

1

Film Materials, Formats and Processes

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On the Materiality of Audio-Visual Heritage

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2

Observations

- 16 mm
- black and white
- reversal
- silent
- cellulose diacetate



3

Common Film Formats

professional formats

- 35 mm, Super 16

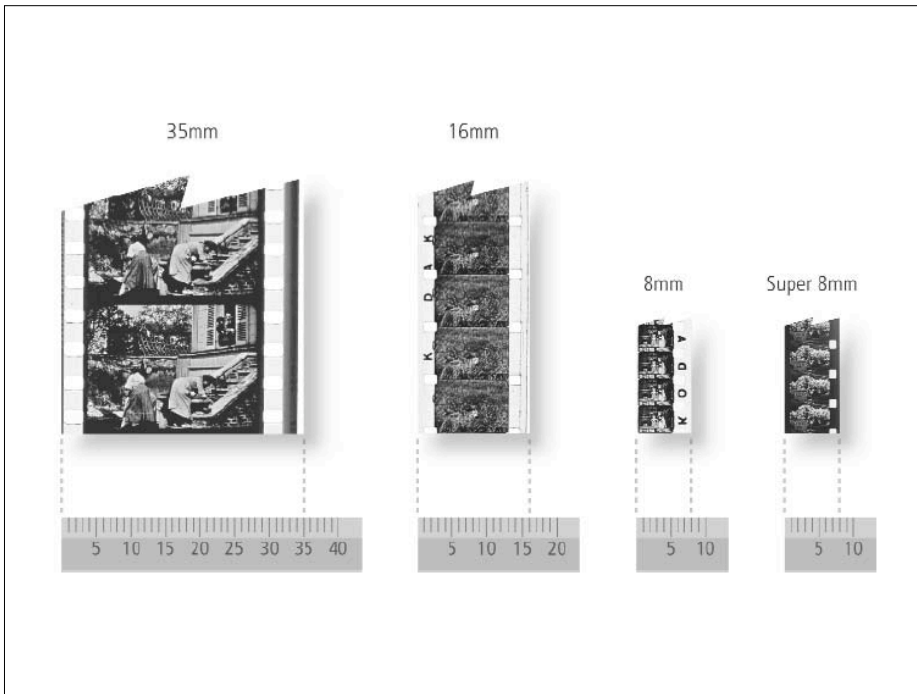
universal format

- 16 mm

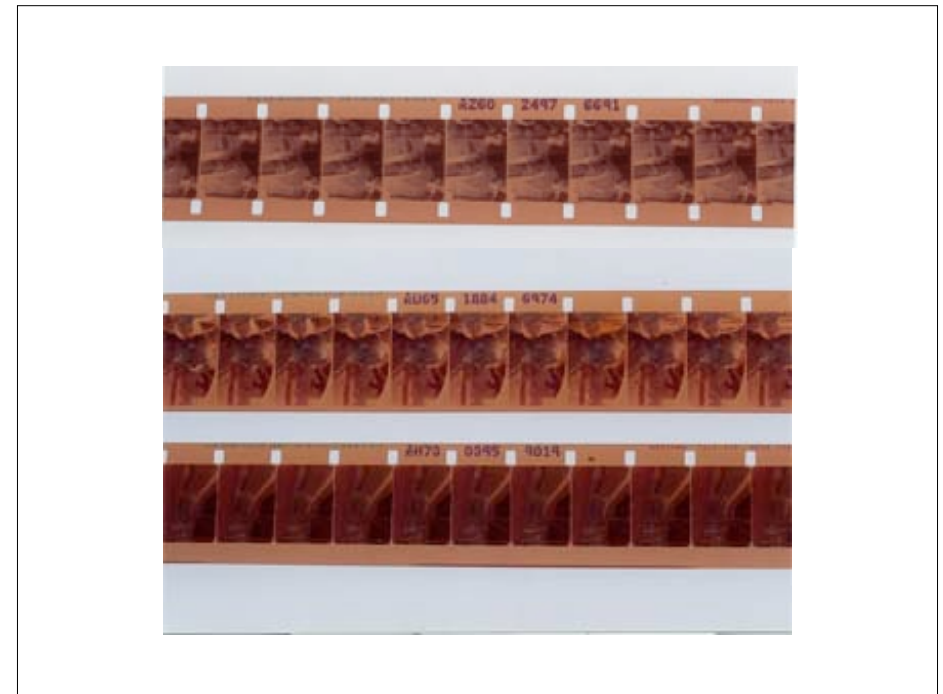
amateur formats

- 9.5 mm, 8 mm, Super 8

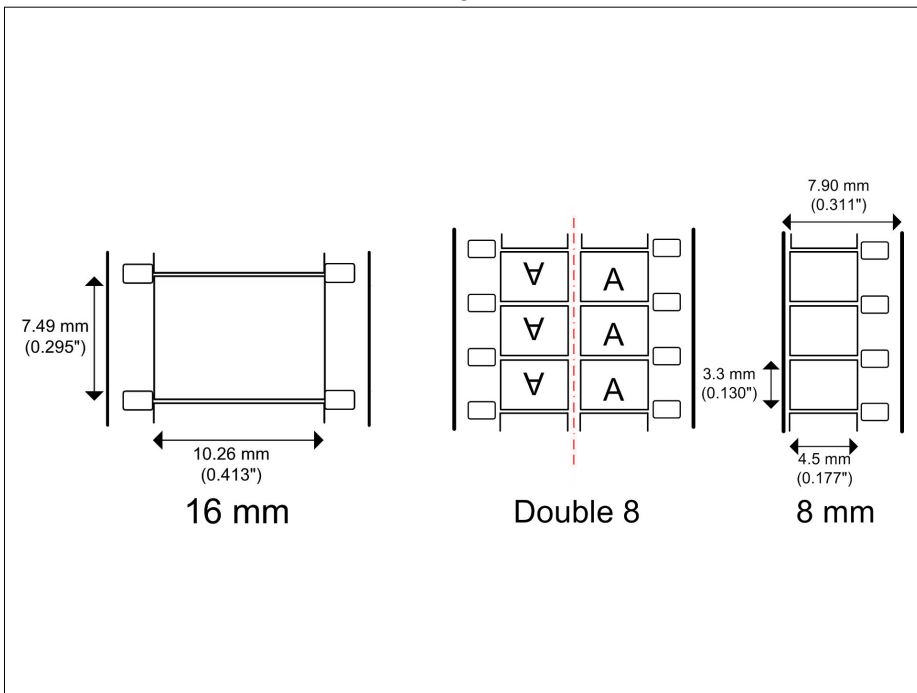
4



5



6



7

Common Magnetic Formats

audio

- 2", 1", 1/2", 1/4"

cinema

- 35 mm, 17.5 mm, 16 mm, 8 mm

video

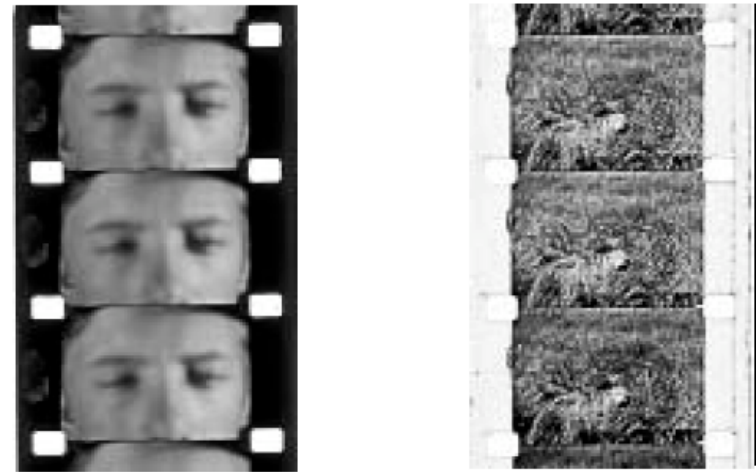
- 2", 1", 3/4", 1/2"

