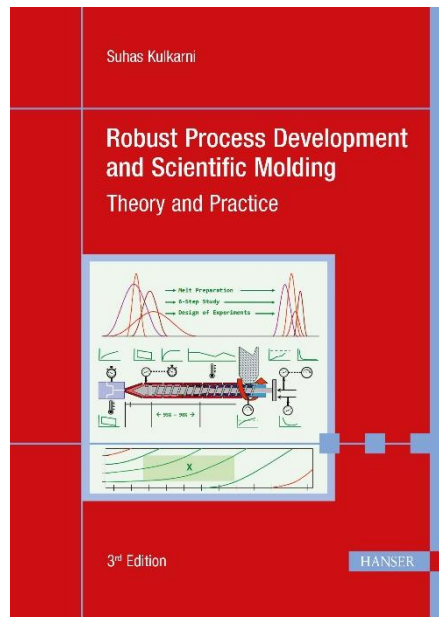


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## Sample Pages

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Suhas Kulkarni

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# The Author

Suhas Kulkarni is the founder and president of FimmTech Inc, an injection molding service-oriented firm focusing on Scientific Molding and Scientific Processing for injection molding. He has a bachelor's degree in polymer engineering from Pune, India and a master's degree in plastics engineering from UMass, Lowell, USA. FimmTech is based in San Diego, CA, USA.

Suhas has been associated with injection molding since 1993 with special focus on injection molding processing. He started his career with Republic Tool and Manufacturing in Carlsbad, CA, which is now a part of the Scotts Fertilizer company. He started as a setup and process technician, where he learnt all the nuts and bolts of injection molding. He later joined Molding International and Engineering in Temecula, CA and worked as a Process Engineer for 12 years before he started FimmTech in 2004. The main goal in starting FimmTech was to provide simple and easy-to-use tools for processors on the production floor for process development and troubleshooting. FimmTech has developed several custom tools that help molders develop robust processes and its seminars have trained individuals from hundreds of companies throughout the world. He is a regular contributor to the widely distributed Plastics Technology magazine and is also an adjunct faculty member at UMass, Lowell.





## Preface to the Third Edition

It has been six years since the second edition of this book was published. In those six years my approach to process development has become increasingly streamlined and methodical, prompting the need for this third edition. Outdated sections have been deleted or revised and new insights have been incorporated based on my recent findings. My quest to set the value of every molding process parameter based on an experimental data continues. The basic molding principles and theories have remained unchanged but I have experimented and added a few more steps of process development.

A complete chapter on melt preparation has been added. This will help the reader understand the science and procedure of preparing the melt and setting the values for the barrel zone temperatures, the screw rotation speed, and the back pressure. Throughout the book, several existing figures were updated and several new ones were added to enhance the comprehension of the topics.

I extend heartfelt gratitude to my readers who have also encouraged me to take on this task. Special thanks to those who have sent me feedback on the book and mentioning some errors. This not only helps me but helps the readers to understand the subject and not be misguided.

I must express my gratitude to two individuals who were inadvertently omitted from previous editions' acknowledgments. First, Mr. Kirloskar of Kirloskar Kisan, Pune, India. It was in his company that I first saw an injection molding machine. The earliest seeds of my molding future were sown there. I was a summer intern student in my third year of engineering. Mr. Kirloskar was a towering figure but soft spoken with a pleasant smile. The first time I met him he was giving a solution to a molding problem which, at that time, I did not understand a word of. But I loved the technical talk which I am sure ignited the curiosity in me. As the 'Butterfly Effect' explains, an extra flap of a wing of a butterfly somewhere in South America can theoretically cre-

ate a storm in North America; one of those extra flaps is the internship that has led to the place I am today. I owe part of my success to Mr. Kirlosakar – thank you, sir.

Second is my dear friend Biff Lamkin, with whom I worked for 10 years in my second job. He was a genius who was an expert not only at molding but also in computers, IT, programming, and technology in general. He introduced me to a lot of concepts of molding in my early days. I can still remember him teaching me Pressure Drop Study, which is one of the most important studies in process development. He was also the one who came up with the idea of the melt probe preheater that I use in my courses. Thank you, Biff – I will forever be indebted to you.

A special thanks to my brother Sachin Kulkarni, who has supported and encouraged me all these years and to Ravi Khare of Symphony Technologies, who taught me statistics, DOE concepts, and now theories behind artificial intelligence and machine learning. The continued support of Prof. Basargekar, Tim, and Violeta of Distinctive Plastics, and my friends from UMass Lowell is a constant source of encouragement.

I would have never entered the world of plastics engineering had my dad not exposed me to chemistry as a young kid. I remember doing my high school homework sitting in his lab as he conducted his research. I will be forever indebted to my parents for the encouragement and the exposure at an early age.

A special thanks to my wife Neela for having sacrificed a vacation we were supposed to take as instead I ended up finishing up this third edition. She has always been patiently supportive of all my crazy ideas, work goals, irregular work hours, and last-minute schedule changes. I could not have released this edition on time without her support.

It is my commitment to continue enriching our industry and provide better and easier solutions not only to increase all efficiencies but also to build systems for a sustainable planet and future.

Thank you.

*Suhas Kulkarni*

June 2024



# Preface to the Second Edition

As the saying goes “the only thing that is constant is change.” It has been six years since the first edition of this book was published, and it has been very well received. Thank you to all its readers. Since then, I have continued my research to further understand the process of injection molding with the final goal of robust process development. As I kept publishing and teaching this new material, it became time to revise the book.

This second edition has new material in almost all the chapters. Some concepts, which were explained in the first edition, have been expanded upon and rewritten for better understanding. Several figures have been added to complement the explanations. Some of the chapters and text have been split up and rearranged to have a better flow of understanding. A complete chapter on “Basic Quality Concepts” has also been added.

The topic of process development is a complex one, but once the concepts are understood, implementation is easy. The key is to understand the basics first. Over the years, in my consulting business, I often get called on by companies to ‘fix’ their processes. I always go back to the basics and ask them several simple questions about their molds, machines, and processes to which they sometimes have no answer, or when they do answer my questions, they figure out the solution to the problem on their own. Their process development was probably done by throwing darts on a dartboard and hence the issues. This book is attempting to change that. By using the techniques described in this book, one can establish what I call *cruise control processes*: set the process, start molding, and never touch a setting until the run is done.

The topic of “Design of Experiments” (DOE) has great importance in injection molding. Many companies employ this technique, but not effectively. The reason is not because of their lack of knowledge of DOE, but because of their lack of understanding of

the basics of molding, along with their choice of factors and levels for the DOE. This topic has been expanded in the new edition.

I would like to thank Hanser Publications and their staff for this opportunity to write the second edition. Mark Smith and Cheryl Hamilton have been very helpful with the proofing and, moreover, very patient with all the delays from my side. I would also like to thank several other people who have helped me with the second edition. Lorena Castro who took all the bits and pieces of my writing and transformed it into readable flow needs a special mention and acknowledgement.

In the preface to the first edition, I failed to mention a very important place that also helped shape my career and my life. The National Chemical Laboratory (NCL), Pune, India, is where my dad worked all his life as a research scientist. I lived in the shadows of this great institution and its several researchers. My dad would often take me to his lab when he conducted his research, and that is where the seeds of my future were laid. I worked on a couple of projects during my college days in its Polymer Engineering Department, and that was my first personal exposure and involvement with research. It was my experience at NCL, which was one of the contributing factors that pushed me to study further.

My constant sources of inspiration and help include Tim and Violeta of Distinctive Plastics, who have opened their company for my research and seminars, my professor from college, Dr. Basargekar, my colleagues in the industry, Ravi Khare, Atul Khandekar, Vishu Shah, Vikram Bhargava, Randy Phillips, and my family.

To my mom, dad, and siblings, I will be forever indebted to you for all the support and inspiration you have given me over the years.

*Suhas Kulkarni*

October 2016



# Preface to the First Edition

When I interviewed for my second job after I graduated, I was told that if the position was offered to me, I would have to spend my first three days at a seminar on Scientific Molding and Design of Experiments. It was all new to me then. My job was to implement this new technology as a standard across the company. The job was offered to me; I accepted and attended the seminar. Implementing the techniques on the first couple molds was a refreshing change from how I did it before. The scientific method of developing the process left no room for any guess work by applying the theories of polymer science and injection molding. Scientific evidence proved why parts could be or could not be molded consistently within the required specifications. My enthusiasm for the use of these techniques grew as I found more and more evidence of success. Over the next few years, I gave presentations at the local SPE chapter and the attendees wanted to learn more to make their operations efficient. In 2004 I decided to start consulting in the area of Scientific Processing, a term I coined to include all the processes that are involved in the transformation of the pellet to the final product that is shipped out to the customer. My research work on the ‘overdrying’ of PBT and Nylon was the main driving force to think of the process as being outside of the molding machine and not just what happens in the mold. As my consulting and teaching career expanded, I found many people looking for a resource to learn the basic underlying principles of polymers and plastics and apply them to injection molding. They wanted to understand the why, and then how of Scientific Processing. ‘Where can I find this information?’ was always a question that was asked. This book is the answer to their question.

Understanding the molding process from the scientific perspective helps in making better decisions to establish the parameters that are involved in controlling the journey of the pellet; from the warehouse to the molding machine and then to its conversion as a molded product. All the parameters are set on the basis of scientific knowledge and experience making the process efficient in terms of productivity.



Higher yield, reduced scrap, robust processes, reduced quality inspection, reduced number of process changes leading to less human intervention are some of the benefits of Scientific Processing. This book details the theory and practice of Scientific Processing. There are a lot of 'rules of thumb' in injection molding. My mission is to eliminate them and present a scientific solution. A good example is the size of vents in the mold.

I hope my commitment to researching and understanding of the molding process will continue to give a better insight to the process. I hope to share those with you in the future editions of this book. There are a number of people who are part of the success of writing this book. Some gave me the knowledge, some inspired me to learn more while others gave me unconditional support in this endeavor. It is impossible to thank all of them individually but without all of them this project would not have been accomplished. First and foremost, special mention must be made of my father who introduced me to the fascinating world of chemical research. It is from here that I get my curiosity, creativity and my analytical abilities of problem solving. Thanks to my teachers and professors who not only imparted the knowledge but also instilled in me the value of education through the dedication to their students. It is from here that I get my inspiration to teach and spread my knowledge. Thanks to my family and friends who have supported me and believed in me. It is from them that I get my will power and courage to get past the current frontiers and take a step into an unknown future.

In the production of this book I would like to thank Christine Strohm and the management of Hanser Publications for publishing the book. The sections on cavity pressure sensing and the chapter on rheology were reviewed by Mike Groleau of RJG and John Beaumont of Beaumont Technologies respectively. Thanks to them for their valuable comments. Thanks also to Dave Hart for proofreading the text and making the matter an interesting technical read. Valuable comments from Ravi Khare of Symphony Technologies were included on the DOE chapter. Without the unconditional help of Tim and Violeta Curnutt of Distinctive Plastics I would have not had the chance to experiment with many of the theories and applications put forward in this book. Special thanks to them for letting me make Distinctive Plastics my home during the book writing process. I am often told I am an effective teacher with clear concepts in polymer science and rheology – I have picked the teaching skills and the knowledge from Prof. Basargekar – my sincere acknowledgements to him. Under the leadership of Vishu Shah I conducted a few successful seminars with the Society of Plastics Engineers. These seminars gave me the fuel and material for this book. Thanks to Vishu not only for the opportunities of the seminars but also for being a professional guide and a personal friend. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of John Bozzelli and Rod Groleau for their pioneering work in Scientific Molding and raising its awareness in the molding community.

