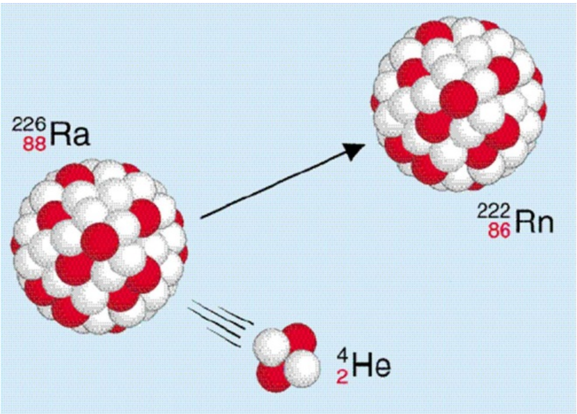
Why α-decay occurs?

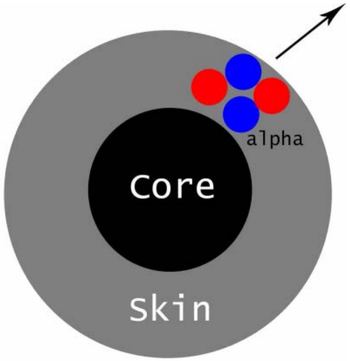


The mass excess (in MeV/c²) of ^{4}He and its near neighbors

↓N, Z →	0	1	2	3	4
0	-	7.289	-	-	-
1	8.071	13.136	14.931	25.320	37.996
2	-	14.950	**2.425**	11.679	18.374
3	-	25.928	11.386	14.086	15.769
4	-	36.834	17.594	14.908	4.942

Compared to its low-A neighbors in the chart of nuclides, ^{4}He is bound very strongly.

Think classically, occasionally 2 protons and 2 neutrons appear together at the edge of a nucleus, with outward pointing momentum, and bang against the Coulomb barrier.

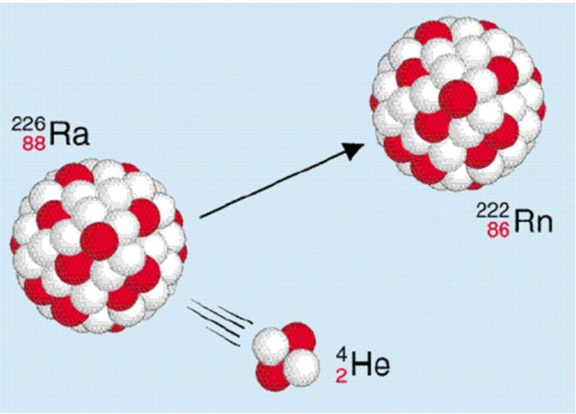


The energetics of α-decay

The α-decay process is determined by the rest mass difference of the initial state and final state.

$$Q = m(A,Z) - m(A-4,Z-2) - m({}^{4}_{2}He)$$

$$Q = BE(A-4,Z-2) + B_{\alpha}(28.3\ MeV) - BE(A,Z)$$



The Q-value of a reaction or of a decay indicates if it happens spontaneously or if additional energy is needed.

Mass data:
http://nuclear.lu.se/database/masses/

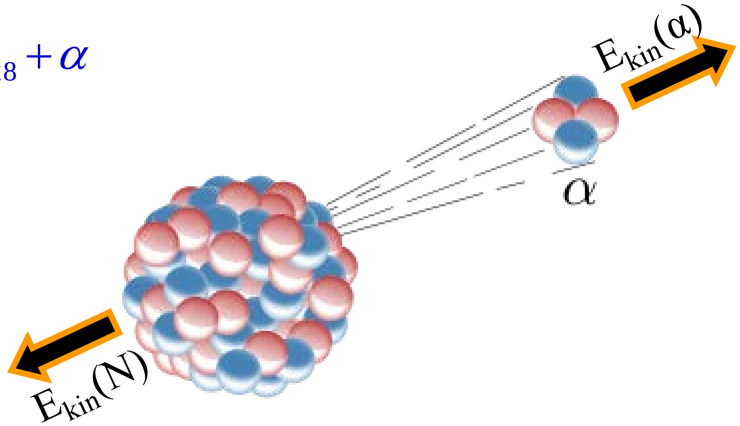
Mass (1u=931.478MeV/c^2)**:**
226.0254u → 222.0176u + 4.0026u
energy gain: 4.87 MeV

Binding energy [M(A,Z) - Z·M(^{1}H) - N·M(^{1}n)] :
-1731.610 MeV → -1708.184 MeV – 28.296 MeV
energy gain: 4.87 MeV

Mass excess [M(A,Z) - A] :
23.662 MeV → 16.367 MeV + 2.425 MeV
energy gain: 4.87 MeV

The Q-value and the kinetic energy of α-particles

What is the α-energy for the system $^{214}_{84}Po_{130} \rightarrow \ ^{210}_{82}Pb_{128} + \alpha$



Mass data: http://nuclear.lu.se/database/masses/

BE(^{214}Po) = 1666.0 MeV
BE(^{210}Pb) = 1645.6 MeV
BE(^{4}He) = 28.3 MeV

Q_α = 7.83 MeV

momentum conservation: $m_N \cdot v_N = m_\alpha \cdot v_\alpha \quad \rightarrow \quad v_N = \frac{m_\alpha}{m_N} \cdot v_\alpha$

energy conservation:

$$Q_\alpha = E_{kin}^N + E_{kin}^\alpha$$
$$= \frac{m_N}{2} \cdot v_N^2 + E_{kin}^\alpha$$
$$= \frac{m_N}{2} \cdot \frac{m_\alpha^2}{m_N^2} \cdot v_\alpha^2 + E_{kin}^\alpha$$
$$= \frac{m_\alpha}{m_N} \cdot E_{kin}^\alpha + E_{kin}^\alpha$$
$$= \frac{m_\alpha + m_N}{m_N} \cdot E_{kin}^\alpha$$

$$\boxed{\rightarrow E_{kin}^\alpha = Q_\alpha \cdot \frac{m_N}{m_N + m_\alpha} = 7.83 MeV \cdot \frac{210}{214} = 7.68\ MeV}$$

For a typical α-emitter, the recoil energy is ~100-150 keV.

