

15.8 Types of Radioactive Decay

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 10 marks

KEY WORDS alpha 阿尔法 • gamma 伽马 • beta 贝塔 • alpha decay 阿尔法衰变
• gamma decay 伽马衰变

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **types of radioactive decay**.

You must be able to:

- describe **alpha** 阿尔法, **beta** 贝塔, and **gamma** 伽马 decay and what each emits
- write balanced nuclear equations that conserve nucleon number and charge
- compare the penetrating power of the three types

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a question type used later.

■ The three decays

- Alpha** — emits a helium nucleus (${}^4_2\text{He}$).
- Beta** — emits a fast electron.
- Gamma** — emits a high-energy photon (electromagnetic wave).

■ Balanced nuclear equations

Both the **nucleon number** (top) and the **charge** (bottom) must balance on each side.

■ Penetrating power

Alpha is the **least** penetrating (stopped by paper); beta is stopped by aluminium; **gamma is the most** penetrating (needs thick lead).

2 Practice

2.1 State what is emitted in alpha, beta, and gamma decay. [2]

2.2 State which type of radiation is the most penetrating. [1]

2.3 In alpha decay, state how the mass number and the atomic number change. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 An alpha particle is a [1]

- A** helium nucleus
- B** fast-moving electron
- C** high-energy photon
- D** single proton

3.2 The most penetrating type of radiation is [1]

- A** alpha
- B** beta
- C** gamma
- D** all equally penetrating

3.3 A nucleus ${}^{238}_{92}\text{U}$ emits an alpha particle.

(a) State the mass number of the new nucleus. [1]

(b) State its atomic number. [1]

(c) Name the two quantities that must be conserved in the equation. [1]

Solutions

2.1 alpha: a helium nucleus; beta: a fast electron; gamma: a high-energy photon.

2.2 gamma.

2.3 the mass number decreases by 4 and the atomic number decreases by 2.

3.1 A.

3.2 C.

3.3 (a) $238 - 4 = 234$. (b) $92 - 2 = 90$. (c) nucleon number and charge.