

Calculating Gas Flow Through Orifices

A TECHNICAL GUIDE



O'Keefe Controls Co.

If it's about precision, it's O'Keefe.

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With the broad array of applications for industrial gases, controlling gas flow is a subject of vital importance. To achieve the extremely accurate, repeatable results necessary to successful operation, *precision* is required in gas flow. It is crucial to understand the science behind gas flow — the various factors that are involved in achieving precise control — and to be able to use that information to determine the correct orifice size that will create the desired results.

There are several technical factors which must be considered when calculating flow through orifices, including pressure, temperature, type of gas, and others. To help simplify the selection process, precision orifice manufacturers often provide flow charts within a common range to help engineers specify the correct orifice size for their application. However, not all applications fall within the data set included on the charts.

In addition to providing such charts, our Technical Guide details a number of formulas which can be used to extend orifice flow data beyond the charts, when specific factors of the application require it. These include high or low pressure, temperature, and more. Examples are shown for each, making this a valuable resource for engineers and system designers. If further help is needed regarding a specific application, the engineers at O'Keefe Controls Co. are readily available.

PRESSURE

High Pressure Extrapolation

To calculate flow rates at pressures higher than those on the attached charts, use the following formula:

$$Q_{HP} = Q_{80} \times \frac{P_{HP} + 14.7}{94.7}$$

Q_{HP} = Flow at elevated pressure
(above 80 psig)

Q_{80} = Chart flow reading at 80 psig

P_{HP} = Elevated pressure in psig

Example:

To calculate the flow for the No. 16 metal orifice at 150 psig supply pressure:

$$Q_{HP} = 17.9 \times \frac{150 + 14.7}{94.7} = 31.13 \text{ SCFH}$$

↑
(from chart)

Low Pressure Extrapolation

To calculate flow rates at pressures lower than those on the charts, use the following formula:

$$Q_{LP} = Q_5 \sqrt{\frac{P_{LP}^2 + 29.4 P_{LP}}{13.12}}$$

Q_{LP} = Flow at the low pressure
(below 5 psig.)

Q_5 = Chart flow reading at 5 psig.

P_{LP} = Low pressure in psig.

Example:

To calculate the flow at a supply pressure of 0.5 psig. for the No. 16 metal orifice:

$$Q_{LP} = 3.26 \sqrt{\frac{0.5^2 + 29.4(.5)}{13.12}} = 0.96 \text{ SCFH}$$

↑
(from chart)

TEMPERATURE EFFECTS

The flow of gases through an orifice varies inversely as the absolute temperature. As the gas temperature rises and the gas density decreases, the mass flow rate also decreases.

To extend the chart data on the attached pages for air flow, use the following formula:

$$Q_T = Q_S \sqrt{\frac{T_S}{T_T}}$$

Where:

T_S = standard absolute temperature °R
(°R = 460 + °F).

T_T = non standard absolute temperature °R.

Q_S = flow from chart at 70°F = 530°R.

Q_T = flow at a different temperature.

Example:

At 70°F and an inlet pressure of 25 psig the No. 60 (.060" dia.) orifice has a flow rate of 52.8 SLPM (see chart, page 8).

Under similar conditions, the air flow rate at 300°F is:

$$Q_T = 52.8 \sqrt{\frac{530}{760}} = 44.09 \text{ SLPM}$$

↑
(from chart)

SPECIFIC GRAVITY — OTHER GASES

Specific gravity is used to correct for the differences in density between the gas being measured and the standard reference gas used in the flow rate calculation. Our flow charts are based on air at 70° F and 14.7 psia. To obtain the flow of gases other than air, multiply the air flow values on the charts by the chart multiplier below.

To convert air flow from the attached chart to another gas flow, use the following formula:

$$\text{Flow (gas)} = \text{Flow (air)} / \sqrt{\text{S.G. (gas)}}$$

Where:

S.G. = specific gravity of gas relative to air

Example:

To obtain flow rate for helium when air flow is 5 SCFH:

S.G. = .138 for Helium

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Flow (Helium)} &= \text{Flow (air)} / \sqrt{.138} \\ &= 5 / .371 = 13.48 \text{ SCFH} \end{aligned}$$

Gas	Specific Gravity	Chart Multiplier
Air	1.0	1.0
Argon	1.379	.852
Carbon Dioxide	1.53	.809
Helium	.138	2.68
Hydrogen	.0696	3.79
Methane	.554	1.34
Natural Gas	.61	1.28
Nitrogen	.972	1.01
Oxygen	1.1053	.95
Propane	1.56	.80

OTHER ORIFICE SIZES (not on charts)

To calculate the required diameter of an orifice not included in the charts on pages 7-9 use the following formula:

The equations are based on data taken for a no. 60 (.060" dia.) orifice.

$$d_L = .060 \sqrt{\frac{Q_L}{Q_{60}}} \text{ in. dia.}$$

Where:

d_L = diameter of the unknown orifice.

