

## Scattering: Interactions of Particles and Waves

Jacob May\*

Department of Quantum Physics, University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland

### DESCRIPTION

Scattering is a fundamental physical process in which particles or waves deviate from their original place due to interaction with other particles, objects or media. It plays a central role in many fields of science, from physics and engineering to chemistry, biology and astronomy. Whether analyzing how light interacts with particles in the atmosphere, studying particle collisions in high-energy physics, or understanding how electromagnetic waves propagate through materials, scattering provides essential insights into the properties and behaviors of both matter and energy.

### Fundamentals of scattering

At its core, scattering refers to the deflection or redistribution of energy when waves or particles encounter obstacles or interact with each other. The direction and intensity of the scattered waves or particles depend on several factors, including the size of the scatterers, the wavelength of the incoming wave and the nature of the medium through which the waves or particles travel.

Scattering can be broadly classified into two main categories: Elastic and inelastic scattering.

**Elastic scattering:** In elastic scattering, the total kinetic energy of the particles or waves remains conserved before and after the interaction. The direction of motion may change, but the energy does not. This type of scattering is commonly observed in phenomena such as the scattering of light by small particles or atoms. An example of elastic scattering is Rayleigh scattering, where light waves are scattered by particles much smaller than the wavelength of the light, leading to effects like the blue color of the sky.

**Inelastic scattering:** In inelastic scattering, the total kinetic energy of the system changes after the interaction. The incoming particle or wave may lose or gain energy due to the interaction, often leading to changes in the internal energy states of the scatterer. Compton scattering, where X-rays or gamma rays scatter off electrons and lose energy, is a well-known example of

inelastic scattering. Inelastic scattering processes are key to understanding phenomena such as energy transfer and excitation of molecules or atoms.

### Types of scattering

Several types of scattering are of great importance in various scientific fields, each governed by different principles and giving rise to specific phenomena. The most commonly studied types of scattering include:

**Rayleigh scattering:** Rayleigh scattering occurs when the wavelength of the incident radiation is much larger than the scattering particles. This type of scattering explains why the sky appears blue during the day. The shorter wavelengths of light (blue) are scattered more efficiently by atmospheric molecules like nitrogen and oxygen than the longer wavelengths (red). Rayleigh scattering is also responsible for the red and orange hues of sunsets, as the lower angle of the sun causes light to pass through more of Earth's atmosphere, scattering the blue light and leaving the longer red wavelengths.

**Mie scattering:** Mie scattering describes the scattering of light by particles that are comparable in size to the wavelength of the incident light. It is important in explaining phenomena like the white appearance of clouds, where water droplets scatter all wavelengths of visible light equally, producing a diffuse white glow. Mie scattering also plays a role in various technological applications, such as aerosol detection, optical sensors, and medical imaging.

**Compton scattering:** Compton scattering is an inelastic scattering process that involves the interaction of high-energy photons (X-rays or gamma rays) with electrons. When a photon collides with an electron, it transfers some of its energy to the electron, resulting in a scattered photon with lower energy and a longer wavelength. This phenomenon, discovered by Arthur Compton in 1923, confirmed the particle-like behavior of photons and contributed to the development of quantum mechanics. Compton scattering is widely used in fields such as medical imaging, astrophysics and radiation detection.

**Correspondence to:** Jacob May, Department of Quantum Physics, University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland, E-mail: may\_jacu@hotmail.com

**Received:** 09-Jun-2025, Manuscript No. JPCB-24-34682; **Editor assigned:** 11-Jun-2025, PreQC No. JPCB-24-34682 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 04-Jul-2025, QC No. JPCB-24-34682; **Revised:** 11-Jul-2025, Manuscript No. JPCB-24-34682 (R); **Published:** 18-Jul-2025, DOI: 10.35841/2161-0398.25.15.431

**Citation:** May J (2025). Scattering: Interactions of Particles and Waves. *J Phys Chem Biophys*. 15:431.

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**Bragg scattering:** Bragg scattering or Bragg diffraction, occurs when waves scatter off the regularly spaced atoms in a crystalline material. The constructive interference of the scattered waves leads to diffraction patterns that reveal the atomic structure of the material. This phenomenon is the basis of X-ray crystallography, a technique used to determine the structures of complex molecules such as proteins and DNA. Bragg's law, which relates the angle of diffraction to the atomic spacing and the wavelength of the incident waves, is central to understanding how X-rays scatter within crystals.

**Raman scattering:** Raman scattering is a type of inelastic scattering where photons interact with the vibrational modes of a molecule, leading to a shift in the energy of the scattered photons. The energy change corresponds to the vibrational energy levels of the molecule, making Raman scattering a valuable tool for studying molecular structures and chemical

bonds. Raman spectroscopy is widely used in chemical analysis, material science and biological research to probe the vibrational states of molecules and identify molecular compositions.

## CONCLUSION

Scattering is a common and essential process in both everyday life and scientific research. Whether it's explaining the color of the sky, determining the structure of a protein or detecting subatomic particles, scattering phenomena are at the heart of our understanding of the physical world. Advances in scattering techniques continue to push the boundaries of what we can observe, from the macroscopic scale of atmospheric phenomena to the microscopic region of molecules and particles. As technology and computational methods advance, scattering will continue to play a key role in deepening our understanding of matter, energy and the universe.