

# 23.1 Mass defect and nuclear binding energy

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Total: 27 marks

**KEY WORDS** energy 能量 • mass defect 质量亏损 • binding energy 结合能  
• binding energy per nucleon 比结合能 • nucleon number 核子数

## Objective

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Build the skills to answer exam questions on **mass defect and binding energy**.

**You must be able to:**

- use  $E = mc^2$  and balance **nuclear equations**
- define **mass defect** and **binding energy**
- use the **binding energy per nucleon** curve for fusion and fission

## 1 Worked examples

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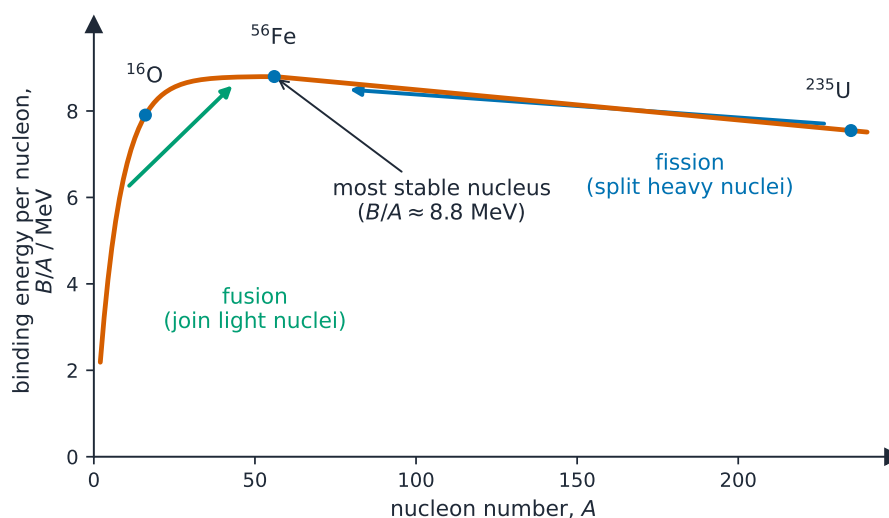
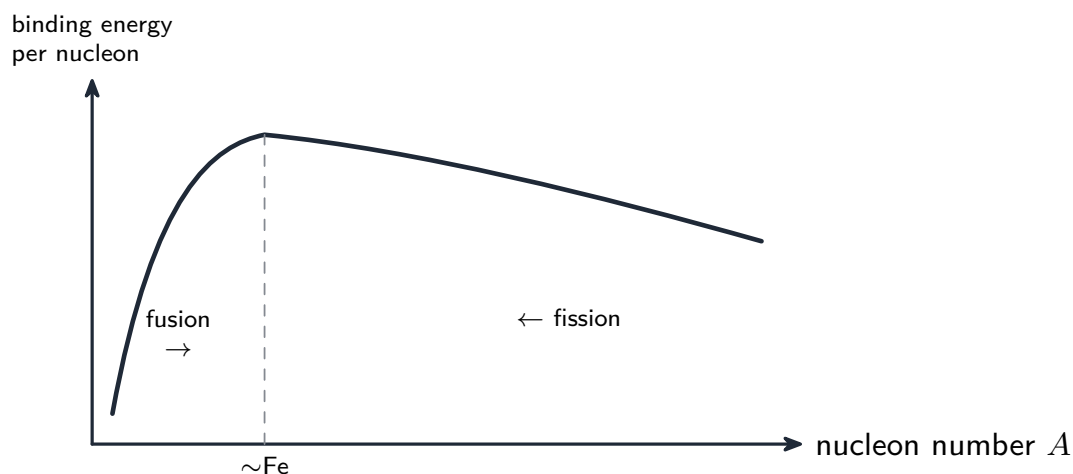
Study these first. Each one shows the method for a question type used later — follow the steps and you can do the Practice and Exam-style questions yourself.