To my alma maters, Maharashtra Institute of Technology, Pune, India and University of Massachusetts, Lowell, USA: Hidden in one of your foundations' bricks are the enriching roots to my success. Thank You.

*Suhas Kulkarni*

FIMMTECH Inc.

Vista, CA.

January 2010



# Contents

<b>The Author .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>Preface to the Third Edition .....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>Preface to the Second Edition .....</b>	<b>XI</b>
<b>Preface to the First Edition .....</b>	<b>XIII</b>
<b>1 Introduction to Scientific Processing .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Evolution and Progress of Injection Molding .....	1
1.2 The Molding Process .....	2
1.3 The Three Types of Consistencies Required in Injection Molding .....	3
1.4 Scientific Processing .....	6
1.5 The Five Critical Factors of Molding .....	9
1.5.1 Part Design .....	9
1.5.2 Material Selection .....	10
1.5.3 Mold Design and Construction .....	10
1.5.4 Machine Selection .....	11
1.5.5 Molding Process .....	11
1.6 Concurrent Engineering .....	12
1.7 Variation .....	12
1.8 The Molding Parameters and a Recommended Process Development Procedure .....	14

<b>2</b>	<b>Properties of Polymers and Plastics That Influence Injection Molding</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1	Polymers	17
2.2	Molecular Weight and Molecular Weight Distribution	19
2.3	Polymer Morphology (Crystalline and Amorphous Polymers)	21
2.4	Role of Morphology in Injection Molding	26
2.4.1	Differences in Shrinkage between Amorphous and Crystalline Materials	26
2.4.2	Melt Processing Range	27
2.4.3	Mold Filling Speed	28
2.4.4	Mold Temperatures	28
2.4.5	Barrel Heat Profile	29
2.4.6	Screw Recovery Speeds	29
2.4.7	Nozzle Temperature Control	30
2.4.8	Cooling Times	30
2.4.9	Mechanical Properties	30
2.4.10	Optical Clarity	30
2.5	Exceptions of Morphology Rules to Polyolefins	31
2.6	Thermal Transitions in Polymers	32
2.6.1	Relationship between the Glass Transition Temperature and Post Mold Shrinkage	38
2.6.2	Importance of Mold Temperatures in Injection Molding	41
2.7	Shrinkage of Polymers in Injection Molding	44
2.8	The Plastic Pressure–Volume–Temperature (PVT) Relationship	46
2.8.1	Importance of Plastic Density in Injection Molding	47
2.8.2	Residence Time and Maximum Residence Time of a Plastic	49
2.8.3	Plastic Datasheets	50
2.9	References	52
<b>3</b>	<b>Polymer Rheology</b>	<b>55</b>
3.1	Viscosity	55
3.2	Newtonian and Non-Newtonian Materials	57
3.3	Viscosity in Polymer Melts	58
3.4	Effect of Temperature on Viscosity	61
3.5	Velocity and Shear Rate Profiles	62

3.6	Application to Injection Molding .....	64
3.6.1	Flow Imbalance in an 8-Cavity Mold .....	64
3.6.2	Racetrack Effect in a Part with Constant Thickness .....	66
3.6.3	Stress Build-Up in Molded Parts .....	67
3.6.4	Warpage Difference between Cavities .....	67
3.7	Solving Flow Imbalances Using Melt Rotation Techniques .....	67
3.8	Fountain Flow .....	69
3.9	Effect of Fountain Flow on Crystallinity, Molecular Orientation, and Fiber Orientation .....	72
3.10	Characterization of Polymer Viscosity .....	73
3.11	References .....	75
<b>4</b>	<b>Plastic Drying .....</b>	<b>77</b>
4.1	Problems in Melt Processing Related to the Presence of Moisture .....	79
4.1.1	Degradation of Plastic .....	79
4.1.2	Presence of Surface Defects .....	80
4.2	Hygroscopic Polymers .....	83
4.3	Drying of Plastics .....	85
4.3.1	Drying Temperatures and Times .....	85
4.3.2	Relative Humidity and Dew Point .....	87
4.3.3	Air Flow Rate .....	88
4.4	Equipment for Drying Plastics .....	88
4.4.1	Oven Dryers .....	88
4.4.2	Hot Air Dryers .....	89
4.4.3	Desiccant Dryers .....	89
4.4.4	Classifications Based on the Location of the Dryer .....	89
4.5	Determination of the Amount of Moisture .....	90
4.5.1	The Glass Slide Technique (TVI Test) .....	90
4.5.2	The Karl Fischer Titration Method .....	91
4.5.3	Electronic Moisture Analyzer .....	91
4.5.4	Measurement of the Dew Point .....	92
4.6	'Overdrying' or Overexposure to Drying Temperatures .....	93
4.7	Cautions .....	100
4.8	Prevention of Overexposure to Longer Drying Times .....	100
4.9	Overdrying Controller .....	100
4.10	References .....	102

<b>5</b>	<b>Common Plastic Materials and Additives. ....</b>	<b>103</b>
5.1	Classification of Polymers .....	103
5.2	Commercially Important Plastics .....	105
5.2.1	Polyolefins .....	105
5.2.2	Polymers from Acrylonitrile, Butadiene, Styrene, and Acrylate .....	106
5.2.3	Polyamides (PA) .....	107
5.2.4	Polystyrenes (PS) .....	108
5.2.5	Acrylics .....	109
5.2.6	Polycarbonates (PC) .....	109
5.2.7	Polyesters .....	109
5.2.8	Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) .....	109
5.2.9	Polyoxymethylene (POM or Acetal) .....	110
5.2.10	Fluoropolymers .....	111
5.3	Additives .....	111
5.3.1	Fillers .....	111
5.3.2	Plasticizers .....	112
5.3.3	Flame Retardants .....	112
5.3.4	Anti-Aging Additives, UV Stabilizers .....	113
5.3.5	Nucleating Agents .....	113
5.3.6	Lubricants .....	113
5.3.7	Processing Aids .....	114
5.3.8	Colorants .....	114
5.3.9	Blowing Agents .....	114
5.3.10	Other Polymers .....	115
5.4	Closing Remarks .....	115
5.5	Reference .....	116
<b>6</b>	<b>Injection Molding and Molding Machines .....</b>	<b>117</b>
6.1	The History of Injection Molding .....	117
6.2	Injection Molding Machines and Their Classifications .....	118
6.3	Machine Specifications .....	120
6.3.1	Clamp Force (Tonnage) .....	121
6.3.2	Shot Size .....	121
6.3.3	Screw Diameter and L/D Ratio .....	121

6.3.4	Plasticating Capacity .....	122
6.3.5	Maximum Plastic Pressure .....	122
6.4	The Injection Molding Screw .....	122
6.5	Screw Designs .....	125
6.6	The Check Ring Assembly .....	126
6.7	Intensification Ratio (IR) .....	126
6.8	Obtaining Intensification Ratios .....	128
6.9	Selecting the Right Machine for the Mold .....	129
6.9.1	Physical Size of the Mold .....	130
6.9.2	Calculating the Required Machine Tonnage for a Mold .....	132
6.9.3	Percentage Shot Size Used and Number of Shots in the Barrel ...	137
6.9.4	Residence Time of the Material in the Barrel .....	140
6.9.5	Practical Methods to Find Percentage Shot Size, Shots in a Barrel, and Residence Time .....	141
6.9.6	Residence Time Distribution .....	142
<b>7</b>	<b>Scientific Processing, Scientific Molding, and Molding Parameters.....</b>	<b>143</b>
7.1	Introduction .....	143
7.2	What Scientific Molding and Scientific Processing Are Not! .....	145
7.3	Process Robustness .....	145
7.4	Process Consistency .....	146
7.5	The Injection Molding Cycle .....	149
7.6	The Injection, Pack, and Hold Phases of Injection Molding .....	150
7.7	Speed and Pressure .....	153
7.8	The 11 + 2 Plastic Injection Molding Machine Input Parameters .....	154
7.8.1	Barrel Temperatures .....	155
7.8.2	Mold Temperatures .....	156
7.8.3	Shot Size .....	158
7.8.4	Transfer Position .....	158
7.8.5	Injection Speed (Velocity) .....	158
7.8.6	Injection Pressure .....	159
7.8.7	Pack Pressure .....	159
7.8.8	Pack Time .....	159
7.8.9	Hold Pressure .....	160



- 7.8.10 Hold Time ..... 160
  - 7.8.11 Screw Rotation Speed ..... 160
  - 7.8.12 Back Pressure ..... 161
  - 7.8.13 Cooling Time ..... 164
- 7.9 Additional Settings ..... 165
  - 7.9.1 Decompression or Suck Back Position ..... 165
  - 7.9.2 Pack Speed ..... 166
  - 7.9.3 Tonnage ..... 166
- 7.10 Process Outputs ..... 166
  - 7.10.1 Actual Melt Temperature ..... 167
  - 7.10.2 Actual Mold Temperature ..... 168
  - 7.10.3 Injection (Fill) Time ..... 170
  - 7.10.4 Peak Injection Pressure ..... 170
  - 7.10.5 Pressure at Transfer ..... 171
  - 7.10.6 Cushion Value ..... 171
  - 7.10.7 Screw Rotation Time ..... 173
  - 7.10.8 Cycle Time ..... 173
  - 7.10.9 Injection Only Shot Weight (Including Runners) ..... 174
  - 7.10.10 Full Part(s) Weight ..... 175
  - 7.10.11 Runner Weights ..... 175
- 7.11 Decoupled Molding<sup>SM</sup> ..... 176
- 7.12 References ..... 177
- 8 Introduction to Process Development ..... 179**
  - 8.1 Introduction ..... 179
  - 8.2 Process Development Fundamentals ..... 179
  - 8.3 Premolding Setup ..... 182
    - 8.3.1 Storage and Drying of Resin ..... 182
    - 8.3.2 Plastic Drying ..... 182
    - 8.3.3 Machine Selection ..... 185
  - 8.4 Importance of Adding Charge Delay Time ..... 185
  - 8.5 Filling in Injection: Weight or Volume? ..... 187

