

# Solidification During Casting of Metal-Matrix Composites

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METAL-MATRIX COMPOSITES (MMC's) are engineered combinations of two or more materials in which reinforcing phases are dispersed in a metal or an alloy. Structurally, cast MMC's consist of continuous or discontinuous fibers (designated by the subscript f), whiskers (w), or particles (p) in a metal or an alloy that solidifies in the restricted spaces between the reinforcing phase (or phases) to form the bulk of the matrix. There are several cast materials, such as aluminum-silicon alloys and cast iron, that exhibit two-phase microstructure in which the volume and shape of the phases are governed by phase equilibria and that have a long history of foundry production. Modern cast MMC's differ from these traditional materials in that any selected volume, shape, and size of reinforcement can be introduced into the matrix, even beyond the permissible limits presented by the phase diagrams.

By carefully controlling fiber size, shape, surface properties, volume fraction, and distribution of the reinforcement and by controlling the solidification conditions, MMC's can be synthesized having a tailored set of useful engineering properties. For example, as shown in Table 1, combinations of very high specific strength and specific modulus, beyond those of conventional monolithic alloys, are achievable. Table 2 summarizes the applications of several commonly used MMC's and the properties that make them suitable for

their applications. Microstructural design and synthesis procedures have been developed to achieve unique combinations of properties, including improved elevated-temperature and fatigue strengths, increased damping ability, tailored electrical and thermal conductivities,

reduced wear rates, and targeted coefficients of thermal expansion. These tailored properties provide opportunities for a variety of new applications for MMC's that were not possible using conventional materials. For more information about MMC types and their applications, see the

Table 1 Specific strength and specific modulus of some metal matrices, reinforcements, and metal-matrix composites

Material	Amount of fiber reinforcement, vol %	Specific strength, N m/kg	Specific modulus, N m/kg
Al-10Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	—	30,000	$7.59 \times 10^7$
Al	100	4,950–6,200	$4.40 \times 10^7$
Ti-20Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> (p)	—	—	$3.77 \times 10^7$
Ti	100	47,337	—
Inconel (Ti-6Al-4V)	—	50,552	—
Al	100	26,339	—
Aluminum (7075-T6)	—	36,340	$6.53 \times 10^7$
Al	100	11,440	$2.53 \times 10^7$
Ti-6Al-4V	—	17,249	$3.59 \times 10^7$
Al	100	26,431	$5.507 \times 10^7$
Al-10K <sub>2</sub> CO <sub>3</sub>	—	$6.67 \times 10^7$	$2.19 \times 3.29 \times 10^8$
Al-10SiC	—	80,000	$1.175 \times 10^8$
Al	100	1,534 $\times 10^7$	$1.62 \times 10^7$
Cu	100	1,413 $\times 10^7$	$1.25 \times 10^7$
Al	100	86,459	$1.08 \times 10^7$
Al	100	14,074	$1.79 \times 10^7$
Aluminum	—	—	—
Al	100	8,000	$7.01 \times 10^7$
Al	100	5,203	$5.44 \times 10^7$
Al-10SiC	—	—	—
Al	100	6,363	$1.092 \times 10^7$
Al	100	3,407	—

Table 2 Selected potential applications of cast metal-matrix composites

Composites	Applications	Special features
Aluminum/graphite	—	—
Aluminum/graphite, aluminum/SiC, Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> , aluminum/SiC-Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	Boatings	Chemical, light, self-lubricating, corrosion Cu, Pb, Sn, Zn, etc.
Aluminum/SiC	Automobile pistons, cylinder bores, piston rings, connecting rods	Reduced wear, increasing mold start, lightness, corrosion (Sn, Zn)
Copper/graphite	—	Improved efficiency
Aluminum/SiC	Sliding bearings of cranes	Excellent conductivity and lubricating properties
Aluminum/iron or carbon reinforcements	Tractor-trailer impellers	High compressive wear
Magnesium/graphite fibers	—	Lightweight materials
Aluminum/iron, aluminum/SiC, aluminum/SiC	Turbine compressors for space vehicles	Low thermal expansion, high-temperature strength, good specific strength and specific stiffness
Aluminum/iron, aluminum/SiC	Cutting tools, machine elements, impellers	Hard, abrasion-resistant materials
Aluminum/iron, aluminum/SiC	Low-cost, low-energy materials	—

# Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites

**Katrin Zwirgmaier**



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## **Table of Contents Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites**

1. Understanding the eBook Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Personalized Recommendations
  - Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites User Reviews and Ratings
  - Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites and Bestseller Lists

5. Accessing Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites Free and Paid eBooks
  - Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites Public Domain eBooks
  - Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites eBook Subscription Services
  - Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites Budget-Friendly Options
6. Navigating Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites eBook Formats
  - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites Compatibility with Devices
  - Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Interactive Elements Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
8. Staying Engaged with Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Setting Reading Goals Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Solidification Of Metal Matrix Composites
  - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning

- Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
- Exploring Educational eBooks

### 14. Embracing eBook Trends

- Integration of Multimedia Elements
- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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