8

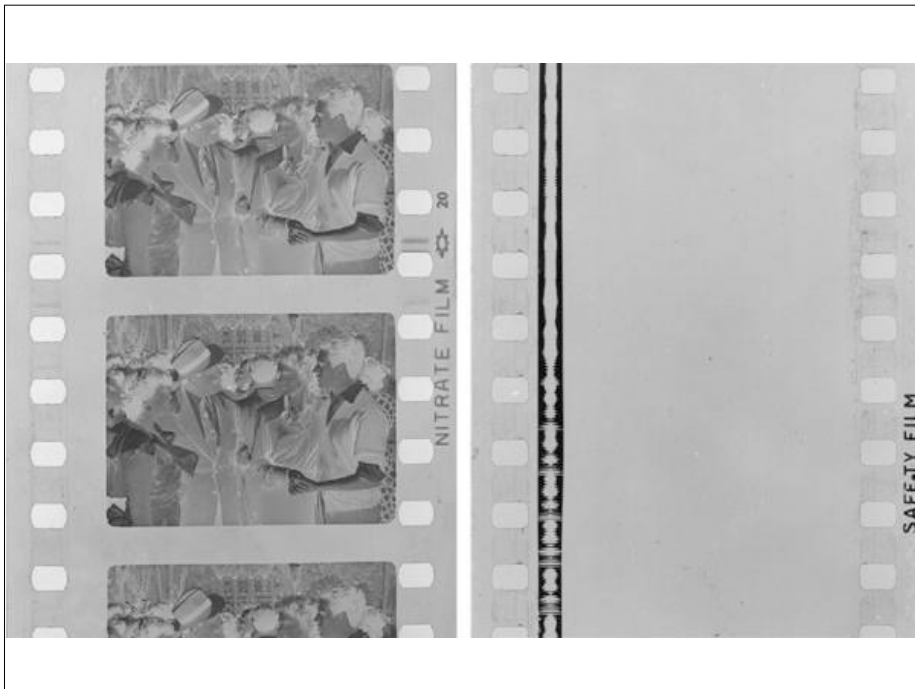
Film Polarity

- negative/positive
- reversal

9



10



11

"Silent Film" Sound

- musical improvisation
- cue sheet
- "Kinemathek"
- score
- film narrator or Benshi
- voices from behind the screen
- sound effects
- sound on disc or tape cassette

12

Sound Film

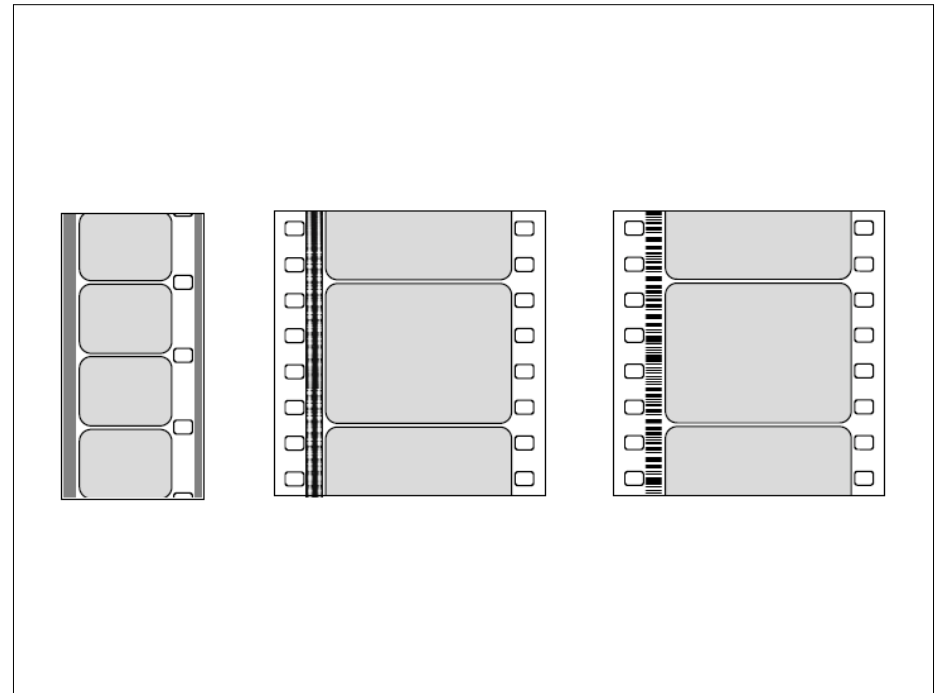
comopt = composite optical sound print
(variable density or variable area)