α-decay

Energy differences of atomic masses:

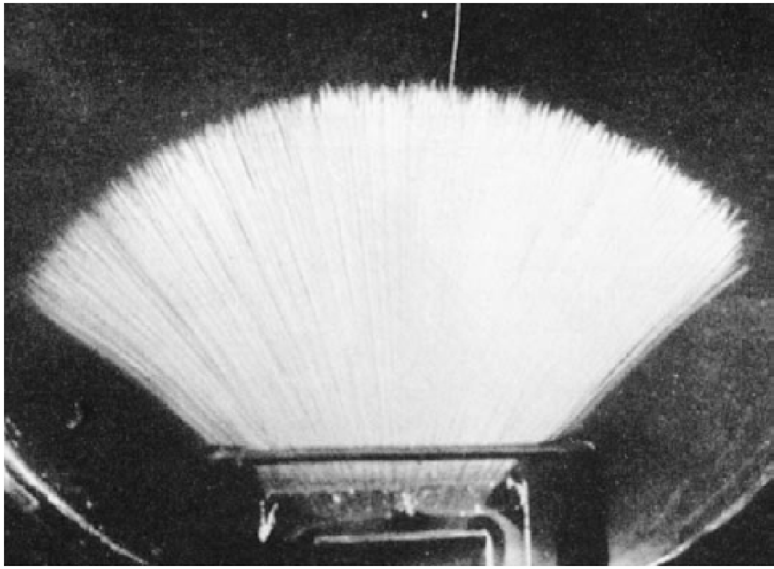
$$Q = m(A,Z) - m(A-4, Z-2) - m({}^4_2He)$$

$$Q = BE(A-4, Z-2) + B_\alpha(28.3\ MeV) - BE(A,Z)$$

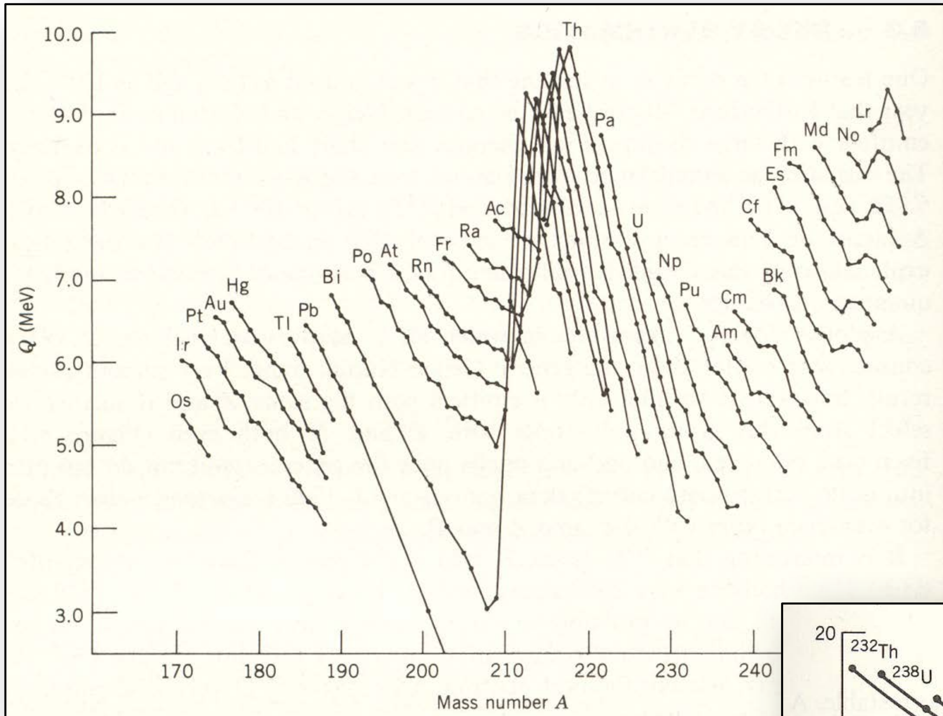
The Q-value of the decay is the available energy which is distributed as kinetical energy between the two participating particles. Since the mother and daughter nucleus have fixed masses, the α-particles are mono-energetic.

Tracks of α-particles (^{214}Po ⟶ ^{210}Pb + α) in a cloud chamber.

The constant length of the tracks shows that the α-particles are mono-energetic (E_α=7.7 MeV)