<b>9</b>	<b>Process Development Part 1: The Melt Preparation.....</b>	<b>189</b>
9.1	Setting of the Barrel Temperatures .....	191
9.2	Optimization of Screw Rotation Speeds .....	195
9.3	Screw Rotation Speed Rule of Thumb That Should Not Be Used .....	199
9.4	Optimization of Back Pressure .....	200
<b>10</b>	<b>Process Development Part 2: The 6-Step Study – Exploring the Cosmetic Process .....</b>	<b>205</b>
10.1	The 6-Step Study .....	205
10.1.1	Step 1: Optimization of the Injection Phase – Rheology Study ....	205
10.1.1.1	Procedure to Determine the Viscosity Curve at the Molding Machine .....	210
10.1.1.2	Interpreting the Data .....	212
10.1.1.3	Cautions and Exceptions .....	213
10.1.1.4	Profiling of Injection Speeds .....	214
10.1.1.5	When a Short Shot Sticks .....	215
10.1.1.6	Selecting Melt Temperature for Viscosity Graphs .....	217
10.1.2	Setting the Shot Size and the Transfer Position .....	217
10.1.3	Step 2: Determining the Cavity Balance – Cavity Balance Study ..	219
10.1.3.1	Procedure to Determine the Cavity Balance .....	221
10.1.3.2	Reasons for Cavity Imbalance .....	222
10.1.3.3	Determining the Cause of Cavity Imbalances .....	225
10.1.3.4	Calculating Cavity Imbalance .....	226
10.1.3.5	Acceptable Level of Cavity Imbalance .....	227
10.1.4	Step 3: Determining the Pressure Drop – Pressure Drop Studies ..	229
10.1.4.1	Procedure to Determine Pressure Drop .....	231
10.1.4.2	How to Use the Information from the Study .....	235
10.1.4.3	Effect of Pressure Drop on the Pack and Hold Phase ....	236
10.1.5	Step 4: Determining the Cosmetic Process Window – Process Window Study .....	237
10.1.5.1	Procedure for Determining the Process Window for Amorphous Materials .....	241
10.1.5.2	Procedure for Determining the Process Window for Crystalline Materials .....	242
10.1.5.3	How to Use This Information .....	243

10.1.5.4	Shape of the Process Window .....	244
10.1.5.5	Cautions and Exceptions .....	245
10.1.5.6	Relationship between Cavity Balance and Process Windows .....	245
10.1.5.7	The Pack and Hold Pressure Rule Not to Be Used .....	246
10.1.6	Step 5: Determining the Gate Seal Time – Gate Seal Study .....	246
10.1.6.1	How to Use This Information .....	249
10.1.6.2	Cautions and Exceptions .....	249
10.1.7	Differentiating between the Pack and the Hold Phase .....	249
10.1.7.1	Hot Runner and Valve Gated Molds .....	253
10.1.8	Step 6: Determining the Cooling Time – Cooling Time Study .....	253
10.1.8.1	Procedure to Determine Cooling Time .....	255
10.2	Optimization of Tonnage .....	257
10.3	The Cosmetic Scientific Process .....	260
10.4	Post-Mold Shrinkage Studies .....	261
10.4.1	Procedure to Measure Shrinkage .....	263
10.4.2	How to Use This Information .....	264
10.5	Completion of Part 2 of the Recommended Process Development Procedure .....	264
10.6	Recommended Adjustments to Maintain Process Consistency and Robustness .....	266
10.7	Process Documentation .....	267
10.8	References .....	267
<b>11</b>	<b>Process Development Part 3: Exploring the Dimensional Process via Design of Experiments.....</b>	<b>269</b>
11.1	Why Perform DOEs? .....	271
11.2	The PVT Diagram and Injection Molding Relationship .....	271
11.2.1	Design of Experiments: Definition .....	272
11.3	Terminology .....	274
11.3.1	Factor .....	274
11.3.2	Response .....	275
11.3.3	Level .....	275
11.3.4	Designed Experiment .....	276
11.4	Relationships between the Number of Factors, Levels, and Experiments	277

11.5	Balanced Arrays .....	278
11.6	Interactions .....	280
11.7	Confounding or Aliasing .....	282
11.8	Factorial Experiments .....	284
11.9	Data Analysis .....	285
11.9.1	Tornado Charts .....	286
11.9.2	Contour Plots .....	288
11.9.3	Prediction Equation .....	289
11.9.4	Process Sensitivity and Outliers Charts .....	289
11.10	Using the Results from DOE .....	291
11.10.1	Process Selection .....	291
11.10.2	Cavity Steel Adjustment .....	291
11.10.3	Process Adjustment Tool .....	292
11.10.4	Setting Process Change Tolerances .....	292
11.10.5	Reducing Inspection .....	293
11.11	The Dimensional Process Window (DPW) .....	293
11.12	Selection of Factors for DOEs .....	295
11.13	Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) .....	299
11.14	Collecting Shots for a Quality Check .....	301
11.15	Choosing the Highs and Lows for DOEs from the Process Window .....	302
11.16	Randomization .....	302
11.17	DOE Application to Optimize Pack and Hold Times .....	303
11.18	Setting Acceptable Machine Tolerances and Alarms during Production ..	308
11.19	Summary .....	310
<b>12</b>	<b>Mold Qualification Flowchart, Production Release, and Troubleshooting .....</b>	<b>311</b>
12.1	Process Development Flowchart .....	311
12.1.1	Stage 1: Development of the Cosmetic Process .....	312
12.1.2	Stage 2: Mold and Part Quality Qualification Procedure .....	313
12.2	Mold Qualification Checklist .....	313
12.3	Process Documentation .....	314
12.3.1	Process Sheet .....	314
12.3.2	Waterline Diagrams .....	315
12.3.3	Mold Temperature Maps .....	316

12.3.4	Setup Instructions .....	317
12.3.5	Operator Instructions .....	317
12.4	Documentation Books .....	318
12.5	Qualification Production Runs .....	319
12.6	Mold Specific Troubleshooting Guide .....	319
12.7	Molding Startup and Shutdown .....	320
12.7.1	Purging .....	320
12.7.2	Startup of a Molding Machine .....	321
12.7.3	Shutdown of a Molding Machine .....	322
12.8	Troubleshooting .....	322
12.9	Important Equipment and Tools for Qualifications and Troubleshooting	325
12.10	Common Defects, Their Causes, and Prevention .....	326
12.10.1	Splay: What Is It? How to Get Rid of It? .....	327
12.10.2	Defects in Molding .....	329
<b>13</b>	<b>Role of Mold Cooling, Venting, and Regrind in Process Development .....</b>	<b>335</b>
13.1	Mold Cooling .....	335
13.1.1	Number of Cooling Channels .....	336
13.1.2	Reynolds Number of the Coolant Flow .....	336
13.1.3	Type of Coolant .....	337
13.1.4	Series and Parallel Cooling .....	338
13.2	Venting .....	339
13.2.1	Dimensions of the Vent .....	340
13.2.2	Primary Vent Depths .....	341
13.2.3	Location of Vents .....	344
13.2.4	Forced Venting or Vacuum Venting .....	345
13.3	Regrind .....	346
13.3.1	Effect of the Molding Process on the Part Properties .....	347
13.3.2	Using Regrind .....	348
13.3.3	Batch and Continuous Processes of Incorporating Regrind .....	349
13.3.4	Estimating the Amount of Regrind from Different Generations ...	350
13.3.5	Effect of Regrind on Processing .....	352
13.3.6	Closing Remarks .....	353

<b>14</b>	<b>Related Technologies and Topics</b>	<b>355</b>
14.1	Cavity Pressure Sensing Technology	355
14.1.1	Sensors and Output Graphs	356
14.1.2	Types and Classification of Pressure Sensors	357
14.1.3	Use of Information from the Pressure Graphs	359
14.1.4	Controlling the Process with Cavity Pressure Sensors	361
14.1.5	Sensor Locations	363
14.2	Building a Knowledge Base	364
14.3	Concurrent Engineering in Injection Molding	366
14.3.1	The Product Designer	368
14.3.2	The Tooling Engineer	369
14.3.3	The Mold Designer and Mold Maker	369
14.3.4	The Material Supplier	370
14.3.5	The Process Engineer	370
14.3.6	The Quality Engineer	371
14.3.7	The Sales Team at the Molder	371
14.3.8	Mandatory for All Departments	372
14.3.9	Implementing Concurrent Engineering	372
<b>15</b>	<b>Quality Concepts</b>	<b>375</b>
15.1	Basic Concepts	375
15.2	Histogram	376
15.3	Normal Distribution	377
15.4	Standard Deviation	378
15.5	Specification Limits and Standard Deviation	379
15.6	Capability Index	380
15.7	Process Capability	382
15.8	Statistical Quality Control (SQC) and Statistical Process Control (SPC)	383
15.9	References	384
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Materials Data Sheet</b>	<b>385</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Conversion Tables for Commonly Used Process Parameters</b>	<b>391</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>Water Flow Tables</b>	<b>393</b>

**Appendix D   Part Design Checklist . . . . . 395**

**Appendix E   Mold Design Checklist. . . . . 397**

**Appendix F   Mold Qualification Checklist. . . . . 399**

**Appendix G   Regrind Tables – Percentage of Regrind in Total Shot 401**

**Appendix H   Calculation of Melt Density . . . . . 405**

**Index . . . . . 407**

# 1

## Introduction to Scientific Processing

### 1.1 The Evolution and Progress of Injection Molding

Injection molding and extrusion are the most common techniques employed in the manufacture of plastic products. Injection molding of plastics began as an idea by the Hyatt brothers for the manufacture of billiard balls. The idea was borrowed based on a patent by John Smith to inject metal castings. Since then, injection molding of plastics has come a long way. The technique became a popular way to fabricate plastic parts because of the simplicity of the concept, efficiency of production, and the possibility of producing intricate parts with fine details.

The art of injection molding evolved to its present state for a few key reasons. The requirements of the molded parts became more stringent because of the advances in the fields of science and technology. The demand for tighter tolerances and more complex parts increased and is ever increasing. A required tolerance of a few microns on a 10 mm part, or a couple thousandths of an inch on a one inch dimension, is not uncommon these days. Parts requiring innovative designs, especially designed for assembly (DFA) or parts molded from different materials in the same mold (multi-material molding) are now commonplace. As polymer materials were developed for injection molding, the requirements of processing changed. The discovery of the different morphologies of polymers and the need for better melt homogeneity in molding led to the introduction of the injection screw. Various designs for material-specific screws have followed since. The use of high temperature materials that have high melting points and need high mold temperatures have led to the use of high-temperature ceramic heaters and mold temperature controllers providing higher heat capability. Innovations in electrical and electronic technologies paved the road for machines that could be better controlled, accurate, and efficient. Response times for hydraulic valves can be in milliseconds. All electric machines and hybrid machines



are gaining popularity because of their consistency and accuracy. The real-time processing parameters of a molding machine can now be viewed from any part of the world via an internet connection and therefore machine production can be monitored or machines can be debugged online. All these features are becoming a common practice among manufacturers. Even some auxiliary equipment can now be debugged and programmed by the suppliers via an internet connection. For the machines tied into the company ERP system, automated messages can be sent to the managers and supervisors about the machine status and quality issues. The need for efficiency and the requirements for advanced product features have dictated the need for innovations in injection molding over the years.