commag = composite print with magnetic stripe

sepmag = magnetic sound only

sepopt = optical sound only print

magopt = both optical and magnetic sound on one film

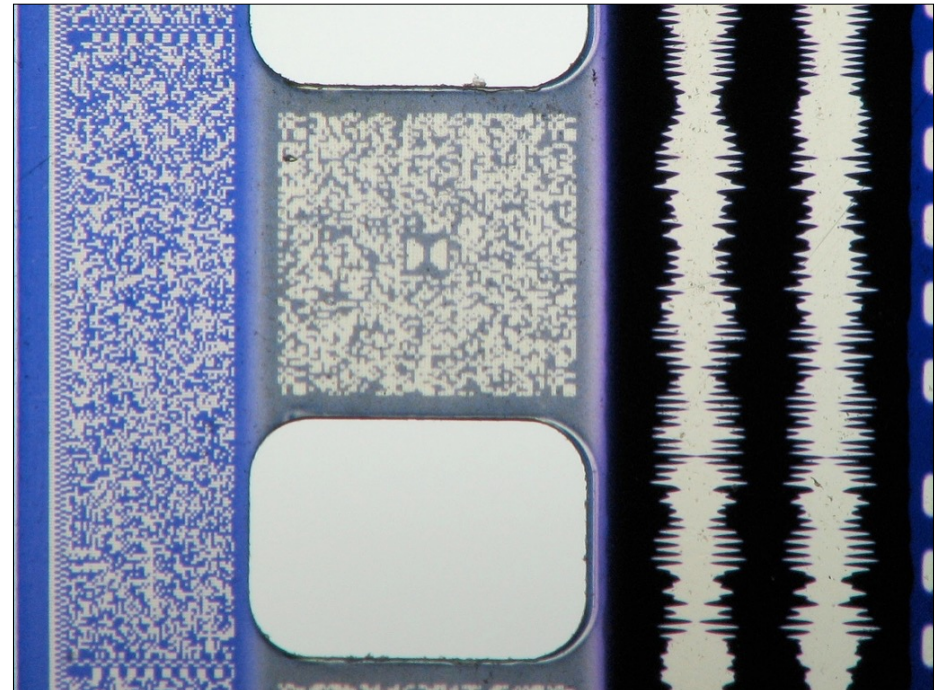


13



15

14



16

Sound Film Production

image	sound
photochemical	photochemical
photochemical	magnetic
photochemical	digital
photochemical + digital	digital
digital	digital

17

Flavours of Film Colour

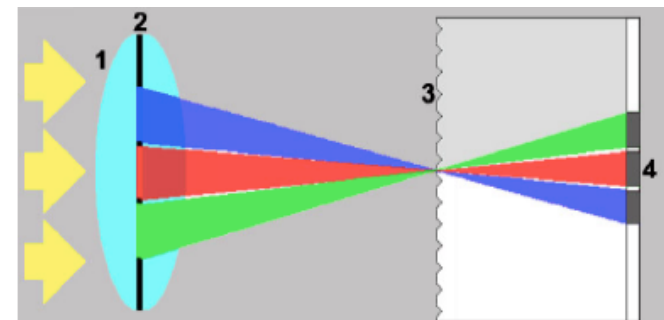
- hand coloured
- stencil
- tinting
- toning
- additive colour
- subtractive colour