α-decay systematics: Geiger-Nuttall law

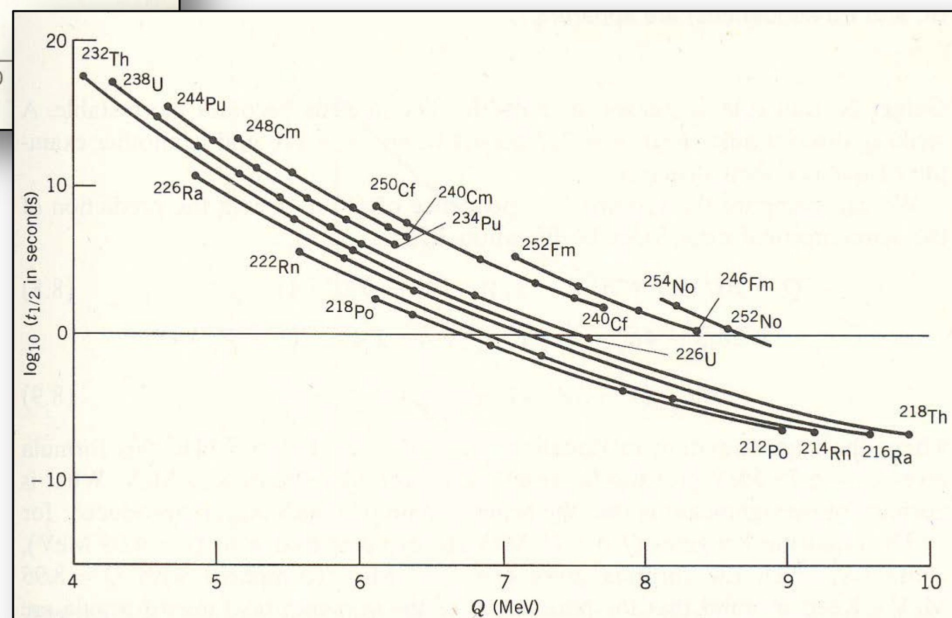


Q-value for α-decay:

$$Q = BE(A-4, Z-2) + B_{\alpha}(28.3\ MeV) - BE(A, Z)$$

shell effect at N = 126, Z = 82

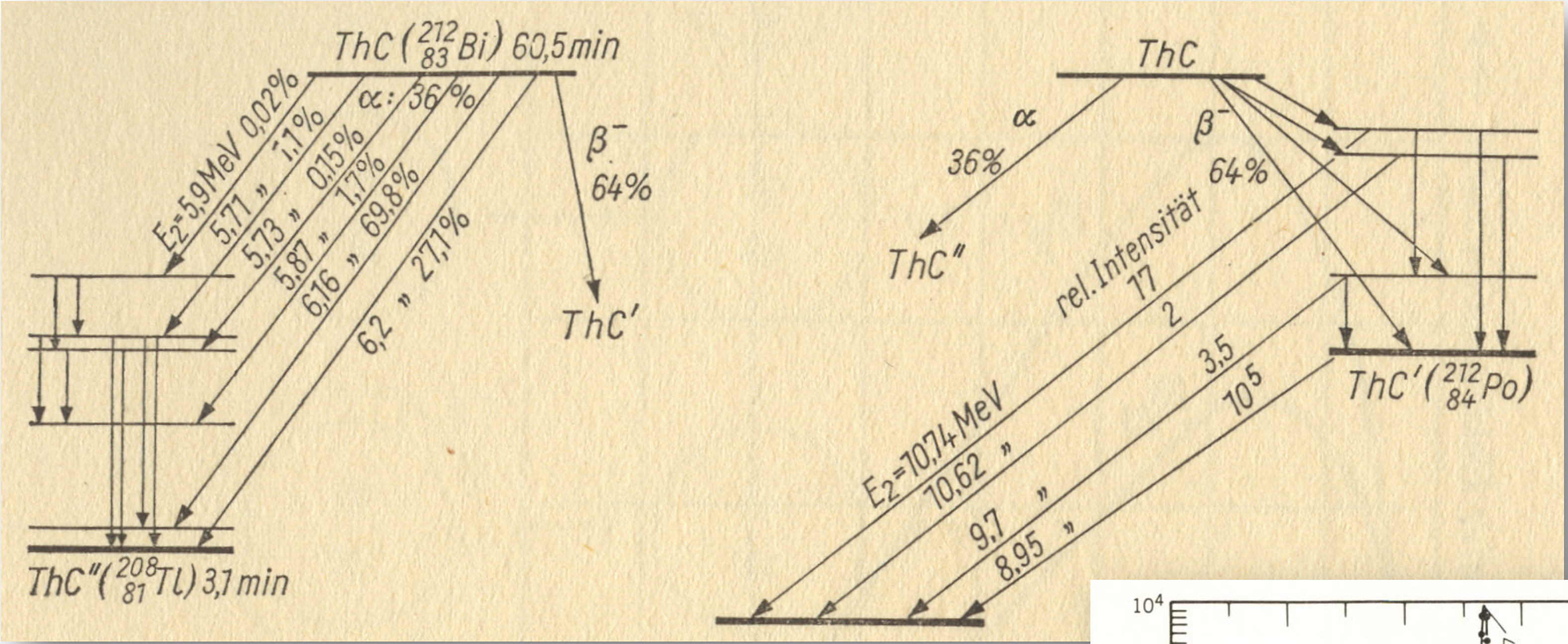
odd-even staggering

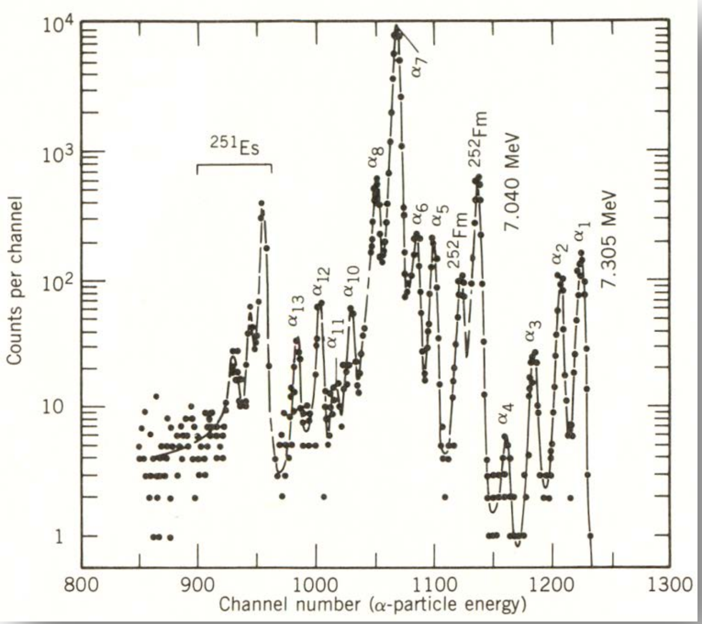


Geiger-Nuttall law:

as the Q-value increases, $T_{1/2}$ decreases

α-decay schemes / spectra





$$^{251}_{100}Fm \rightarrow \, ^{247}_{98}Cf$$

α - spectrum

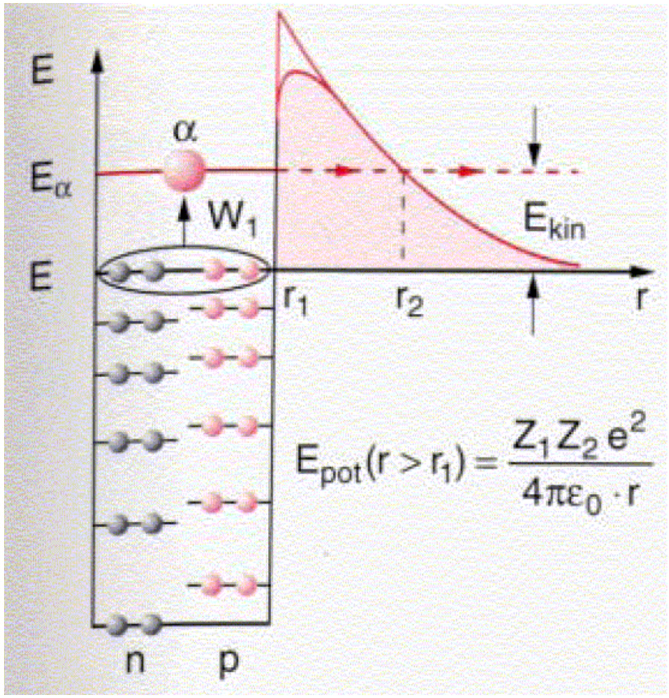
α-decay

Proton and neutrons are bound with up to 7 MeV and can not escape out of the nucleus.
The emission of a bound system is more probable because of the additional binding energy $E_\alpha = 28.3$ MeV.

The Coulomb barrier of the nucleus prevents the α-particles from escaping. The energy needed is generally in the range of about 20-25 MeV.

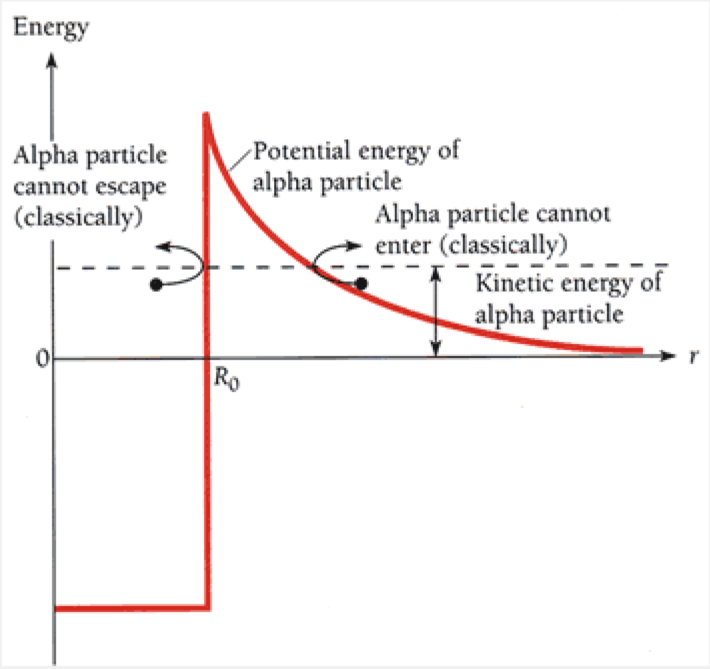
$$V_C = \frac{2 \cdot (Z-2) \cdot e^2}{r} = \frac{2 \cdot 82 \cdot 1.44\ MeV\ fm}{11.25\ fm} = 21\ MeV$$

Classically, the α-particle is reflected on the Coulomb barrier when $E_\alpha < V_C$, but quantum mechanics allows the penetration through the Coulomb potential via the mechanism of tunneling.

