted when viewed through the microscope—it is upside down and also reversed from side to side. When the slide is moved in one direction, through the microscope it appears to be moving in the opposite direction.

### Activity 2.4 Answers

- A 5. ▶ Answers will vary depending on what slides students view.  
 ▶ MAKING CONNECTIONS: Depth of field decreases as magnification increases. The image is magnified, but the actual diameter of the tube through which the image is viewed is unchanged, so less of it is visible within that space.

### Activity 2.5 Answers

- A 6. ▶ Magnification data will depend on your particular microscopes, but the most common values are listed below.

Type of objective lens	Magnification of obj. lens	Magnification of ocular lens	Total magnification	Diameter of the field of view (mm)
Scanning	4X	10X	40X	Answers will vary
Low power	10X	10X	100X	Answers will vary
High power	40X	10X	400X	Answers will vary

7. ▶ The diameter decreases as the magnification increases.  
 B 1. ▶ The magnification of the ocular lens is 10X. If you are using the scanning objective lens, the total magnification will be 10X times 4X, which equals 40X.  
 3. ▶ Answers vary with the structures selected and the individual estimations each student makes.  
 7. ▶ Answers will vary.  
 8. ▶ Answers will vary.  
 ▶ MAKING CONNECTIONS: Answers will vary.

### Answers to Review Sheet

1. e  
 2. b  
 3. f

4. d
5. c
6. a
7. g
8. h
9. With a parfocal microscope, initial focusing is done rapidly with the scanning objective or low power objective, where more of the specimen is visible (larger field of view) so that it can easily be centered. Once the specimen is centered and in focus at low magnification, the magnification can be increased and the specimen remains almost in focus so that only the fine adjustment knob needs to be used. This makes it easier to get the desired object centered and in focus, and it minimizes the risk of damage to the microscope and the slides.
10. Resolving power is the ability to distinguish close objects as separate and distinct.
11. Working distance is the distance between the slide and the objective lens.
12. The field of view refers to the area of the slide that is visible when viewed through the microscope.

13.

Low magnification	High magnification
Bigger field of view	Smaller field of view
Greater depth of field	Smaller depth of field
More light transmitted	Less light transmitted
Less detail visible	More detail visible

14. The image will be upside down and reversed left to right.
15. The depth of field refers to the thickness or depth of a specimen that is currently in focus.
16. To determine the diameter of the field of view, use the equation  $M_1D_1 = M_2D_2$ .

$$M_1D_1 = 40X \times 5.0 \text{ mm} = 200 \text{ mm}$$

Thus  $M_2D_2$  must also equal 200 mm.  $M_2 = 100X$ , so  $D_2$  must equal 2.0 mm.

The depth of field at 100X is 2.0 mm.