18



19

lenticular film



20

Dufaycolor



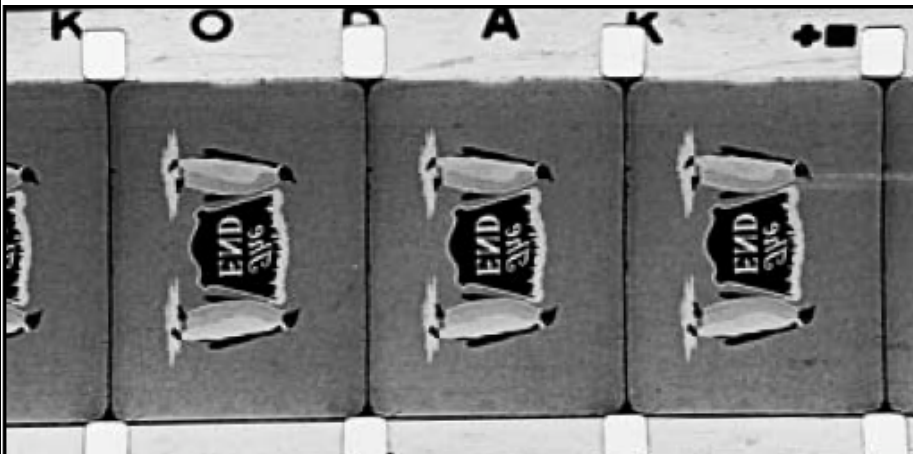
21

Other Information

- raw stock: manufacturer and type
- type of camera
- image format
- wind (winding A; winding B)
- generation/type of element: camera original, print, internegative, interpositive, dupe neg, fine grain; A and B rolls (sometimes more)
- Filmographic data in titles and credits; people, places, etc.