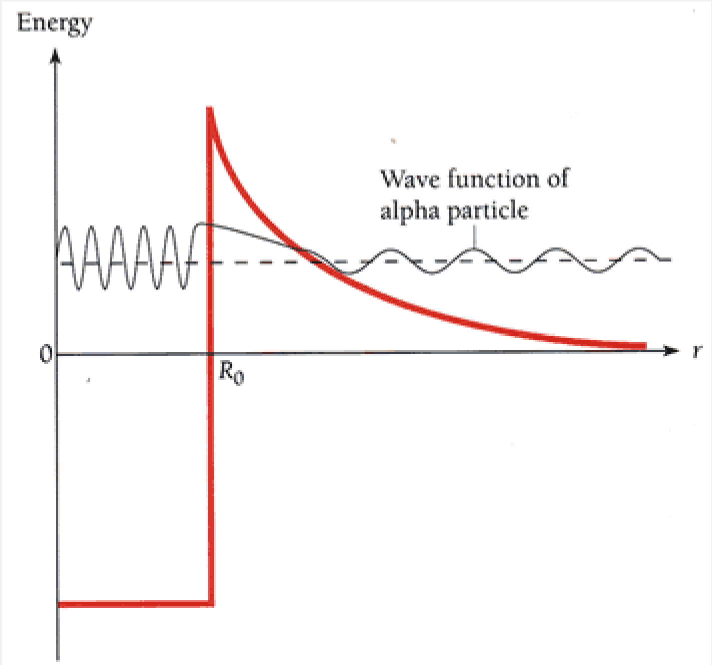


Quantum tunneling and α-decay

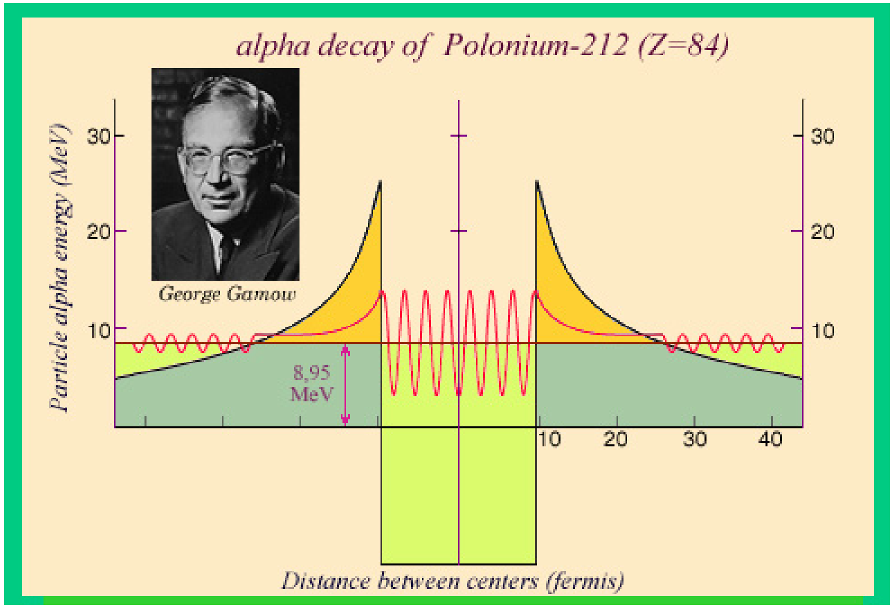
classical treatment



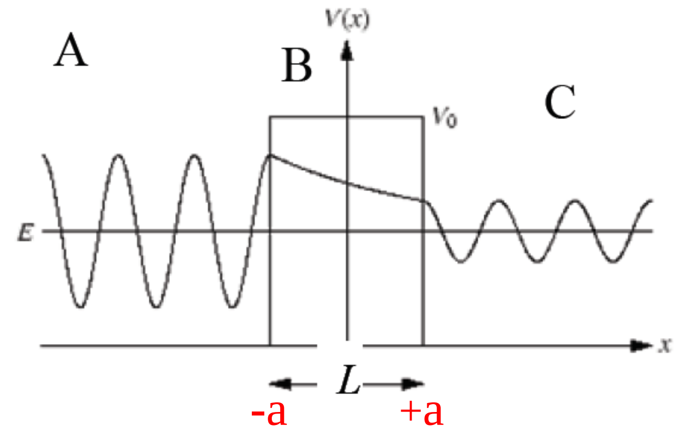
quantum treatment



Quantum tunneling



Intrintic α-wave function 'leaks' out



general Ansatz for the solutions in area A, B, C

time independent Schrödinger equation:

$$-\frac{\hbar^2}{2m}\frac{\partial^2}{\partial x^2}\Psi(x) + V(x)\cdot\Psi(x) = E\cdot\Psi(x)$$

with $\int |\Psi(x)|^2 = 1$

A,C: $\Psi''(x) + k^2\cdot\Psi(x) = 0; \quad k^2 = 2\cdot m\cdot E/\hbar^2$

B: $\Psi''(x) + k'^2\cdot\Psi(x) = 0; \quad k'^2 = 2\cdot m\cdot (E - V_0)/\hbar^2$

A: $\Psi(x) = A_1\cdot e^{i\cdot k\cdot x} + A_2\cdot e^{-i\cdot k\cdot x}$

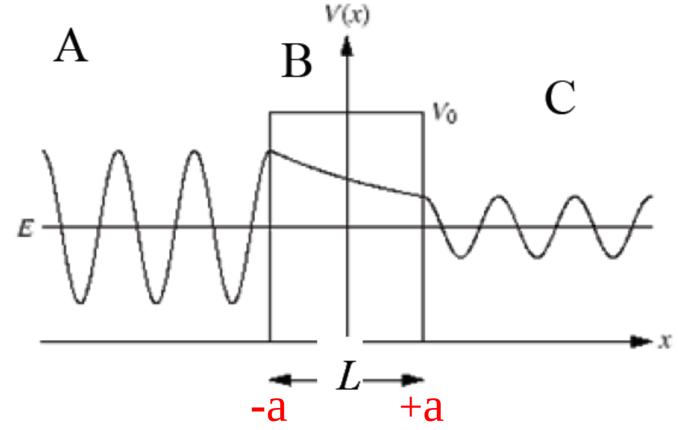
C: $\Psi(x) = C_1\cdot e^{i\cdot k\cdot x} + C_2\cdot e^{-i\cdot k\cdot x}$

B: $\Psi(x) = B_1\cdot e^{\kappa\cdot x} + B_2\cdot e^{-\kappa\cdot x}; \quad \kappa^2 = 2\cdot m\cdot (V_0 - E)/\hbar$

Quantum tunneling

The α-wave function from left will either be reflected or transmitted through the potential.