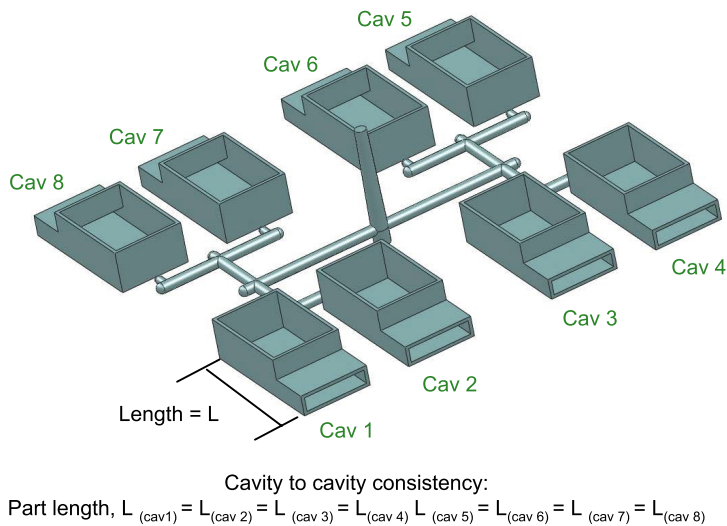
## 1.2 The Molding Process

The actual molding process has been traditionally defined as the inputs to the molding machine. These are the settings of speeds, pressures, temperatures, times and distances. Examples of these are injection speeds, holding pressure, mold temperature, cooling time and transfer position. These are inputs one would set at the molding machine and record on a sheet, commonly called the Process Sheet. However, the word process now needs to be redefined as the complete operation that encompasses all the activities the plastic is subjected to inside a molding facility – from when the plastic enters the molding facility as a pellet to when it leaves the facility as a molded part. For example, the storage of the plastic, the control of the drying of the plastic, and the post mold shrinkage of the part can have a significant influence on the quality of the part. During this journey of the pellet, every stage can have a significant effect on the final quality of the part or assembly. Naturally, understanding every stage now becomes imperative if we would like to control the quality of the molded part. Molding a part that meets the quality requirements can be a challenge, but the real challenge is molding parts consistently; cavity to cavity, shot after shot, and from one production run to another, meeting all the quality requirements and with the least amount of effort and maximum efficiency. We need to understand not just the inputs but also the outputs of the molding process. In fact, outputs are more important than the inputs.

The goal of this book is to explain to the reader all the molding process inputs, process outputs and provide process optimization techniques. There are several factors that contribute to each of these parameters and these factors will be discussed.

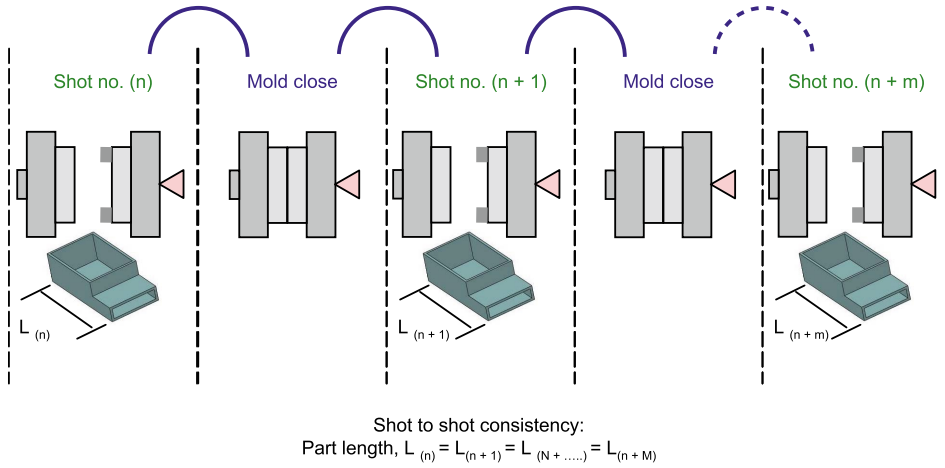
### 1.3 The Three Types of Consistencies Required in Injection Molding

The aim of developing a molding process should be to develop robust processes that would not need any process modifications once the processes are set. Process consistency leads to quality consistency, see Figure 1.1. We look for three different types of consistencies: cavity-to-cavity consistency (Figure 1.1(a)), shot-to-shot consistency (Figure 1.1(b)), and run-to-run consistency (Figure 1.1(c)). Cavity-to-cavity consistency is required in multicavity molds so that each cavity is of the same quality as the other cavities. Shot-to-shot consistency implies that every consecutive shot would be identical in quality to the previous shot, or the first shot is identical to the last shot of the production run with the process parameters remaining identical during the entire production run. When the process parameters from two different runs are identical and they produce identical quality parts, then this is called run-to-run consistency. Robust and stable processes always yield consistent quality parts with one established process.

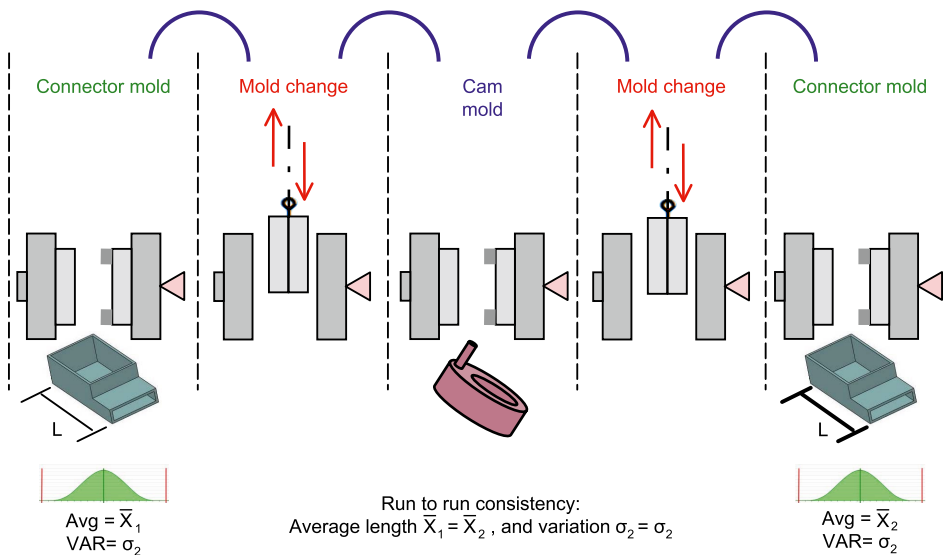


(a) Cavity to cavity consistency

**Figure 1.1** The three types of consistencies required in injection molding



(b) Shot to shot consistency



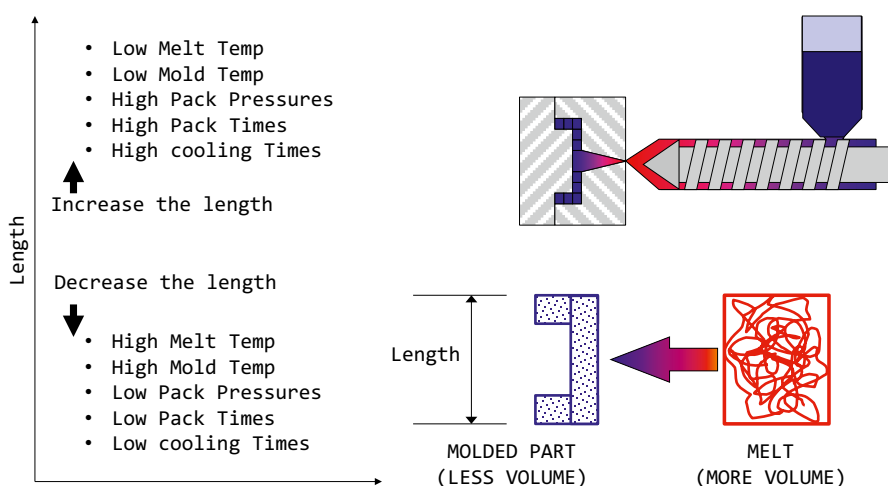
(c) Run to run consistency

**Figure 1.1** The three types of consistencies required in injection molding (*continued*)

There can be several reasons for not achieving the three types of consistencies. A cavity-to-cavity inconsistency could be caused because of an error when machining the steel in one of the cavities or by not making the gate sizes of the cavities identical to each other. A shot-to-shot inconsistency could be caused because of a damaged leaking check ring at the end of the molding screw or a problem with the hydraulic injection valve. A run-to-run inconsistency can be caused because of a lack of a robust

process or simply because the process was not accurately or completely documented in the previous run. The run-to-run consistency is the one that most companies struggle with. This book deals in depth with process development of robust, repeatable and reproducible processes.

Another reason for inconsistencies and variations in the molded product is the nature of the shrinkage of plastics. When molten plastic is injected inside a mold it cools and freezes to form the product. There is a reduction in the volume of the melt when it cools inside the mold. This is called shrinkage. The magnitude of shrinkage determines the final dimensions of the part. However, this shrinkage is not easily predictable and depends on a number of factors. There is a range of shrinkage values available and that makes it difficult for a mold maker to select a shrinkage value. For example, the shrinkage value for a low-density polyethylene is between 1.3 and 3.1%, which is a wide range. Shrinkage also depends upon the processing conditions. For example, higher the melt temperature, the higher the shrinkage. Every processing parameter can affect the shrinkage to varying degrees. Refer to Figure 1.2, which shows the effect of the molding parameter on the length of the part. To increase or decrease the length of the part, several parameters can be increased or decreased.



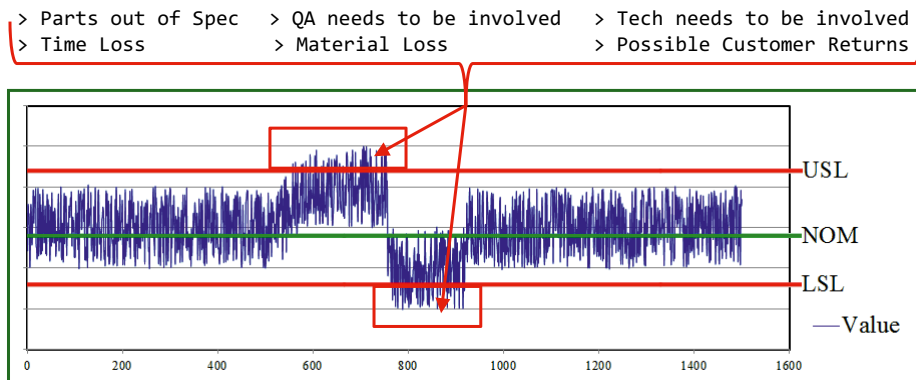
**Figure 1.2** Effect of molding parameters on shrinkage and dimension of a part

As seen in the figure, several parameters can have effect on the part dimension and quality. To increase the length of the part, some parameters need to be increased whereas some need to be decreased. Further, the magnitudes of change in length with change in the parameter varies from parameter to parameter. If the molding processes are not developed with these understandings, and in case the dimensions get out of specifications, each processor can work with any one of the parameters. The net result being that processes that were supposedly approved end up having com-

pletely different values in a matter of a few runs. When process sheets are compared, for example, from two years ago, there are hardly any numbers that match the current settings.