22

Edge code



23

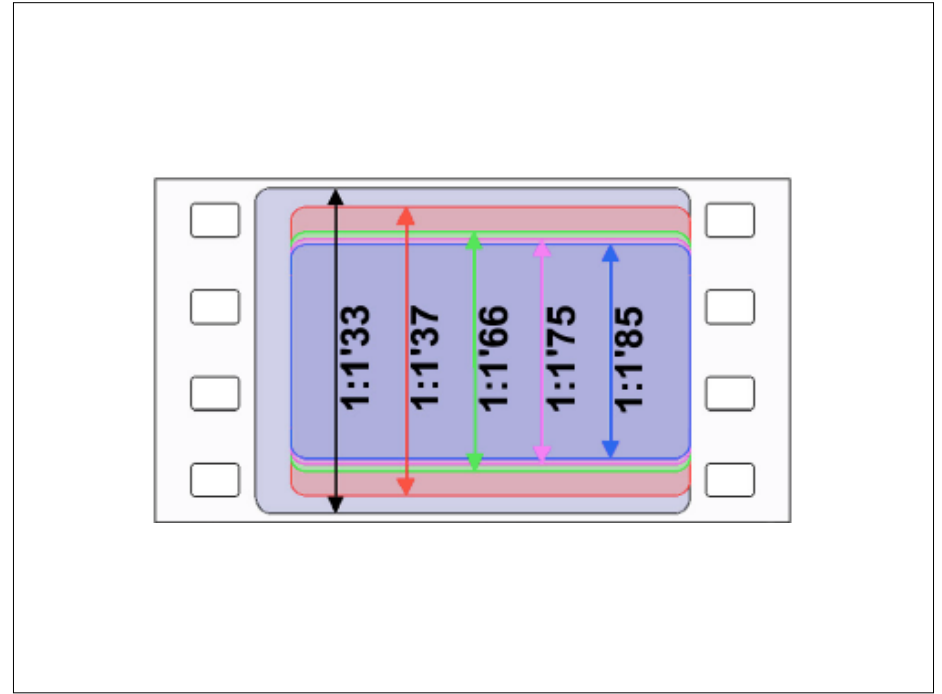
EASTMAN KODAK DATE CODE CHART

1922	1942	1962	● ■	1982	● ■ X
1923	1943	1963	● ▲	1983	X ▲ X
1924	1944	1964	▲ ■	1984	▲ ■ ▲
1925	1945	1965	■ ●	1985	■ ● ▲
1926	1946	1966	▲ ●	1986	▲ ● ▲
1927	1947	1967	■ ▲	1987	■ ▲ ▲
1928	1948	1968*	● ● ●	1988	+ + ▲
1929	1949	1969	+	1989	X + ▲
1930	1950	1970	▲ +	1990	▲ + ▲
1931	1951	1971	● +	1991	X + X
1932	1952	1972	■ +	1992	■ + ▲
1933	1953	1973	+ ▲	1993	+ ▲ ▲