Q_L = flow through the unknown orifice.

Q_{60} = flow from chart on pages 7-9.

Example: (Data from page 8) At supply pressure of 50 psig and outlet at standard conditions:

$$Q_{60} = 87.4 \text{ SLPM (from chart)}$$

Let:

$$Q_L = 600 \text{ SLPM @ 50 psig}$$

$$d_L = .060 \sqrt{\frac{600}{87.4}} = .157 \text{ in. dia.}$$

CONVERSIONS

Flow Conversions

SCFH - standard cu. ft. per hour

SLPM - standard liters per min.

SCCM - standard cu. cm. per min.

$$\text{SCFH} \times .472 = \text{SLPM}$$

$$\text{SCFH} \times 472 = \text{SCCM}$$

$$\text{SLPM} \times 1000 = \text{SCCM}$$

Example:

$$5 \text{ SCFH} \times .472 = 2.36 \text{ SLPM}$$

Pressure Conversions

PSIG - pounds per sq. in. gage

Kg/CM² - kilograms per sq. cm

KPA - kilo pascals

Bar - unit of pressure equal to 1 atmospheric pressure at sea level

In-H₂O - pressure produced by 1" H₂O

$$\text{PSIG} \times .0703 = \text{Kg/CM}^2$$

$$\text{PSIG} \times 6.895 = \text{KPA}$$

$$\text{PSIG} \times .0689 = \text{Bars}$$

$$\text{PSIG} \times 27.68 = \text{In. H}_2\text{O}$$

Example:

$$25 \text{ psig} \times 6.895 = 172.37 \text{ KPA}$$

Instrument Accuracy

The three variables to be measured in gas flow applications are:

- Pressure
- Temperature
- Flow Rate

The accuracy of the flow measurement of a gas through an orifice is limited by the combined accuracy of the instruments used in the measurement.

Expected accuracy of a gas flow measurement is generally in the range of 1 to 20%. 1% accuracy can only be achieved with high quality instruments.

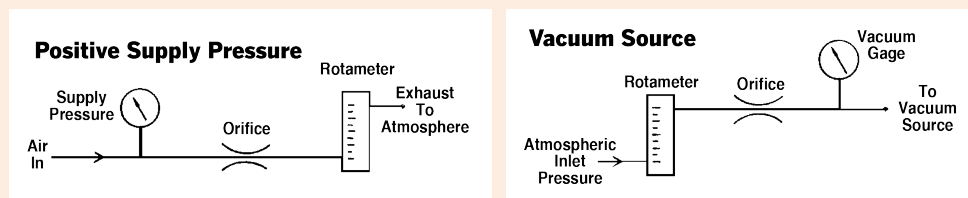
Rotameters

Rotameters for measurement of air or other gas flows must be used for the conditions for which they are calibrated. Typically they are calibrated for the following:

- Air Flow
- Outlet Conditions - 14.7 psig @ 70°F

Rotameters can be calibrated for other gas flows or other outlet pressure conditions. Manufacturers also provide graphs or tables for correction of measured data when conditions vary from the calibration conditions.

When using rotameters calibrated for standard outlet conditions use the test procedures shown below.



Mass Flow Meters

Mass flow meters are generally insensitive to gas pressure or barometric pressure conditions. Consequently their location in the test circuit is not critical. Consult your instrument manufacturer for recommended test procedures.

