DISPERSING PRISMS

Dispersing prisms are used to separate a beam of white light into its component colors. Generally, the light is first collimated and then dispersed by the prism. A spectrum is then formed at the focal plane of a lens or curved mirror. In laser work, dispersing prisms are used to separate two wavelengths following the same beam path. Typically, the dispersed beams are permitted to travel far enough so the beams separate spatially.

A prism exhibits magnification in the plane of dispersion if the entrance and exit angles for a beam differ. This is useful in anamorphic (one-dimensional) beam expansion or compression, and may be used to correct or create asymmetric beam profiles.

As shown in Figure 1.39, a beam of width W_1 is incident at an angle α on the surface of a dispersing prism of apex angle A. The angle of refraction at the first surface, β, the angle of incidence at the second surface, γ, and the angle of refraction exiting the prism, δ, are easily calculated:

$$\beta = \sin^{-1}((\sin\alpha)/\eta)$$
$$\gamma = A - \beta$$
$$\delta = \sin^{-1}(\eta\sin\gamma)$$

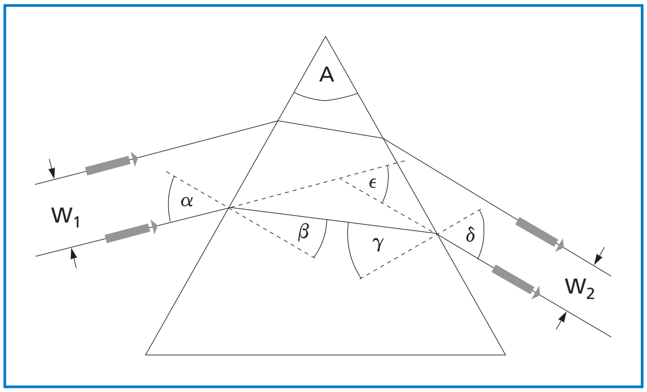

Figure 1.39 **Diagram of dispersing prism**

The beam deviation, ϵ, is of greatest importance. It is the angle the exit beam makes with its original direction.

$$\epsilon = \alpha + \delta - A \quad (1.68)$$

The magnification W_2/W_1 is given by:

$$M = \frac{\cos\delta\cos\beta}{\cos\alpha\cos\gamma} \quad (1.69)$$

The resolving power of a prism spectrometer angle α, the angular dispersion of the prism is given by:

$$\frac{d\delta}{d\lambda} = \left(\frac{\sin A}{\cos\delta\cos\beta}\right)\left(\frac{d\eta}{d\lambda}\right) \quad (1.70)$$

If the spectrum is formed by a diffraction limited focal system of focal length f, the minimum spot size is dx ~ $f\lambda$/ W. This corresponds to a minimum angular resolution dδ ~ λ/w for a beam of diameter w. The diffraction limited angular resolution at a given beam diameter sets the limit on the spectral resolving power of a prism. Setting the expression for dδ equal to the minimum angular resolution, we obtain:

$$RP = \frac{\lambda}{d\lambda} = \left(\frac{w_2\sin A}{\cos\delta\cos\beta}\right)\left(\frac{d\eta}{d\lambda}\right) \quad (1.71)$$

where RP is the resolving power of the prism.

At a given wavelength, the beam deviation ϵ is a minimum at an angle of incidence:

$$\alpha_{\text{min dev}} = \sin^{-1}[\eta\sin(A/2)] \quad (1.72)$$

where η is the prism index of refraction at that wavelength. At this angle, the incident and exit angles are equal, the prism magnification is one, and the internal rays are perpendicular to the bisector of the apex angle.

By measuring the angle of incidence for minimum deviation, the index of refraction of a prism can be determined. Also, by proper choice of apex angle, the equal incident and exit angles may be made Brewster's angle, eliminating losses for p-polarized beams. The apex angle to choose is:

$$A = \pi - 2\theta_B \quad (1.73)$$

If, in addition, the base angles of the prism are chosen as Brewster's angle, an isosceles Brewster prism results.

Another use is illustrated next.

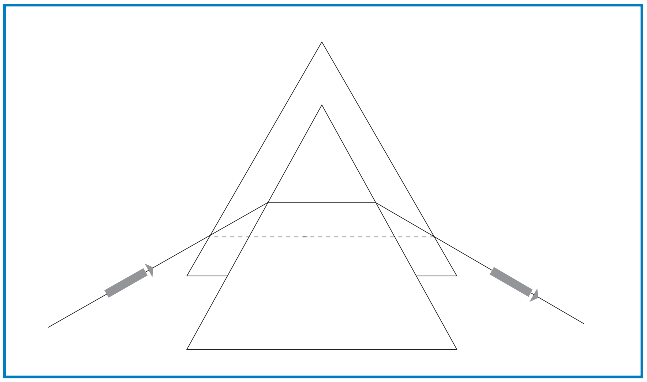

Figure 1.40 **Translation of a prism at minimum deviation**

At minimum deviation, translating a prism along the bisector of the apex angle does not disturb the direction of the output rays. See Figure 1.40. This is important in femtosecond laser design where intracavity prisms are used to compensate for group velocity dispersion. By aligning a prism for minimum deviation and translating it along its apex bisector, the optical path length in material may be varied with no misalignment, thus varying the contribution of the material to overall group velocity dispersion. Finally, it is possible to show that at minimum deviation

$$RP = (b_2 - b_1)\frac{d\eta}{d\lambda} \qquad (1.74)$$

where the relevant quantities are defined in Figure 1.41.

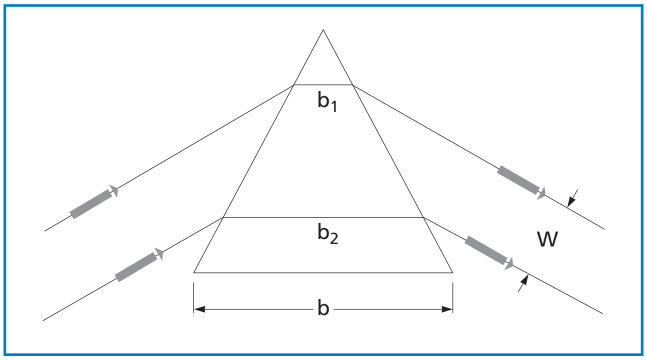

Figure 1.41 **Ray path lengths of a prism at minimum deviation**

If the beam is made to fill the prism completely, $b_1 = 0$, and $b_2 = b$, the base of the prism. So, we have the classical result that the resolving power of a prism spectrometer is equal to the base of the prism times the dispersion of the prism material.

As an example, consider CVI Melles Griot EDP-25-F2 prism, operating in minimum deviation at 590 nm. The angle of incidence and emergence are both then 54.09° and $d\eta/d\lambda$ is $-0.0854\ \mu m^{-1}$ for F2 glass at 590 nm. If the 25-mm prism is completely filled, the resolving power, $\lambda/d\lambda$, is 2135. This is sufficient to resolve the Sodium D lines.