It should be the goal of every molder to develop an understanding of the molding process for the given mold. A systematic process development approach must be followed. The result of such an approach is a robust, repeatable and reproducible process: the 3 R's. The process also must be such that it can absorb the natural variations that are seen in the production environment such as temperature and humidity changes and even operator changes.

A process shown in Figure 1.3 is not acceptable because there is a lot of inefficiency in the system. Such processes result in defective parts, loss of material, and loss of time, not to mention the time and effort put in by the molding personnel. The parts can be remolded and shipped to the customer; however, the time and efforts lost cannot be recovered. The reputation of the molder is something that can also be permanently affected.



**Figure 1.3** Example of an inefficient process

## 1.4 Scientific Processing

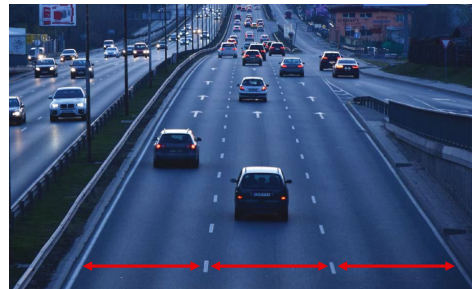
Scientific Processing is the process of achieving consistency in part quality via the application of the underlying scientific principles that control the parameters of the molding process. To achieve this consistency, we must be able to control every activity that is taking place in the process and to control every activity, we must understand the underlying scientific principles. The goal of scientific processing should be to achieve a robust process. Achieving robustness in each of the stages that the pellet travels through automatically translates to an overall robust process. The term consistency must not be confused with the parts being within the required specifications.

A consistent process will produce parts that will reflect the consistency but the parts may be out of specifications. In this case, the mold steel dimensions and/or the part specifications must be adjusted to bring the parts within the required specifications. The process must not be altered if the process is a robust process. Process robustness will be discussed at length in Chapter 8.

Consider that the task on hand is to drive a car in the cruise control mode at 120 km/h (75 mph) for 4 hours with no stops, every day for 365 days a year from location A to location B. There are two choices for the route between the two locations. The first is on a hilly terrain with the road on the edge of a cliff and the second on a wide lane highway as shown in Figure 1.4. Since this is a task to be done on a continuous basis it would be prudent to choose the wide lane highway since any small distractions at any time during the 4 hour daily drive, 365 days a year, could mean the car wavers some but because of the wide lanes the car would still be safe. However, driving the car at the edge of the cliff in the cruise control mode would need constant attention and there would be no chance of any error for the fear of driving off the cliff. For an efficient molding operation it is important to run the machines with no or the least amount of human interaction. In other words, the molding processes must run in a cruise control mode. The available tolerances should also support the natural variations that are seen in a molding environment. Figure 1.5 shows such a process where the part dimensions are well within specifications.

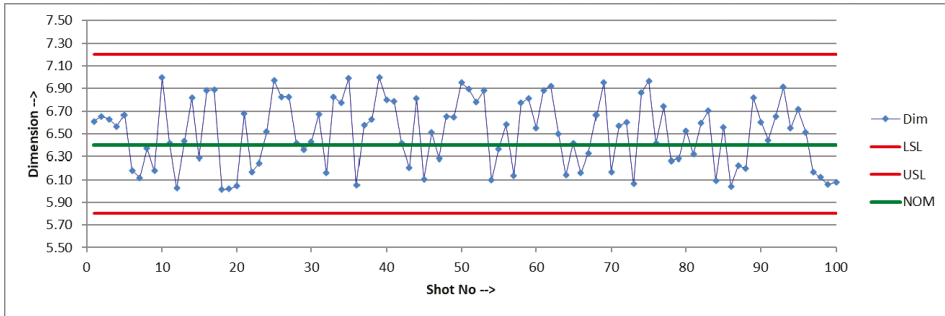


Winding road in the hills



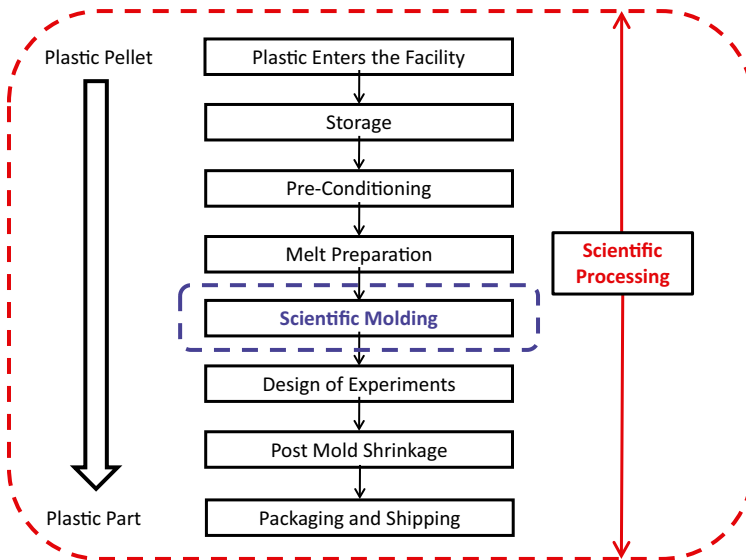
Highway with wide lanes

**Figure 1.4** Road options: edge of a cliff or wide lane highway? (Sources: George59/Pixabay; zdrsoft/Pixabay)



**Figure 1.5** Cruise control process

The term *Scientific Molding* was coined and promoted by two pioneers in the field of injection molding, John Bozzelli and Rod Groleau. Their principles are widely used today and are industry standards. Scientific molding deals with the actual plastic that enters the mold during the molding operation at the molding press. Scientific processing is the complete process from when the pellet enters the facility and leaves the facility as a finished product. Figure 1.6 shows the journey of the pellet and how scientific molding is a subset of scientific processing.



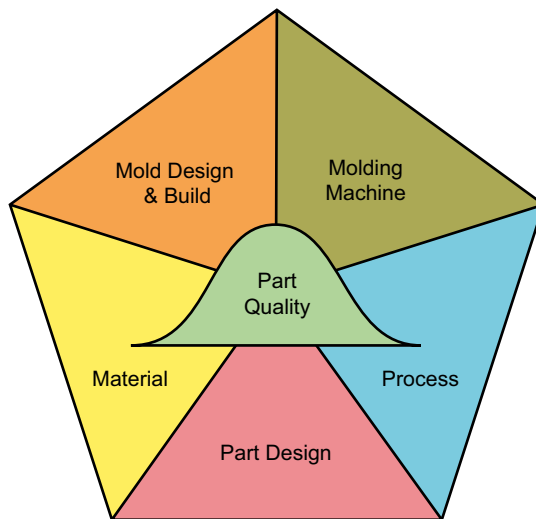
**Figure 1.6** The journey of the pellet, Scientific Molding and Scientific Processing

## 1.5 The Five Critical Factors of Molding

For a part to be molded successfully, there are five factors that have to be considered. These factors, shown in Figure 1.7, are as follows.

1. Part design
2. Material selection
3. Mold design and construction
4. The choice of the molding machine
5. Molding process

Each of these factors plays a very important role in the production of the molded part and therefore every one of them has to be optimized for the production. It is not just the performance of the part but also being able to mold the parts consistently with all the part quality requirements being within the required specifications.



**Figure 1.7**

The five factors influencing part quality consistency and process robustness

### 1.5.1 Part Design

The concept of the part starts with the engineer designing it. The part must be designed for molding and all the design rules for plastics must be considered. Rules for plastic part design are considerably different than those used for metal part design because of the inherent nature of the plastic. For example, to avoid sink defects in the plastic part, thick sections cannot be present. Additionally, all corners must have a



radius to avoid stress concentration and premature failure. With the growing cost of labor and the need for efficiency in the manufacturing process, the part designers now face the added challenges of designing parts for assembly along with those molded parts that utilize multiple materials, commonly referred to as multicomponent molding or multimaterial molding.

### 1.5.2 Material Selection

Based on the part design and the part performance requirements, the plastic material must be selected. These are functional requirements. The required tolerances should also be taken into consideration. For example, if a part is around the length of a ruler that is 30 cm (about 12 inches) long and needs to hold tight tolerances then a material of low shrinkage values must be selected. A polyethylene or a polypropylene material will not be able to hold the tolerances since the shrinkage values are high. A glass-filled polycarbonate could possibly work. The part design may require a special plastic material or a special additive to be added to the base plastic for performance. If a thick section must be present, a filled material may need to be selected or if there is a sliding surface, then an additive such as Teflon to reduce the coefficient of friction may need to be added to the plastic. Material selection should typically take place when the basic part design is done. Once the material is selected and the mold is built based on the shrinkage value for the material then changing the material will change the shrinkage and the mold will now not produce the parts to the required specifications. If the shrinkage values are the same, then it will be acceptable.

### 1.5.3 Mold Design and Construction

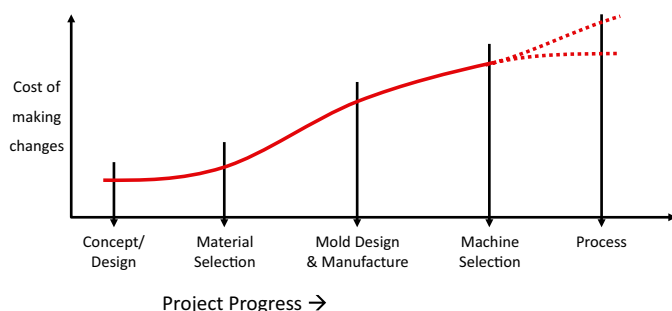
Once the part design and material selection is complete, the mold must be designed and constructed such that it is robust enough to withstand the molding process conditions and the plastic material. For example, during the molding process, the mold can be subjected to high mechanical stresses, especially during the plastic injection and the packing phases. The gates are high-wear areas and there are several places where the air needs to vent out for the plastic to enter the mold. Some plastic materials will require special attention and the mold must be specifically designed with the material in mind. Shrinkage may vary considerably from material to material. All these material specific factors must be considered. The required number of parts over the life of the mold is another factor that will dictate the actual materials of construction. Wear on the mold components must be considered, as the materials chosen to build the injection mold and mold cavities will impact the overall life of the mold and associated amount of maintenance required to keep it production worthy.

## 1.5.4 Machine Selection

Selecting the right machine for the mold should be done once the mold design is complete. It can be done concurrently during the mold construction stage. The machine plays a very important role in the stability of the molding process. For example, machines with large shot sizes must not be used to mold small shots because the part quality consistency will suffer. Vice versa, using a large percentage of the shot size can give rise to problems with melt homogeneity and therefore issues with fill and dimensions. Small molds must also not be mounted in large machines for fear of mold damage due to excessive clamp tonnage being applied.