Metal Orifice Air Flow — SLPM



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Orifice Diameter Inches	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	31	32	33		
Size Number	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	31	32	33		
Supply Pressure - psig																															
1	0.0035	0.0064	0.086	0.127	0.170	0.226	0.280	0.308	0.398	0.45	0.52	0.61	0.66	0.77	0.86	0.96	1.05	1.13	1.29	1.41	1.54	1.67	1.91	1.95	2.21	2.39	2.65	2.88	3.03		
5	0.09	0.16	0.21	0.30	0.40	0.52	0.65	0.71	0.82	1.06	1.21	1.41	1.54	1.76	1.98	2.22	2.47	2.65	2.97	3.24	3.53	3.83	4.34	4.44	4.94	5.31	5.86	6.42	6.80		
10	0.12	0.22	0.31	0.43	0.57	0.74	0.93	1.01	1.29	1.48	1.68	1.95	2.01	2.26	2.54	2.83	3.16	3.53	4.33	4.75	5.18	5.55	6.15	6.43	7.18	7.83	8.63	9.40	9.98		
15	0.16	0.28	0.39	0.54	0.72	0.93	1.17	1.26	1.62	1.85	2.10	2.44	2.50	2.85	3.23	3.57	4.01	4.41	5.35	5.93	6.43	6.95	7.58	7.95	8.78	9.58	10.6	11.6	12.3		
20	0.19	0.33	0.46	0.65	0.85	1.10	1.38	1.49	1.92	2.19	2.49	2.87	2.97	3.40	3.86	4.24	4.84	5.22	6.35	6.93	7.58	8.15	8.90	9.28	10.3	11.2	12.4	13.5	14.3		
25	0.22	0.39	0.53	0.75	0.98	1.27	1.59	1.71	2.20	2.50	2.86	3.28	3.42	3.92	4.45	4.91	5.59	6.01	7.30	7.95	8.65	9.38	10.2	10.7	11.7	12.8	14.2	15.4	16.3		
30	0.25	0.44	0.60	0.85	1.12	1.43	1.80	1.93	2.47	2.82	3.21	3.69	3.87	4.43	5.03	5.56	6.33	6.81	8.23	8.98	9.75	10.6	11.5	12.0	13.2	14.4	15.9	17.3	18.4		
40	0.30	0.54	0.74	1.05	1.38	1.77	2.21	2.37	3.04	3.45	3.93	4.51	4.78	5.47	6.21	6.85	7.81	8.42	10.1	11.0	12.0	13.0	14.1	14.7	16.1	17.5	19.4	21.1	22.5		
50	0.36	0.65	0.88	1.26	1.65	2.10	2.62	2.80	3.58	4.07	4.64	5.31	5.70	6.51	7.40	8.15	9.26	10.0	11.9	13.0	14.2	15.4	16.6	17.3	19.0	20.7	22.9	25.0	26.6		
60	0.42	0.75	1.02	1.46	1.91	2.42	3.02	3.23	4.13	4.70	5.34	6.13	6.61	7.56	8.58	9.46	10.7	11.6	13.8	15.0	16.4	17.7	19.2	20.0	21.9	23.8	26.4	28.8	30.7		
70	0.48	0.86	1.16	1.67	2.17	2.75	3.43	3.66	4.68	5.32	6.05	6.96	7.53	8.61	9.77	10.8	12.2	13.2	15.6	17.0	18.5	20.1	21.7	22.7	24.8	27.0	30.0	32.7	34.9		
80	0.54	0.96	1.30	1.87	2.43	3.08	3.83	4.09	5.23	5.95	6.77	7.79	8.46	9.67	11.0	12.1	13.7	14.9	17.5	19.0	20.7	22.5	24.2	25.3	27.7	30.2	33.6	36.7	39.0		
90	0.60	1.07	1.44	2.08	2.69	3.40	4.23	4.51	5.78	6.58	7.49	8.62	9.38	10.7	12.2	13.4	15.2	16.5	19.3	21.0	22.9	24.9	26.8	28.0	30.7	33.5	37.2	40.6	43.2		
100	0.66	1.17	1.58	2.28	2.95	3.72	4.63	4.94	6.33	7.22	8.21	9.46	10.3	11.8	13.4	14.7	16.6	18.0	21.1	23.0	25.1	27.4	29.4	30.8	33.7	36.8	40.9	44.6	47.5		
Vacuum Level In. Hg.																															
5	0.053	0.096	0.129	0.191	0.253	0.332	0.406	0.450	0.582	0.661	0.773	0.899	0.977	1.14	1.28	1.41	1.55	1.70	1.90	2.10	2.30	2.48	2.74	2.83	3.16	3.41	3.78	4.12	4.32		
10	0.069	0.124	0.168	0.246	0.324	0.421	0.519	0.564	0.730	0.894	1.072	1.12	1.24	1.41	1.58	1.79	1.96	2.18	2.44	2.68	2.89	3.13	3.44	3.58	4.00	4.30	4.77	5.16	5.43		
15	0.075	0.134	0.185	0.268	0.351	0.455	0.566	0.614	0.792	0.902	1.07	1.22	1.35	1.55	1.75	1.94	2.19	2.32	2.61	2.85	3.12	3.34	3.65	3.78	4.20	4.51	5.05	5.45	5.72		
20	0.075	0.134	0.185	0.268	0.351	0.455	0.566	0.614	0.792	0.902	1.07	1.22	1.35	1.55	1.75	1.94	2.19	2.32	2.61	2.85	3.12	3.34	3.65	3.78	4.20	4.51	5.05	5.45	5.72		