- In region C the wave is only travelling to the right
  $\rightarrow C_2 = 0$



With 4 equations for the 5 unknowns A_1, A_2, B_1, B_2 and C_1 4 quantities can be determined with respect to e.g. A_1.

Reflection coefficient: $$R = \frac{|A_2|^2}{|A_1|^2}$$

Transmission coefficient: $$T = \frac{|C_1|^2}{|A_1|^2}$$

x= -a:

$$A_1 \cdot e^{-i \cdot k \cdot a} + A_2 \cdot e^{i \cdot k \cdot a} = B_1 \cdot e^{-\kappa \cdot a} + B_2 \cdot e^{\kappa \cdot a}$$

$$i \cdot k \cdot A_1 \cdot e^{-i \cdot k \cdot a} - i \cdot k \cdot A_2 \cdot e^{i \cdot k \cdot a} = \kappa \cdot B_1 \cdot e^{-\kappa \cdot a} - \kappa \cdot B_2 \cdot e^{\kappa \cdot a}$$

x= +a:

$$C_1 \cdot e^{i \cdot k \cdot a} = B_1 \cdot e^{\kappa \cdot a} + B_2 \cdot e^{-\kappa \cdot a}$$

$$i \cdot k \cdot C_1 \cdot e^{i \cdot k \cdot a} = \kappa \cdot B_1 \cdot e^{\kappa \cdot a} - \kappa \cdot B_2 \cdot e^{-\kappa \cdot a}$$

$$T = \left[1 + \frac{V_0^2}{4 \cdot E \cdot (V_0 - E)} \cdot sinh^2 \sqrt{2 \cdot m \cdot (V_0 - E)}/\hbar \cdot L\right]^{-1}$$

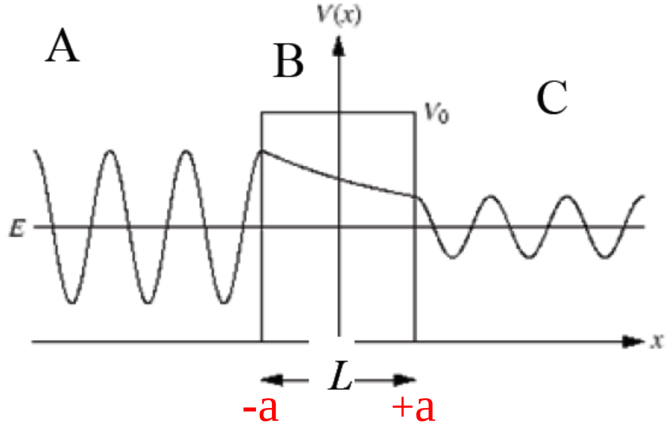
$$\boxed{T \approx \frac{16 \cdot E \cdot (V_0 - E)}{V_0^2} \cdot exp\left\{-2 \cdot \sqrt{2 \cdot m \cdot (V_0 - E)} \frac{L}{\hbar}\right\}; \quad E \ll V_0}$$

$$sinh^2 x = \frac{1}{4} \cdot (e^{2x} + e^{-2x}) - 1/2$$

Quantum tunneling

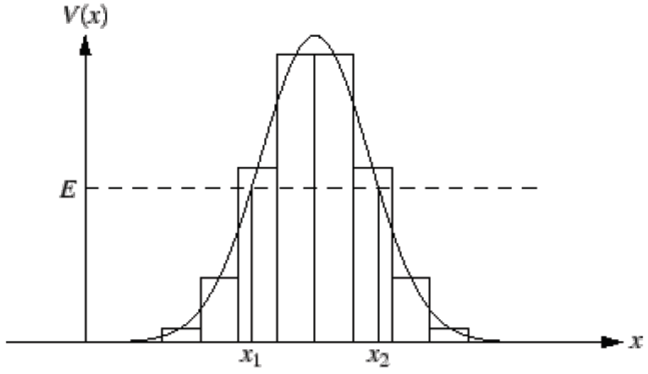
For a simple box potential one obtains the exact solution for transmission coefficient:

$$T(E) = exp\left\{-\sqrt{2 \cdot m \cdot (V_0 - E)}\,\frac{2 \cdot L}{\hbar}\right\}$$



In case of a more realistic potential (see below) one has to use step functions (Δx width) as an approximation

$$T(E) = exp\left\{-2\int_{x_i}^{x_a} dx\,\left(\frac{1}{\hbar}\cdot\sqrt{2 \cdot m \cdot [V(x) - E]}\right)\right\}$$



α-decay systematics: Geiger-Nuttall law

❖ Geiger-Nuttall law: Relation between the half-life and the energy of α-particles

Ansatz for α-decay probability **λ** $[s^{-1}]$:

