

## Specific heat

### Select LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Introduce specific heat in terms of thermal energy and apply the 1<sup>st</sup> law of thermodynamics to simplify specific heat into the more familiar term explicit in terms of heat.
- Be able to use specific heats of systems to determine how much energy it takes to raise the temperature of that system.

### TEXTBOOK CHAPTERS:

- Giancoli (Physics Principles with Applications 7<sup>th</sup>) :: 14-3
- Knight (College Physics : A strategic approach 3<sup>rd</sup>) :: 12.5
- BoxSand :: [Heat](#)

**WARM UP:** What would an example of a system be that has both work and heat present? Is the thermal energy of your system increasing, decreasing, staying the same?

We talked about how to quantify a change in thermal energy of an ideal gas ( $\Delta E^{\text{th}} = 3/2 N k_B \Delta T$ ), but what if the object of interest was a solid or liquid? We would like to formulate a similar way in which we can determine how much the temperature will change if a given amount of energy is added or taken away from a solid or liquid. It turns out we can quantify this relationship for materials by a value known as the specific heat ( $c$ ). The specific heat is then a measure of how much energy is required to change the temperature of a given mass of a substance. For example, the specific heat of aluminum is 900 J/(kg K), which is interpreted as: it takes 900 joules of energy to raise the temperature of 1 kg worth of aluminum by 1 K unit. Mathematically the specific heat is written as...

$$c = \frac{1}{m} \frac{\Delta E^{\text{th}}}{\Delta T}$$

Now that it's mathematically visible, the question might arise, why are we calling it specific "heat" when heat ( $Q$ ) is not explicitly present? It turns out this is just poor terminology, you can really think of it as "specific energy". However for most of the processes we study, the way we will change our thermal energy will be via heat and not work. Recall that  $\Delta E^{\text{th}} = Q + W_{\text{ext}}$ . If  $W_{\text{ext}} = 0$  then  $\Delta E^{\text{th}} = Q$ . And the specific heat can then be explicitly written in terms of heat.

$$c = \frac{1}{m} \frac{\Delta E^{\text{th}}}{\Delta T} \sim \left. \begin{array}{l} \text{If } W=0 \\ E^{\text{th}} = W + Q \end{array} \right\} \text{ THEN } \Delta E^{\text{th}} = Q \Rightarrow c = \frac{1}{m} \frac{Q}{\Delta T} \text{ OR } Q = mc\Delta T$$

Specific heat is a material property, (i.e. the value of  $c$  is different for different types of materials). This means that samples of different materials all with the same mass will have different changes in temperature when introduced with the same amount of thermal energy. The specific heat is of a broader class of what we call response functions, which typically characterize how a macroscopic property of a system responds to a change in another quantity within the system. Here, the specific heat tells us how a substance's temperature will change if we change its thermal energy.

In general, the specific heat for any substance is a function of temperature. However, it is roughly constant



### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- (1) The term "specific heat capacity" suggests that an object can possess heat. Can a system possess heat? Based on your answer, would you change anything about that term "specific heat capacity"?
- (2) The specific heat of an object depends on which of the following
  - a. The amount of energy added or taken away from the object.
  - b. The mass of the object.
  - c. The density of the object.
  - d. The material of the object.