### ■ Mass-energy and binding energy

$$E = mc^2, \quad \Delta E = c^2 \Delta m, \quad 1 \text{ u} \approx 931 \text{ MeV}.$$

The **mass defect** is the difference between the mass of the separate nucleons and the mass of the nucleus; the **binding energy** is the energy equivalent of this ( $\Delta E = c^2 \Delta m$ ) — the energy to split the nucleus apart.

### ■ Binding energy per nucleon



binding energy per nucleon peaks near  $^{56}\text{Fe}$

### *Binding energy per nucleon across the nuclides*

The peak (near iron) is the **most stable**. **Fusion** of light nuclei and **fission** of heavy nuclei both move **towards the peak** — increasing binding energy per nucleon and **releasing energy**.

In nuclear equations, **nucleon number** and **charge** are conserved.

#### ■ Energy released in a decay (from masses)

The energy released is the **mass lost** (parent mass – total product mass), converted with  $1 \text{ u} \approx 931 \text{ MeV}$ :

$$Q = (m_{\text{before}} - m_{\text{after}}) \times 931 \text{ MeV/u.}$$

**Worked example.**  $^{238}_{92}\text{U} \rightarrow ^{234}_{90}\text{Th} + ^4_2\alpha$ , with masses (u): U = 238.05079, Th

$= 234.04360$ ,  $\alpha = 4.00260$ . Mass lost  $\Delta m = 238.05079 - (234.04360 + 4.00260) = 0.00459$  u; energy released  $Q = 0.00459 \times 931 = 4.3$  MeV.

Working **backwards**: if the released energy is known,  $\Delta m = Q/931$  u, which fixes a missing mass.

## 2 Practice

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Now apply the methods above.

**2.1** State **Einstein's** mass–energy equation. [1]

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**2.2** Define **mass defect**. [1]

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**2.3** Define **binding energy**. [1]

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**2.4** In  ${}^{14}_7\text{N} + {}^4_2\text{He} \rightarrow {}^A_8\text{O} + {}^1_1\text{H}$ , find the nucleon number  $A$ . [1]

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## 3 Exam-style questions

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**3.1** The **most stable** nuclei have: [1]

|   |   |
|---|---|
| A | B |
| C | D |

**A** the highest mass

**B** the highest binding energy per nucleon

**C** the lowest binding energy per nucleon

**D** zero binding energy

**3.2** A reaction has a mass defect of 0.030 u. Calculate the energy released. (1 u = 931 MeV.) [2]

**3.3** Explain how the binding-energy-per-nucleon curve shows that **both** fusion of light nuclei **and** fission of heavy nuclei can release energy. [3]

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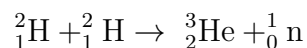
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**3.4** Calculate the energy equivalent of a mass change of  $1.0 \times 10^{-29}$  kg. [2]

**3.5** In the decay  ${}^{210}_{84}\text{Po} \rightarrow {}^{206}_{82}\text{Pb} + {}^4_2\alpha$ , the masses (u) are: Po = 209.98286, Pb = 205.97444,  $\alpha$  = 4.00260. Calculate the energy released, in MeV. (1 u = 931 MeV.) [3]

**3.6** Deuterium nuclei fuse to form helium-3 in the reaction



The masses are: deuterium 2.01410 u, helium-3 3.01603 u, neutron 1.00867 u. Take  $1 \text{ u} = 1.66 \times 10^{-27} \text{ kg}$ ,  $c = 3.00 \times 10^8 \text{ m s}^{-1}$  and  $1 \text{ MeV} = 1.60 \times 10^{-13} \text{ J}$ .

(a) **State** what is meant by the **mass defect** of a nucleus. [1]

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(b) **Determine** the mass difference of this reaction, in u. [2]

(c) **Determine** the energy released, in joules and in MeV. [3]

(d) **Determine** the energy released, in MeV, when 1.0 g of deuterium is fused this way. [3]

(e) **Explain** why fusion releases energy for light nuclei but fission releases energy for heavy ones, referring to **binding energy per nucleon**. [3]