$$\lambda = S \cdot \omega \cdot P$$

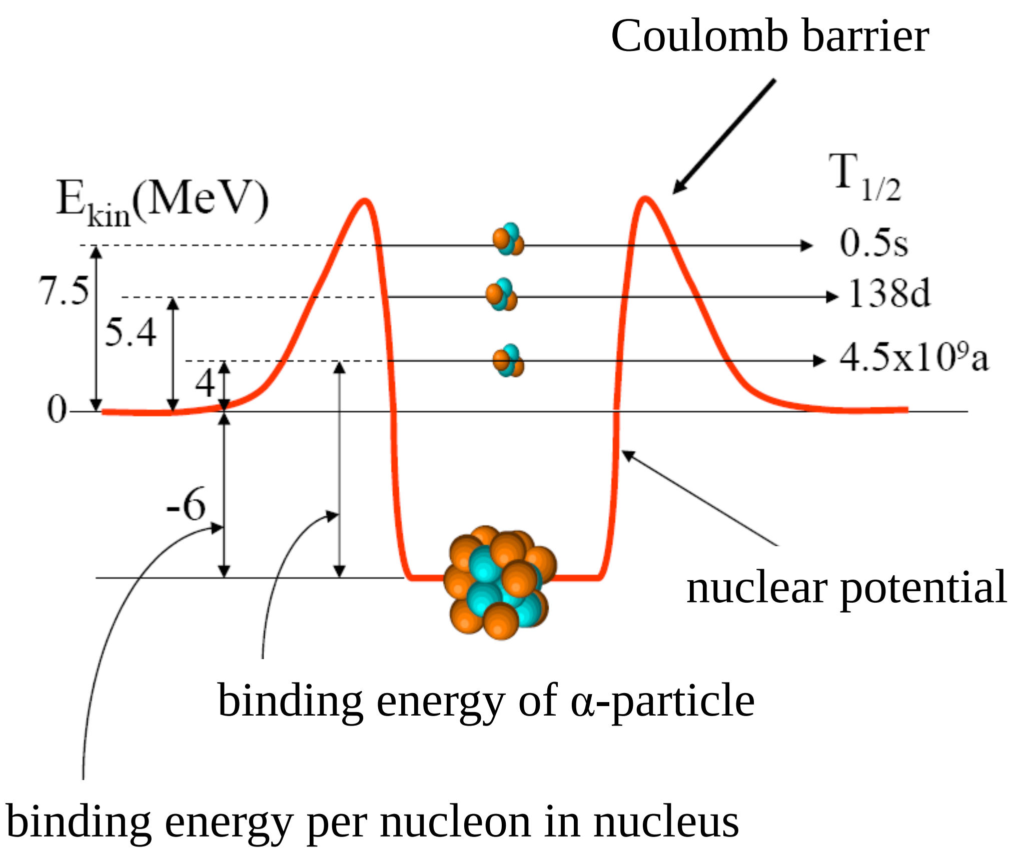
- **S** is the probability that an α-particle has been formed inside of the nucleus
- **ω** is the frequency of the α-particle hitting the Coulomb barrier, where the velocity v is given by the kinetic energy and R is the nuclear radius

$$\omega = \frac{1}{\Delta t} = \frac{v}{2R} = \frac{\sqrt{2V_0/m_\alpha}}{2R} = \frac{\sqrt{2 \cdot \frac{50MeVc^2}{3727MeV}}}{2 \cdot 10fm} \sim 2 \cdot 10^{21}\ s^{-1}$$

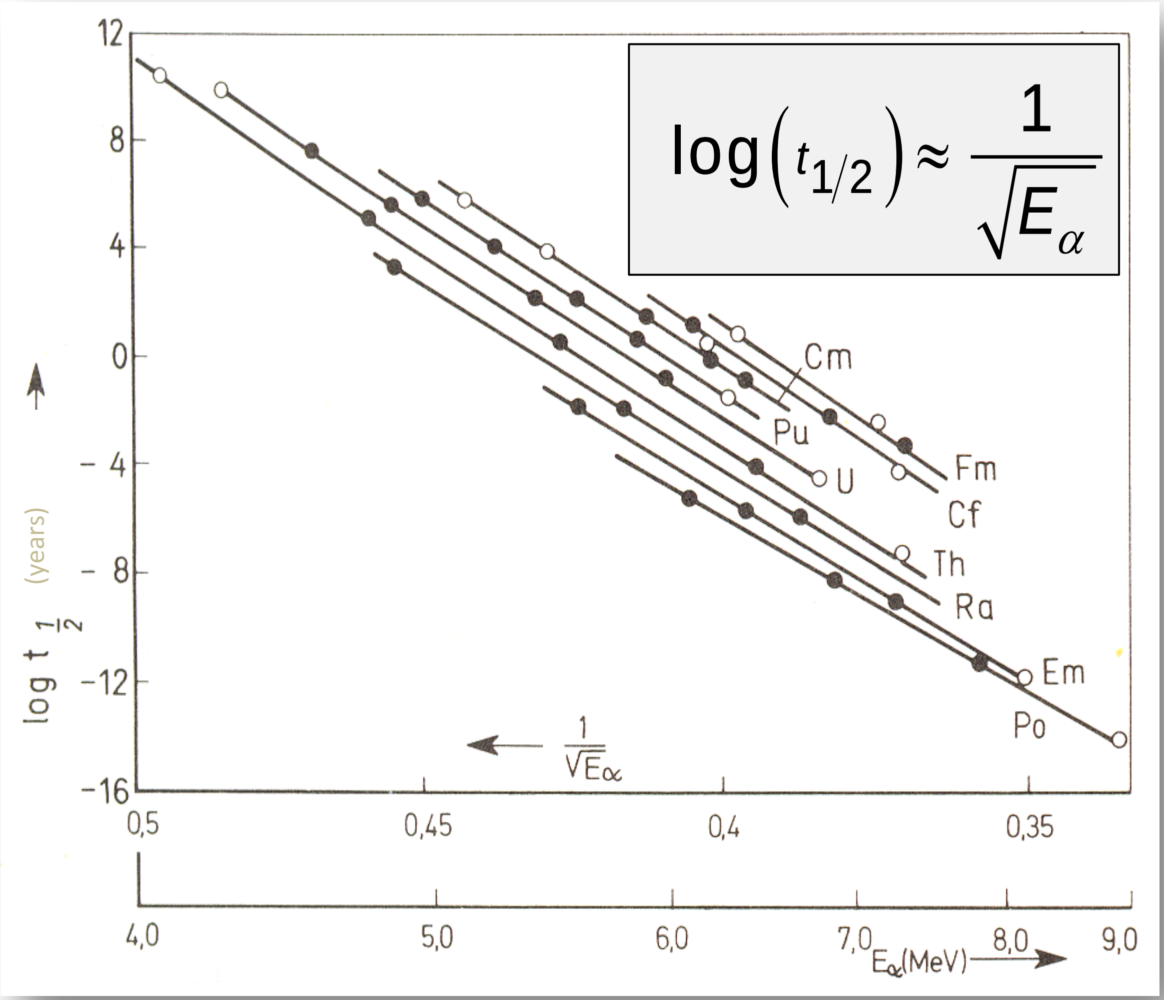
- **P** = e^{-2G} is the probability of the tunneling process, where G is the Gamov factor