## 1.5.5 Molding Process

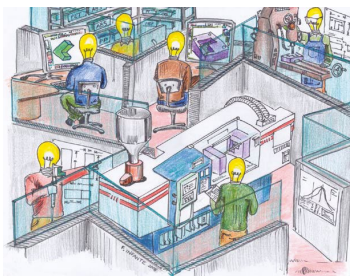
Process optimization is the last step before the mold is released into production. This book will cover this topic in detail. If the above four factors and activities are not properly selected or performed, process optimization can be a challenge, if not impossible, without incurring significant cost and delay to the project. At this stage, it is usually very late in the project timeline to make any changes to the part design or mold design, especially because of the cost and time involved. An improperly constructed mold can have a very narrow process window leading to a process that will tend to be unstable. If the material selected is not capable of holding the tolerances, no process will be able to produce satisfactory parts. Molding processes should be robust, repeatable, and reproducible. Refer to Figure 1.8, which shows how the cost of making changes to the project changes and increases as the project progresses. For example, if a feature in the part design has to change after the first shots are taken, the cost is substantially higher since the mold design has to change, the mold will need to be modified and then trialed again. The figure shows two dotted lines. The bottom line represents the line that shows that the costs will be minimal if all the first four elements are addressed and optimized before the first shots were taken.



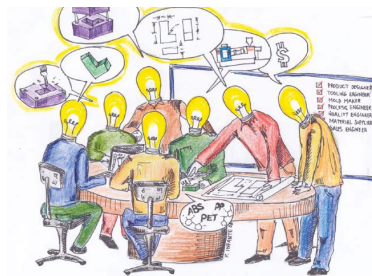
**Figure 1.8** Cost of making changes as the each of the phases is completed

## 1.6 Concurrent Engineering

There are various departments involved in the production of the molded part and therefore regular meetings between the different departments must be held. Each department will have specific knowledge of the selection process and can contribute not just to the process but more importantly predict issues once the mold comes over to their department. For example, getting the process engineer involved in a mold design can help in part orientation in the mold for easy removal, or the mold maker can get help with vent locations based on the process engineer's experience. Involving the quality engineer can help the process engineer understand the required tolerances in the design stage. If the tolerances seem to be unrealistic, they can go back to the product designer for wider tolerances or a material change. There are a lot of benefits associated with implementing concurrent engineering in injection molding. A section is devoted to this topic in this book. Figure 1.9 shows how in the over the wall approach, all the bright people are each working in their own spaces without communicating whereas in the concurrent engineering approach, they are all discussing and contributing the project. The biggest advantage of concurrent engineering is the availability of and access to each member's experience. This contributes to the success of the project.



Over The Wall Engineering



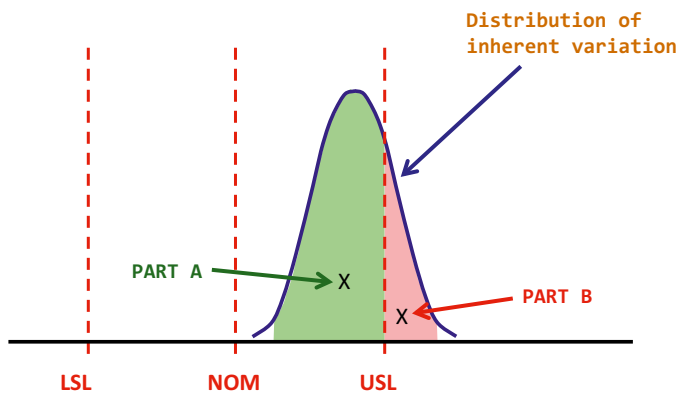
Concurrent Engineering

**Figure 1.9** Over the Wall and Concurrent Engineering

## 1.7 Variation

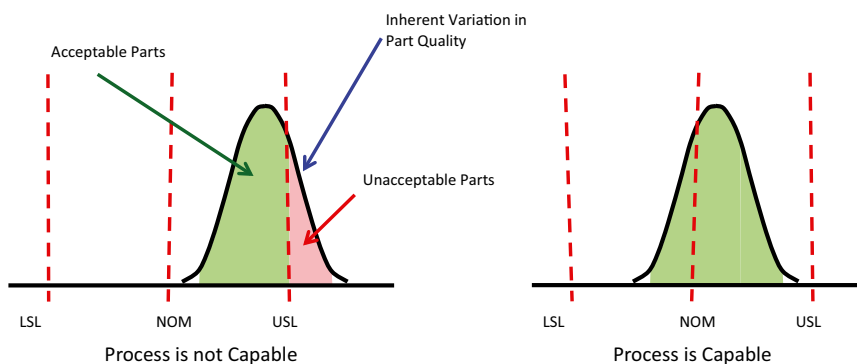
Variation is a natural phenomenon that is present in every process and activity. For example, the time it takes to drive to work has a number, but it can be an average that is collected over a certain period of time. There will be times that are lower than the average and there are times that are above the average. In injection molding, if the lengths of 100 parts are measured, then one could get an average number, but there

will be parts below and above this number. Variation can never be eliminated, so the goal should be to minimize it. Variation should be measured in order to predict the quality of the molded parts. As shown in Figure 1.10, a molder could measure the part marked as A and decide that all the molded parts are within specification. However, only when the variation is measured can it be seen that there will be some parts, such as the one marked B, which are out of specification. Once the variation is known, it becomes important to make sure that this variation is always contained within the required specification limits before the mold is released into production.



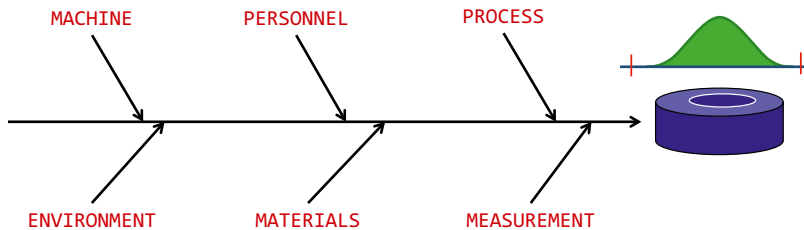
**Figure 1.10** Reason to measure variation

A process is said to be capable when all the molded product variation is contained within the specification limits. This is shown in Figure 1.11. The concept of process capability will be discussed in detail in the chapter on quality concepts.



**Figure 1.11** Process capability

Variation in injection molding can come from a number of sources, as shown in Figure 1.12. The variation in the molded product is the collective variation from each of these sources, plus many more. Controlling the variation in each source will help the reduction of the overall variation in the final product. The focus of this book will be to discuss the variations that arise from the molding process inputs and how to minimize these variations.



**Figure 1.12** Some of the sources of variation in a molded part

In the chapters that follow, the reader will be introduced to the underlying scientific principles to achieve a robust molding process. This understanding will then help in the application of these principles, to develop a robust process and to troubleshoot problems that occur in production. The chapters have been written in a logical sequence to build the readers' knowledge as one would require it or should learn it. However, if the reader is familiar with the topic, he or she can bypass some in favor of other chapters containing the desired information.

## 1.8 The Molding Parameters and a Recommended Process Development Procedure

There are several process-related molding parameters that affect the part quality. These are shown in Figure 1.13. To achieve a robust process that will produce parts to the required specifications in the most efficient manner, one has to understand and implement a rigorous process development procedure. Note that the phrase is not 'follow' a rigorous procedure, but 'understand and implement' a rigorous procedure. This book will attempt to provide the basics of the molding parameters, what they are, how they can affect the molding process and then go on to explain how they can be optimized. A recommended procedure is shown in Figure 1.14.

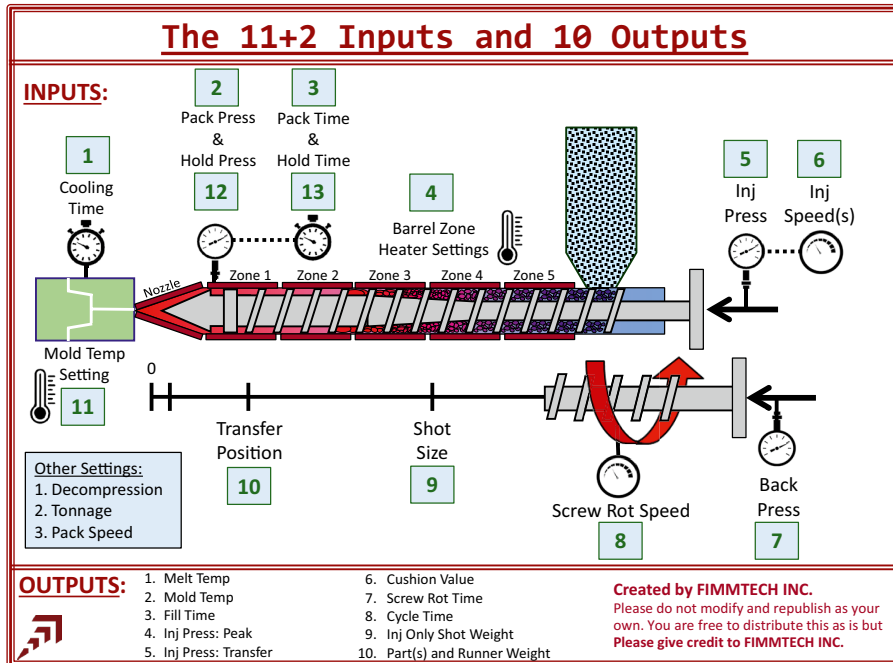


Figure 1.13 The process related molding parameters in injection molding

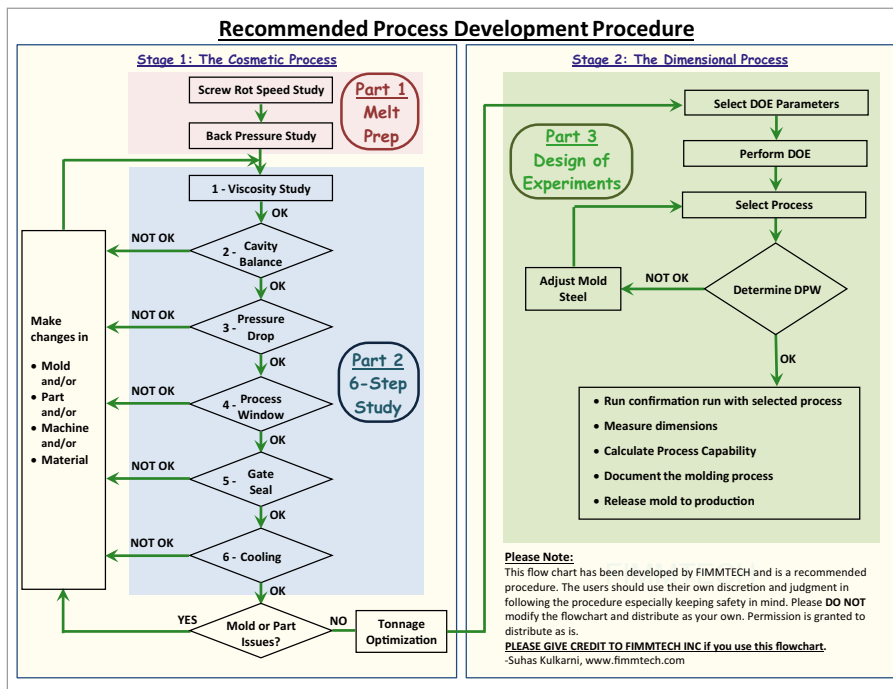


Figure 1.14 Recommended process development procedure

**Suggested Reading**

Osswald, T. A., Turng, L., Gramann, P. J. (Eds.), *Injection Molding Handbook* (2007) Hanser, Munich  
Kulkarni, S. M., *Injection Molding Magazine* (June 2008) Cannon Publications, Los Angeles, USA

# 2

## Properties of Polymers and Plastics That Influence Injection Molding

The term plastic is most commonly used when referring to injection molding materials. Plastics are a class of long-chain molecules called polymers. When polymers have certain properties they are called plastics. Since most of the commercially molded polymers fall under the classifications of plastics, we shall refer to these materials as plastics in this book. The other most commonly molded polymers are thermoplastic elastomers (TPEs) that have the same molding characteristics as plastics but different properties when molded. When referring to these materials, these will be mentioned as TPEs. To understand the concept of injection molding of plastics, a basic understanding about polymers, their properties, and the additives that are incorporated into them is required. This chapter will discuss the topic of polymers and their application to the injection molding process.