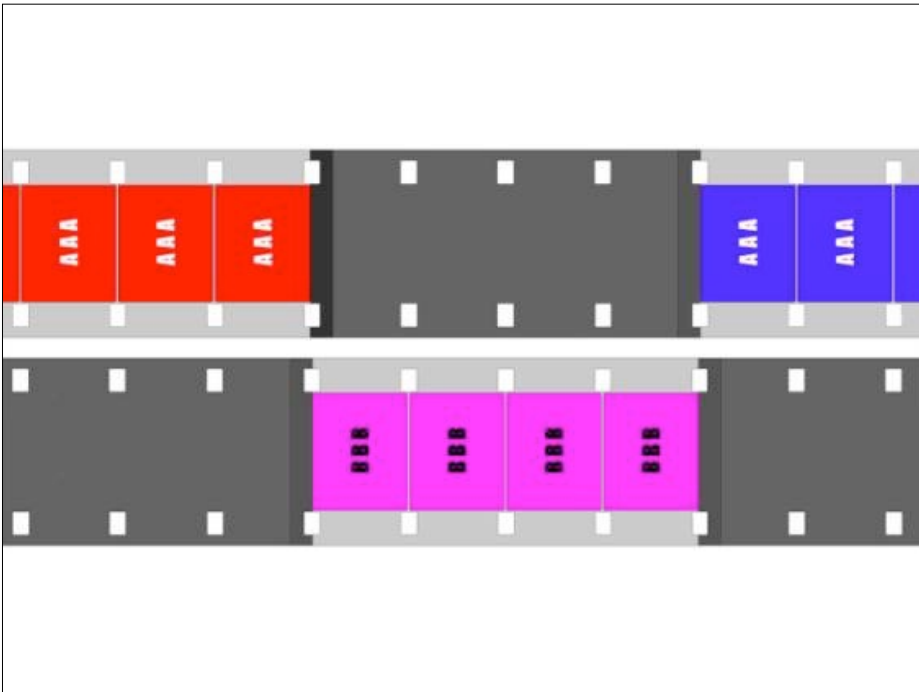
24



25



26

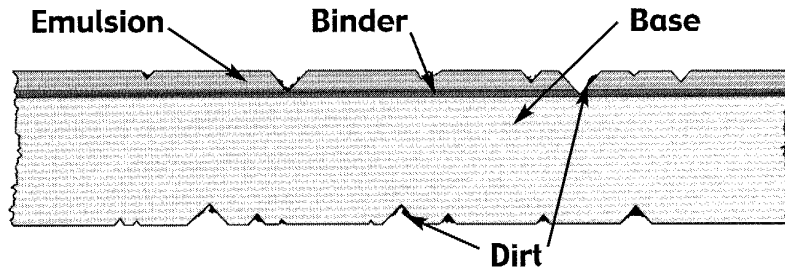


27



28

Cross Section



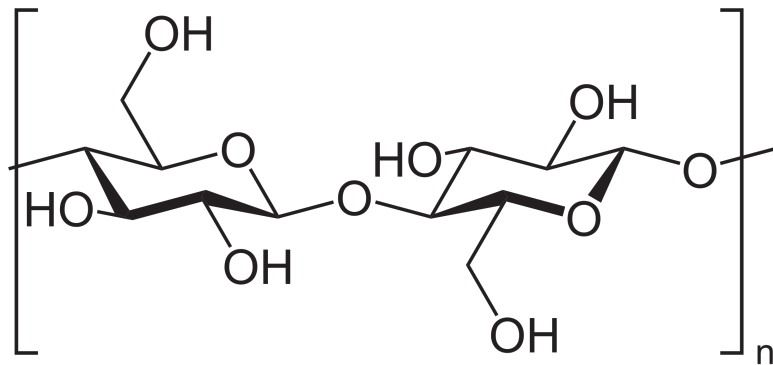
29

Film Base

- cellulose nitrate
- cellulose diacetate
- cellulose triacetate
- polyester

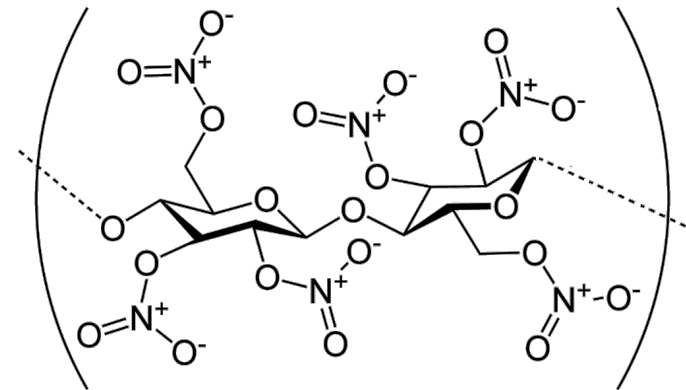
30

Cellulose



31

Nitrocellulose



32

Nitrocellulose

advantages:

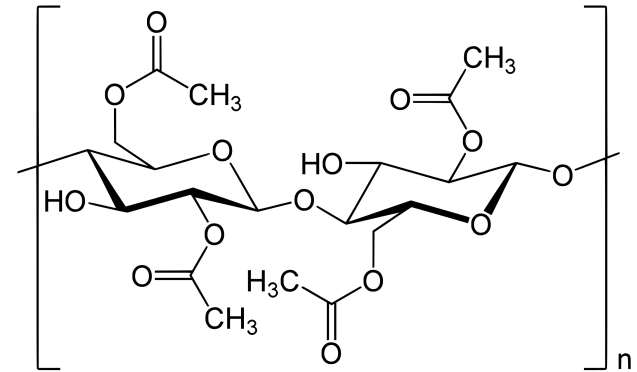
- excellent transparency
- best flexibility

disadvantages:

- highly flammable
- out-gasses nitric acid

33

Cellulose Acetate



34

Cellulose Diacetate

advantages:

- lower flammability than nitrate (but still flammable)

disadvantages:

- becomes brittle at low temperatures
- pronounced shrinkage in dry conditions
- out-gasses acetic acid ("vinegar syndrome")

35

Cellulose Triacetate

advantages:

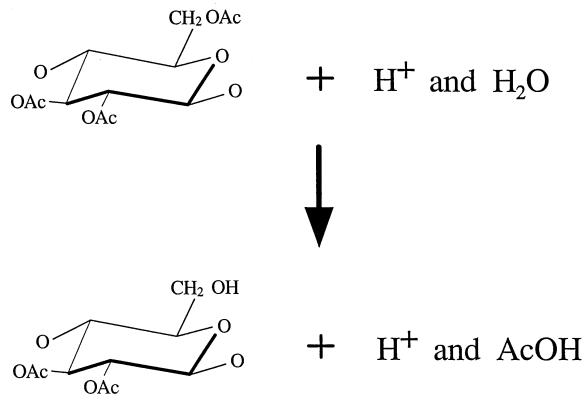
- low flammability
- easily cement spliced

disadvantages:

- out-gasses acetic acid ("vinegar syndrome")