$$ln\lambda = lnS - ln\Delta t - 2G(E_\alpha)$$

$$\boxed{= b(Z) - a\frac{Z}{\sqrt{E_\alpha}} \approx -a\frac{Z}{\sqrt{E_\alpha}}}$$



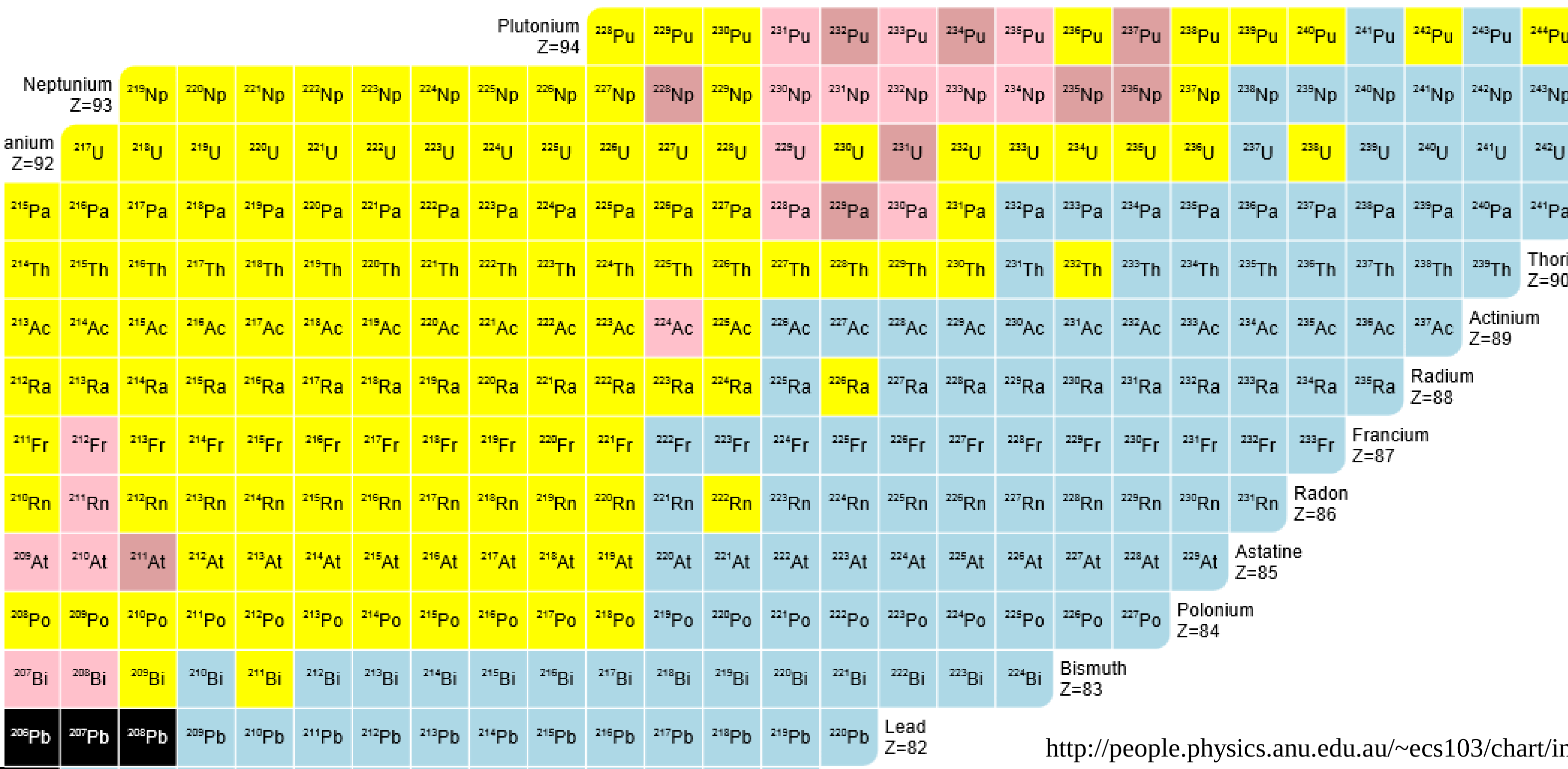
α-decay systematics: Geiger-Nuttall law



$$\log\left(t_{1/2}\right) \approx \frac{1}{\sqrt{E_\alpha}}$$

Chart of Nuclides

1. How are the *isotopes* of an element arranged on the chart?
2. Nuclides with the same number of neutrons are called *isotones*. How are they arranged on the chart?
3. Nuclides with the same mass number are called *isobars*. What would be the orientation of a line connecting an *isobaric* series?
4. Begin with the following radioactive parent nuclei, ^{235}U, ^{238}U, ^{244}Pu, trace their decay processes and depict the mode and direction of each decay process on the chart. What are the final stable nuclei?



http://people.physics.anu.edu.au/~ecs103/chart/index.php