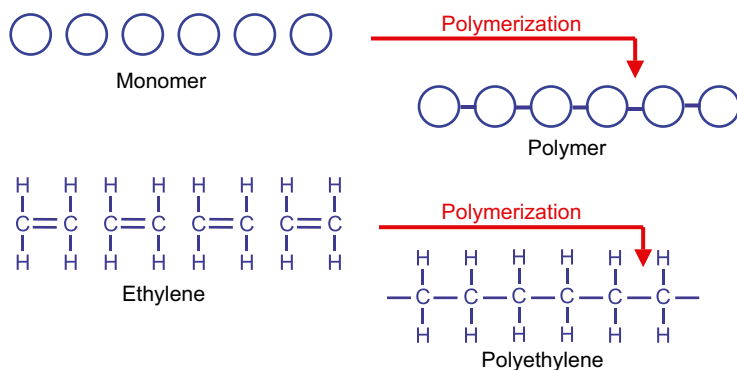
### 2.1 Polymers

Every particle in the universe is composed of atoms. Atoms in turn combine to form molecules. A molecule of water is made up of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen. Polymers are very large molecules that have several identical molecules joined together. An ethylene molecule attaches itself to another ethylene molecule and when several thousands or millions of such molecules join with each other, a polyethylene molecule is formed. 'Poly' means many and 'mer' means part. A polymer is many parts chemically joined together. The basic single unit from which it is synthesized is called a monomer, 'mono' meaning one. Polymers are also called macromolecules. The process of converting monomers to polymers is called polymerization. Polymers can also be synthesized from multiple monomers. For example, ABS is synthesized from three different monomers, acrylonitrile, butadiene, and styrene.



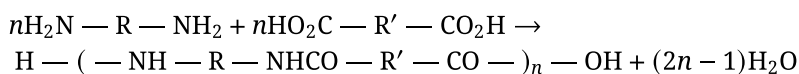
Polymers have been around since the beginning of time. DNA, the basic unit of life, is a polymer found in all plants and animals and is a naturally occurring polymer. Today, almost all commercially available polymers are synthesized from natural ingredients. The first commercially synthesized polymers were materials such as ebonite in the late 1800s. Interestingly, the widely used polyolefins gained commercial importance only in the late 1950s, almost a couple decades after the introduction of polyvinyl chlorides, nylons, and polyesters. Recently introduced polymers are based on biomaterials and nanotechnology.

Polymers are synthesized from monomers via a chemical process. There are mainly two types of polymerization processes, the *addition polymerization* process and the *condensation polymerization* process. In the addition polymerization process, a catalyst initiates the polymerization reaction and each monomer adds onto the next monomer until all the monomers are polymerized. A common example of an addition polymer is polyethylene. Polyethylene is polymerized from ethylene monomer, which is a gas at room temperature. The double bond in the ethylene molecule breaks and a bond with an adjacent ethylene molecule is formed. The process continues and the result is a large molecule with high molecular weight. The polymerization process is shown in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1** The process of polymerization and formation of polyethylene

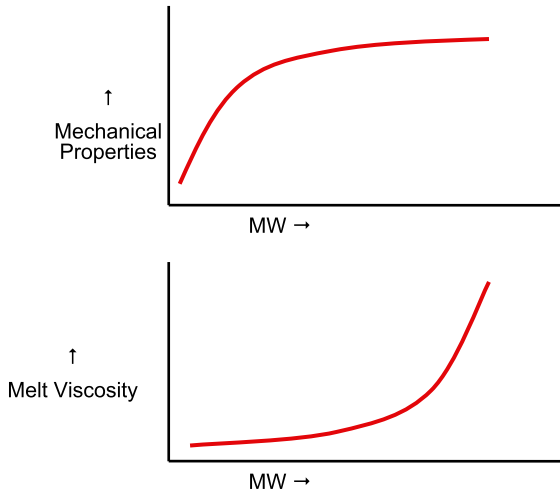
In condensation polymerization too, each monomer adds on to the next monomer, but this chemical reaction also produces a low molecular weight byproduct that has to be continuously removed out of the system for the polymerization to continue. Condensation polymers are usually polymerized from two or more families of monomers. Nylons and polyesters are examples of condensation polymers. A nylon (chemical name: polyamide) is polymerized from the monomer families of diamines and diacids, as shown in the chemical reaction.



R and R' are the characteristic groups that are present in the monomer. In this case, water is the byproduct. Based on these groups, different types of nylons can be produced. The unit in parentheses repeats itself to form the polymer. If R is  $(\text{CH}_2)_6$ , then the first monomer is hexamethylene diamine and if R' is  $(\text{CH}_2)_4$ , the second monomer is adipic acid. The polymer that is synthesized from these two monomers is poly(hexamethylene adipamide), commonly called nylon 66.

## 2.2 Molecular Weight and Molecular Weight Distribution

The repetition of the monomer units causes the molecular weight to increase. The number average molecular weight is the addition of the molecular weights of each of the molecules divided by the number of molecules. Most commercial polymers have a number average molecular weight between 40,000 and 200,000, with some having extremely high numbers. Ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene (UHMWPE) is an example for a molecular weight in the range of 1–6 million. Molecular weights for greases and soft waxes range between 500 and about 3000, whereas some tough and brittle waxes have molecular weights between 3000 and 10,000 [1]. When the attraction between the molecules (intermolecular forces) is high, the materials can gain sufficient mechanical properties at lower molecular weights. Polyamides and polyesters are examples of polymers with strong intermolecular forces. In materials such as polyethylene, where intermolecular forces are low, high molecular weights are required to achieve acceptable mechanical properties. In general terms, molecular weights for polyethylenes are higher than those for nylons or polyesters. UHMWPE was developed for applications in which polyethylenes were the right choice except for their mechanical properties. In most cases, the mechanical properties reach a plateau with increasing molecular weights. Other properties are also affected by molecular weight. Of particular interest to molders is the viscosity of the polymer where an increase in molecular weight results in the increase in viscosity. For melt processing, a certain minimum viscosity is essential for the formation of a processable and homogeneous melt. Processability increases with molecular weight but due to the increase in viscosity, the energy required to process also increases and reaches a point where the increase is not practical for melt processing, see Figure 2.2.



**Figure 2.2** Effect of molecular weight on mechanical properties and the viscosity of polymers

The addition of the monomers during the polymerization process (both addition and condensation) is completely random. It is difficult to control the growth of the molecules, which results in molecules of various lengths and therefore varying molecular weights. This in turn leads to a distribution of the molecular weight in the polymer called the molecular weight distribution (MWD) of a polymer. The MWD is an important factor in processing. The lower molecular weight units melt faster than the high molecular weight units. In injection molding, the plastic needs to be injected into the mold as fast as possible to make sure the molecules do not freeze off in the cold mold during injection. If this happens, the part will not fill completely and/or will have built up internal stresses when ejected out of the mold. A narrow MWD ensures that all the molecules are molten during approximately the same period of time. When the residence time in the barrel of the injection molding machine reaches the upper limit, the possibility of molecular breakdown or degradation, resulting in the loss of properties in the final product, increases. This is another reason why a low MWD is desired. However, in the case of extrusion, melt strength is an important element of the process. In this case, the higher molecular weight units have higher viscosity and help to carry the molten lower molecular weight units to form the extrudate. Therefore, a broader MWD is preferred. A narrow MWD would result in the loss of melt strength, and therefore also in the loss of the shape and characteristics of the extrudate profile. The residence time inside the barrel of an extruder is short because extrusion is a continuous process and therefore the risk of degradation is low. This difference in MWD is the decisive factor whether a resin is an injection molding grade or an extrusion grade. Sometimes, extrusion grades are used in injection molding because the viscosity can be low enough to fill the cavities effectively and consistently. The oppo-

# Index

## A

ABS 106  
acetal 110  
acrylate 106  
acrylics 109  
acrylonitrile 106  
actual melt temperature 167  
actual mold temperature 168  
addition polymerization 18  
additives 111  
aliasing 282, 283  
alloys 105  
amorphous 24  
– polymers 21  
anisotropic material 44  
anti-aging additives 113  
apparent shear rate 61  
apparent viscosity 55  
array  
– orthogonal 278  
atactic 23

## B

back pressure 161  
– optimization 200  
balanced array 278  
barrel clearance 121

barrel heat profile 29  
barrel temperatures 155  
– setting 191  
Beaumont Technologies 67  
blowing agents 114  
Box-Behnken design 278  
bubbles 80  
built-in stress 262  
burn marks 81  
butadiene 106

## C

capability index 380  
capillary rheometer 73  
cavity balance 222  
– procedure 221  
– study 219  
cavity imbalance  
– acceptable level 227  
– calculation 226  
cavity pressure 219, 220  
– curve at the end of fill 357  
– curve near the gate 357  
– sensing technology 355  
– sensor 361  
cavity steel adjustment 291  
chain scission 113

- characterization of polymer viscosity 73
- check ring 126
- clamp force 121, 132
- clamp tonnage 129, 132
- classification of polymers 103
- coefficient of friction 113
- co-injection molding 72
- colorants 114
- commercial plastics 105
- common defects
  - cause 326
  - prevention 326
- concurrent engineering 12, 366
- condensation polymerization 18
- confounding 282, 283
- consistency 143
  - cavity to cavity 3
  - quality 3
  - run-to-run 3
  - shot-to-shot 3
- constant factors 274
- contact type probes 221
- contour cooling 336
- contour plot 288
- control factors 274
- control process window (CoPW) 241, 313
- control sensor 359
- coolant
  - type of 337
- cooling line 336
- cooling phase 149
- cooling time 30, 164, 255
  - optimization 256
  - study 253
- copolymers 104
- cosmetic process development 312
- cosmetic process window (CPW) 239, 312
- critical dimension 290
- critical factors of molding 9
- crystalline 24
  - polymers 21

- crystallinity 25, 36
- crystallite 21
- crystallization 113
  - temperature 28, 35
- cushion value 171, 213
- cycle time 173, 256
  - breakdown 257
- cyclone separator 348