30	0.075	0.134	0.185	0.268	0.351	0.455	0.566	0.614	0.792	0.902	1.07	1.22	1.35	1.55	1.75	1.94	2.19	2.32	2.61	2.85	3.12	3.34	3.65	3.78	4.20	4.51	5.05	5.45	5.72		
Supply Pressure - psig																															
1	3.48	3.83	4.13	4.46	4.80	5.14	5.49	5.86	6.43	7.04	7.70	8.41	9.18	10.01	10.89	11.81	12.78	13.80	14.87	16.00	17.18	18.41	19.70	21.04	22.44	23.89	25.39	26.94	28.54		
5	7.67	8.48	9.09	9.70	10.2	10.6	11.3	12.1	14.2	17.6	20.3	23.9	26.1	30.3	33.8	36.1	39.4	43.1	46.0	51.1	54.9	61.9	65.0	70.8	76.6	84.8	92.1	102	108		
10	10.6	11.8	12.5	13.6	14.4	14.8	15.6	16.8	19.4	24.5	27.1	32.2	35.2	40.7	45.6	48.5	52.9	57.3	61.6	67.9	72.3	81.0	85.5	92.3	102	112	118	135	148		
15	13.1	14.5	15.4	16.7	17.7	18.2	19.1	20.4	23.6	29.7	32.9	39.0	42.6	49.3	55.3	58.8	64.0	69.4	74.5	82.1	87.3	97.8	103	111	123	135	143	163	178		
20	15.3	17.0	18.1	19.6	20.9	21.4	22.5	24.0	27.7	35.0	38.7	45.9	50.1	58.0	65.0	69.0	75.3	81.4	87.3	95.6	102	114	121	130	144	158	167	190	210		
25	17.7	19.6	20.8	22.6	24.0	24.7	25.9	27.6	31.9	40.3	44.6	52.8	57.7	66.7	74.7	79.3	86.4	93.5	100	110	117	131	138	149	164	180	191	219	241		
30	20.0	22.2	23.6	25.6	27.2	28.0	29.4	31.3	36.0	45.6	50.4	59.7	65.2	75.4	84.3	89.5	97.4	105	113	125	132	148	156	168	185	204	216	248	273		
40	24.8	27.4	31.7	31.6	33.6	34.6	36.3	38.7	44.5	56.3	62.2	73.6	80.3	92.7	104	110	120	129	139	153	162	181	191	207	228	251	267	306	337		
50	29.5	32.6	34.8	37.6	40.1	41.3	43.3	46.0	52.9	66.9	74.0	87.4	95.4	110	123	131	142	153	164	181	192	215	227	247	272	299	317	364	401		
60	34.3	38.0	40.6	43.8	46.7	48.1	50.3	53.5	61.5	77.7	85.8	101	110	127	142	151	164	177	189	216	223	250	264	286	315	347	368	422	465		
70	39.2	43.3	46.3	50.0	53.3	55.0	57.4	61.0	70.0	88.4	97.6	115	126	145	162	171	186	202	216	240	254	280	301	327	360	396	421	482	531		
80	44.0	48.7	52.1	56.2	60.0	61.9	64.5	68.5	78.6	99.1	109	129	141	162	181	191	209	227	242	269	285	320	338	367	404	445	472	541	596		
90	50.0	54.2	57.8	62.4	66.7	68.9	71.5	76.0	87.2	109	121	143	156	179	200	211	231	251	268	298	316	354	374	406	447	492	522	598	660		
100	53.9	59.6	63.7	68.7	73.5	77.3	78.6	83.5	95.8	120	133	156	171	196	221	234	255	277	296	329	349	392	413	449	494	548	578	662	729		
Vacuum Level In. Hg.																															
5	4.92	5.40	5.81	6.29	6.76	7.29	7.85	8.31	8.50	9.08	9.58	11.1	13.9	15.4	18.2	21.2	24.2	29.9	32.5	35.3	37.7	41.5	44.8	50.0	52.1	56.6	61.2	72.2	81.4	88.4	
15	6.50	7.17	7.63	8.22	8.66	8.87	9.46	10.0	11.6	14.4	15.9	18.6	22.1	25.5	28.4	31.2	33.9	36.8	39.4	43.3	46.7	52.1	54.4	59.0	63.8	70.1	75.3	84.9	92.2		
20	6.50	7.17	7.63	8.22	8.66	8.87	9.46	10.0	11.6	14.4	15.9	18.6	22.1	25.5	28.4	31.2	33.9	36.8	39.4	43.3	46.7	52.1	54.4	59.0	63.8	70.1	75.3	84.9	92.2		
30	6.50	7.17	7.63	8.22	8.66	8.87	9.46	10.0	11.6	14.4	15.9	18.6	22.1	25.5	28.4	31.2	33.9	36.8	39.4	43.3	46.7	52.1	54.4	59.0	63.8	70.1	75.3	84.9	92.2		

Standard Conditions 70°F, 14.7 psia
Above data obtained with Type B restrictor. Flow rates for other metal restrictors are essentially the same as for Type B. Above data supercedes previous publications.
SCFH – Standard Cu. Ft. Per Hour
SLPM – Standard Liters Per Minute

