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Quantitative chemical analysis of perovskite deposition using spin coating

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Lead and halide ion compositions of spin coated organo-lead halide perovskite films have been quantified using ion chromatography (IC) and atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS) using perovskite films manufactured by 5 different researchers (3 replicates per treatment) to monitor variability between researchers and individual researcher reproducibility. Planar and mesoporous TiO2-coated glass substrates have been studied along with tribromide (CH3NH3PbBr3), triiodide (CH3NH3PbI3) and mixed halide (CH3NH3PbI3-CxClx) perovskite films. The data show low yields of spin coated perovskite material (ca. 1%) and preferential deposition of I-Cx over Cl-Cx in mixed halide films.

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1. Experimental

Perovskite solutions were prepared in anhydrous dimethyl formamide (DMF) using the quantities in Table 1 using methylamine halides (Dyenamo) and lead halides (Sigma). Perovskite solutions were filtered through PTFE syringe filters (0.45 μm). Perovskite deposition methods are described in the ESI.

Halide ions were measured using an ICS-2100 ion chromatograph (Thermo Dionex) with an IonPac® AS11 (4 mm) column and AG11 (4 mm) guard column with a KOH(aq) mobile phase (0.38 ml min⁻¹). Lead ions were measured using a Varian SpectrAA 220FS atomic absorption spectrometer (AAS) at 283.3 nm in an acetylene flame. The IC and AAS were calibrated using certified standards (purity >99.99%) in H2O to give R² > 0.99 (see ESI).

2. Results and discussion

Spin coating produces, consistent thin films on flat substrates from solution. For organolead halide perovskite solar cell manufacturing, an organic solvent containing metal, organic amine and halide ions is dropped onto a pre-heated substrate which is spun at increasing speeds to drive off excess solvent and create a "wet film". Heat then produces the perovskite (Fig. 1).

Firstly, considering perovskite yield, Table 1 shows the mass of halide ions in the 100 μl of tribromide, triiodide and mixed halide DMF solutions used in these experiments. The perovskite yield here is defined as the mass of halide recovered from the substrate compared to the mass of halide in the original perovskite solution.
as listed in Table 1. For tribromide, this contains 36.3 mg of Br\(^-\) whilst, in the deposited films, the mass of Br\(^-\) ranges from 353 to 553 μg (Table 2). This yield ranges from 1.0 to 1.5% so 99.5 to 98.5% of the bromide is spun off the substrate. For the triiodide perovskite (initial I\(^-\) = 42.5 mg), the deposited masses range from 302 to 460 μg which represents a yield of 0.7–1.1%. For the mixed halide (initial solution contains 31.9 mg iodide and 3 mg chloride), the deposited masses of I\(^-\) range from 219 to 357 μg and the chloride from 8 to 10 μg. Hence, the yields based on iodide range from 0.7 to 1.1% and, for chloride, are ca. 0.3%. So, for the more prevalent halides, the yields are ca. 1% but for lower abundance ions (such as Cl\(^-\)) even more is lost (99.7%). The yield has been examined further by studying the tribromide perovskite deposited at room temperature (RT) on planar or mesoscopic TiO\(_2\) substrates (ESI Figs. 4 and 5). The data show lower Br\(^-\) concentrations for 2 × 2 cm planar and mesoscopic substrates at RT (115 and 437 μg, respectively) which shows the importance of pre-heating the substrates to 110 °C. The effect of substrate area was also studied by using 5 × 5 cm substrates. For RT deposition, planar and mesoscopic substrates still showed low Br\(^-\) yields when the additional substrate area is considered (324 and 563 μg, respectively). However, pre-heated (110 °C) 5 × 5 cm planar and mesoscopic substrates did show increased Br\(^-\) deposition (1276 and 2236 μg, respectively). which represents a bromide yield of 3.5% and 6.2%, respectively. 

Looking at the range of Br\(^-\) yields from Table 1 (353–553 μg), whilst these data do not show the proportional increase in Br\(^-\) yield that might be expected in increasing the substrate area from 4 cm\(^2\) to 25 cm\(^2\) substrates, it does suggest that increased perovskite yields are possible with larger substrates. Nonetheless, the low yields of perovskite do raise issues for scaling perovskites unless waste material can be recycled during processing, whilst the preferential loss of low abundance ions raises issues for compositional consistency.

Table 2 also shows the presence of trace amounts of other halides (particularly chloride) in deposited perovskites which should be purely tribromide or triiodide. This suggests that there are trace impurities in the precursors. At the trace levels observed here, these impurities might not be identified by XRD or EDAX analysis, but they could still influence device performance and so should be considered when reporting high efficiency devices.

To study spin coating repeatability, five researchers repeated the same spin coating procedure (3 replicates per condition). Taking individual errors first, the three largest values are ±11–13% for R1 and R5 for triiodide and mixed halide perovskites. However, most individual researcher errors are <5% showing consistency for each person repeating their own method. The second level of variation is between researchers. Here a larger compositional range is observed; e.g. R1 and R4 generally have larger halide masses than R2, R3 and R5 as evidenced by the tribromide data (534–578 μg of Br\(^-\) for R1 and R4) versus 308–385 μg of Br\(^-\) for R2, R3 and R5; this is a 50–70% variance. This suggests that how the solution is deposited onto the substrate (e.g. how clean and dry the substrate is, where the droplet is located and how it wets the surface) and the timings involved (e.g. how long after deposition the spin coater starts) make significant differences to the perovskite mass formed.

Another observation is the consistently higher loadings of halides in the mesoscopic versus planar TiO\(_2\) substrates. This is expected because the mesoscopic films are a network of sintered
The data do suggest that individual researchers can reduce compositional errors to ±5% but researcher-to-researcher variation is higher (50–70%) suggesting that alternatives to spin coating are required to scale this technology.

Conlicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest related to this paper for the authors.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mlblux.2019.100011.

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