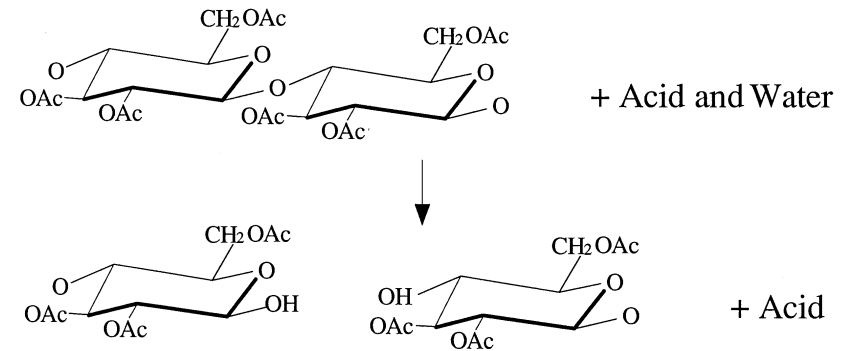
36

Acid Catalysed Hydrolysis



37

Glycosic Cleavage by Hydrolysis



38

Polyester

advantages

- strongest and most stable carrier
- manufactured without solvents
- does not shrink

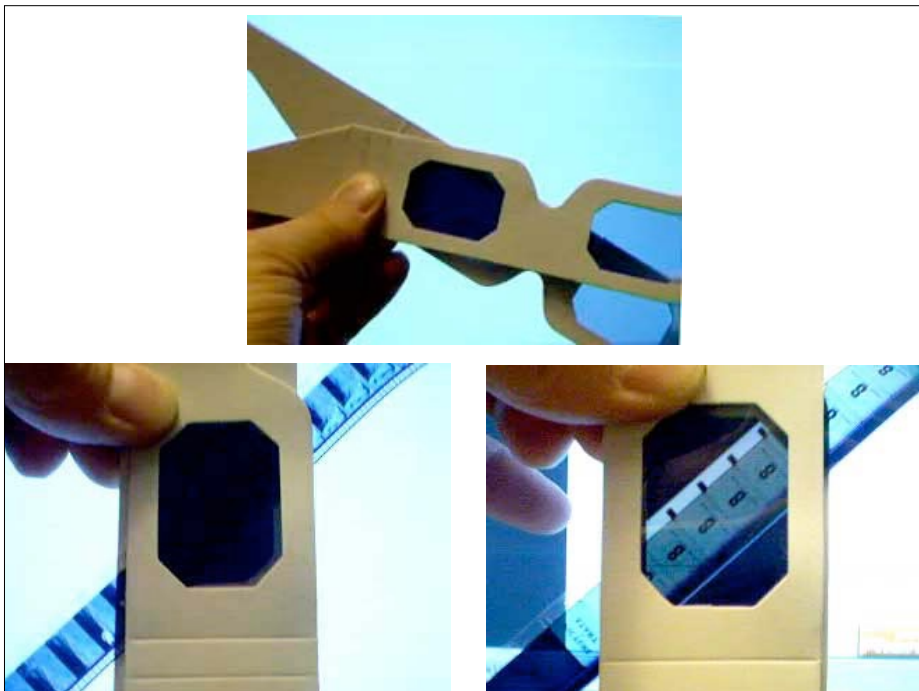
disadvantages

- static charge attracts dust
- can only be spliced ultrasonically

39

base	since	main uses (Kodak)
Nitrate	1869	for still and cinefilm from 1888 until 1951
Diacetate	1909	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● from 1915 until 1937 for home cinema distribution of cinema classics ● from 1923 until 1948 for amateur films
Triacetate	1936	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● since 1948 for film und magnetic tape ● replaced nitrate in 1951 for projection prints ● still used today in most camera negatives
Polyester	1940s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● since 1955 for magnetic tape ● occasionally for Super 8 (Fuji) ● 1990s for 35 and 16mm prints and duplicates

40



41

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until 31st January 2023



43

Bibliography

The Film Preservation Guide. The Basics for Archives, Libraries and Museums. National Film Preservation Foundation, San Francisco CA 2004

www.filmpreservation.org

42

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44