## D

- decompression 165
- decoupled molding<sup>SM</sup> 176, 361
- degradation 79, 320
- degree of crystallinity 22
- desiccant dryer 89
- design of experiments (DOE) 280
  - definition 272
- dew point 87, 92
- dieseling effect 339
- differential scanning calorimeter (DSC) 36
- dilatant 57
- dimensional process window (DPW) 241, 288, 313
- dimensional variation 81
- DIOP 112
- direct sensor 358
- dispersive mixing 124
- distributive mixing 123
- documentation books 318
- drying
  - equipment 88
  - of plastics 85
  - precautions 185
  - temperature 85, 86
  - time 85, 86, 183, 347

## E

- effect of regrind 352
- elastomers 104
- electronic moisture analyzer 91
- end-chain degradation 79

end-of-fill cavity pressure integral 363  
epoxidized soybean oil (ESO) 112

## F

factor 274, 276, 277, 289  
factorial experiments 270, 284  
family molds 229  
feed depth 123  
filler 111  
– content 262  
fill pattern 223  
fill progression 213  
fill time 170  
fines 348  
flame retardants 112  
flow  
– front 58  
– imbalance 64  
– laminar 336  
– promoters 114  
– transitional 336  
– turbulent 336, 337, 338  
fluoropolymers 111  
flush mount sensor 358  
forced venting 345  
fountain flow 58, 69, 216  
fountain flow, effect on  
– crystallinity 72  
– fiber orientation 72  
– molecular orientation 72  
free radicals 113  
free state 45  
frozen layer 70  
full factorial experiment 284  
full part weight 175

## G

gage reproducibility & repeatability 371  
gassing  
– excessive 320  
gate freeze study 247

gate seal 247  
– cautions and exceptions 249  
– procedure 247  
– study 246  
– time 248  
general purpose polystyrene (GPPS) 121  
general purpose screw 123  
glass transition temperature 33  
glassy state 61

## H

heater bands 122  
heat history 346  
heat soaking 317  
helix angle 125  
high-shear lamina 65  
histogram 376  
holding phase 149, 150  
holding pressure 150, 238, 239  
holding time 238  
hold pressure 160  
hold time 160  
homopolymers 104  
horizontal clamp molding machine 119  
horizontal injection machine 119  
hot air dryer 89  
hydraulic ‘fill only’ integral 362  
hydraulic pressure curve 356  
hydrolytic degradation 79, 182  
hydrophilic 77  
hydrophobic 77  
hygroscopic 77, 83

## I

indirect sensor 358  
injection  
– force 153  
– molding, parameter 271  
– phase 149, 150  
– speed 153  
injection molding cycle 149  
injection only shot weight 174

- injection pressure 159
- injection speed 158
- injection time 170
- injection velocity 158
- in-mold rheology study 208
- inorganic polymers 104
- intensification ratio (IR) 126, 127
  - of the screw 122
- interaction 280, 281
  - column 282
  - types of 281
- intermolecular forces 19, 34
- internal voids 153
- isotropic material 44

## K

- Karl Fischer titration 91
- knowledge base 364

## L

- laminar flow 65
- L/D ratio 121, 125
- level 275, 276
- lot-to-lot variations 209
- lower specification limit (LSL) 148, 289
- lower tolerance 266
- low temperature – high pressure
  - corner 242
- low temperature – low pressure
  - corner 241, 242
- lubricants 113

## M

- machine selection 11, 129
- machine specifications 120
- material purging instructions 317
- material selection 9, 10
- material supplier
  - concurrent involvement 370
  - conventional involvement 370
- maximum moisture level 77

- MeltFlipper® 67
- melt flow index (MFI) 74
- melt flow rate (MFR) 74
- melt homogeneity 29, 121
- melting point 35
- melt preparation 189
- melt processing range 27
- melt processing window 35
- melt rheology 73
- melt rotation technology 67, 69
- melt temperature 28, 34, 239
  - check 190
- melt viscosity reducers 114
- moisture determination 90
- mold cooling 335
- mold design and construction 9, 10
- mold designer
  - concurrent involvement 369
  - conventional involvement 369
- molded-in stress 153
- mold filling speed 28
- mold function qualification
  - procedure 265
- mold height 131
- molding area diagram 239, 243
- molding machine 9
  - classification 118
- molding process 9, 11
  - effect on the part properties 347
- molding shut down 322
- molding startup 321
- mold length 130
- mold maker
  - concurrent involvement 369
  - conventional involvement 369
- mold open stroke 131
- mold qualification
  - book 318
  - checklist 267, 313, 314
  - flowchart 311
- mold shut-down procedure 317
- mold stack height 130
- mold temperature 28, 239
  - map 316

- mold temperatures 156
- mold width 130
- molecular weight 19, 25, 347
  - distribution (MWD) 19, 20
- monitor sensor 359
- morphology 21
  - role of 26
- multishot machine 120

## N

- natural cause variations 143
- naturally balanced runner 66
- Newtonian 57
- noise factors 274
- nominal dimension 266
- non-Newtonian 57, 103
- non-return valve 126
- normal distribution 377
- nozzle drool 82
- nozzle temperature control 30
- nucleating agents 113
- number average molecular weight 19
- number of experiments 277
- nylon overdrying 97

## O

- operator instructions 317
- optical clarity 30
- organic polymers 104
- orthogonal array 279
- Ostwald and de Waele 59
- out of specifications 148
- oven dryers 88
- overdrying 79, 93
  - controller 100
  - prevention 100

## P

- packing phase 149
- packing pressure 219, 238
- packing time 238

- pack pressure 159
- pack speed 166
- pack time 159
- parallel cooling 338
- Pareto chart 286
- part design 9
- partial factorial experiment 284
- parting line shot 119
- parting line vent 345
- part quality qualification 313
- PBT overdrying 94
- peak injection pressure 170
- percentage shot size used 137
- phthalates 112
- piezoelectric sensor 357
- Plackett-Burman design 278
- plasticating capacity 122
- plastic drying 77, 182
- plasticizers 112
- plastic pressure 122
- platen 130
  - deflection 130
- plugging up of the vents 81
- Poisson's effect 45
- polar group 83, 85
- polyamides 107
- polycarbonates 109
- polyesters 109
- polyethylene 105
- polymer 17
  - blends 115
  - crystallinity 24
  - morphology 229
  - rheology 55
- polyolefins 105
- polyoxymethylene 110
- polypropylene 105
- polystyrenes 108
- polyvinyl chloride 109
- post-gate cavity pressure integral 362
- post-molding shrinkage 153
- post-mold shrinkage 261
- prediction equation 289



- pressure at transfer 171
- pressure drop 234
  - studies 229
  - study procedure 231
- pressure graph 359
- pressure limited 230, 233, 234
- pressure sensor 357
- process capability 382
- process change log 315
  - sheet 324
- process consistency 3, 146, 266
- process documentation 267, 314
- process engineer
  - concurrent requirement 371
  - conventional involvement 371
- processing aids 114
- process robustness 145, 266
- process selection 291
- process sensitivity chart 289
- process sheet 314, 315
- process window 238, 243, 288
  - cautions and exceptions 245
  - crystalline materials 242
  - study 237
  - study procedure 241
- product designer
  - conventional involvement 368
  - required involvement 368
- production book 318, 324
- progression of the melt 70
- purging 320
  - compound 322
- PVT graph 272

## Q

- qualification runs 319
- qualifications 325
- qualitative factor 274
- quantitative factor 274
- quartz-based sensor 357

## R

- racetrack effect 66
- randomization 302, 303
- reducing inspection 293
- regrind 346
  - batch process 349
  - continuous process 349
  - generation estimating 350
  - generation number 348
  - molecular weight 352
  - particle size distribution 348
  - processing 348
- relative humidity 87
- residence time 140
- resin storage 182
- response 275, 276, 289
  - qualitative 275
  - quantitative 275
- Reynolds number (Re) 336, 337
- rheological behavior 205
- rheological imbalance 66, 223
- rheology study 205
  - cautions and exceptions 213
  - procedure 210
- robust process 143, 148, 149, 289
- runner
  - venting 344
- runner weight 175

## S

- scientific molding 8, 143
- scientific processing 143, 145, 179, 205
  - definition 6
- screening experiment 278
- screw 122
  - bounce-back 213
  - channel depth 123
  - compression ratio 124
  - compression zone 123
  - designs 125
  - diameter 121
  - feed zone 123

- metering zone 124
- outside diameter 123
- recovery speed 29
- root diameter 123
- slipping 123
- speed 160
- transition zone 123
- screw rotation
  - procedure 197
- screw rotation speed 160
  - optimization 195
- screw rotation time 173
- semicrystalline 22
- sensor 356
  - locations 363
- series cooling 338
- setup instructions 317
- shear energy 160
- shear force 56
- shear friction 29
- shear heat 122
- shear rate 56, 57, 59, 73, 207
- shear rate profile 62, 63
- shear stress 57
- shear thinning 57, 103
- shelf life limitations 182
- short shot 220, 233, 339
- shot control 82
- shot size 120, 121, 124, 158
- shrinkage 26, 44, 45, 219, 261, 262
  - additives 262
  - annealing 262
  - filler 262
  - glass transition temperature 261
  - measuring procedure 263
  - mold temperature 262
  - part thickness 262
  - processing conditions 262
  - rate of 261
- sink 150
- solution rheology 73
- special cause variations 143
- specifications 143
- specific volume 34, 219

- speed and pressure 153
- splay 80
- standard deviation 378
- startup procedure 321
- statistical analysis 286
- statistical data 277
- statistical process control (SPC) 383
- statistical quality control (SQC) 383
- stereoregular 23
- strain gage sensor 357
- stress build-up 67
- styrene 106
- suck back position 165
- surface defects 80
- syndiotactic 23

## T

- Taguchi design 278
- target dimension 289
- Teflon 111
- tensile properties 104
- thermal imaging system 221
- thermal region 61
- thermal transition 32, 36
- thermoplastics 104
- thermosets 104
- toggle machine 130
- tolerances
  - process change 292
- Tomasetti volatile indicator test 90
- tonnage 121, 132, 166
  - optimization 257
- tonnage calculation 137
- tooling engineer
  - concurrent requirement 369
  - conventional involvement 369
- tornado chart 286, 287
- transfer position 158
- troubleshooting 322, 325
  - guideline 319, 323
- TVI Test 90

**U**

upper specification limit (USL) 148, 289  
upper tolerance 266  
UV stabilizers 113

**V**

vacuum assist 345  
vacuum venting 345  
valve gate mold 345  
velocity 62  
– profile 62  
vent  
– depth 341  
– dimensions 340  
– locations 344  
– reliefs 341  
– size 342  
venting 339  
vertical clamp molding machine 119

vertical injection 119  
virgin material 346  
viscosity 19, 28, 55, 59, 61, 153, 206, 207  
– curve 209  
– curve worksheet 211  
– effect of temperature on 61  
– in polymer melts 58  
– linear scale 206  
– logarithmic scale 206  
– model 73  
volumetric shrinkage 150

**W**

warpage 153, 262  
waterline diagram 315, 316  
water lines 338  
weld line 82  
Wheatstone bridge 357