

# Journal of Planar Chromatography - Modern TLC

## Revisiting molecular weight distribution of polystyrenes using adsorption high-performance thin-layer chromatography

--Manuscript Draft--

<b>Manuscript Number:</b>	
<b>Full Title:</b>	Revisiting molecular weight distribution of polystyrenes using adsorption high-performance thin-layer chromatography
<b>Article Type:</b>	Original Research Paper
<b>Keywords:</b>	TLC; GPC; polystyrene; MW separation
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<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>A repeatable separation of polystyrenes according to MW, from 1920 to 520000 u.m.a, has been obtained under adsorption conditions using a method that comprises the use of Lichrospher HPTLC plates, and a controlled, isocratic elution with a 78:22 (v/v) mixture of cyclohexane (Cy)-tetrahydrofuran (THF). Likewise, UV-densitometric quantification of polystyrenes in mixtures can be achieved, by an intra-plate or an inter-plate procedure, using the corresponding polystyrene calibration curve. In the case of overlapped, unresolved peaks, an average curve of the corresponding polystyrenes can be used.</p> <p>Migration of polystyrenes strongly varies with slight variations in the relative proportion of Cy and THF in the mobile phase. This allows different ranges of MW to be separated as a function of mobile phase composition. Other factors influencing repeatability have been identified.</p> <p>Some reasons have been advanced to explain the current lack of activity in the research on polymer characterization by HPTLC. Old literature results concerning polystyrene separation have also been discussed in the light of modern HPTLC instrumentation.</p> <p>Developed method provides similar information on Molecular Weight Distribution (MWD) to that obtained using Gel Permeation Chromatography (GPC). Advantages and limitations of HPTLC for obtaining polymer MWD have also been discussed.</p>

## Revisiting molecular weight distribution of polystyrenes using adsorption high-performance thin-layer chromatography

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Keywords: polystyrenes; polystyrenes characterization; HPTLC; GPC; MWD; quantitation

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## Abstract

1 A repeatable separation of polystyrenes according to MW, from 1920 to 520000  
2 u.m.a, has been obtained under adsorption conditions using a method that  
3 comprises the use of Lichrospher HPTLC plates, and a controlled, isocratic  
4 elution with a 78:22 (v/v) mixture of cyclohexane (Cy)-tetrahydrofuran (THF).  
5 Likewise, UV-densitometric quantification of polystyrenes in mixtures can be  
6 achieved, by an intra-plate or an inter-plate procedure, using the corresponding  
7 polystyrene calibration curve. In the case of overlapped, unresolved peaks, an  
8 average curve of the corresponding polystyrenes can be used.

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10 Migration of polystyrenes strongly varies with slight variations in the relative  
11 proportion of Cy and THF in the mobile phase. This allows different ranges of  
12 MW to be separated as a function of mobile phase composition. Other factors  
13 influencing repeatability have been identified.

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15 Some reasons have been advanced to explain the current lack of activity in the  
16 research on polymer characterization by HPTLC. Old literature results  
17 concerning polystyrene separation have also been discussed in the light of  
18 modern HPTLC instrumentation.

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20 Developed method provides similar information on Molecular Weight  
21 Distribution (MWD) to that obtained using Gel Permeation Chromatography  
22 (GPC). Advantages and limitations of HPTLC for obtaining polymer MWD have  
23 also been discussed.

## 1. Introduction

1 Polymers have been characterized for a long time using Size-Exclusion  
2 Chromatography (SEC) which is referred as to Gel Permeation  
3 Chromatography (GPC) when is carried out using organic eluants [1,2]. This  
4 liquid chromatography-based technique provides Molecular Weight Distributions  
5 (MWD) of polymers and polymer mixtures. In GPC, polymers are mostly  
6 separated by molecular exclusion, in order of decreasing MW: the first to be  
7 eluted is the highest MW.  
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9  
10 The variety of stationary phases, the different pore size distributions, and their  
11 possible combinations makes this technique has been firmly implanted in the  
12 analysis of polymers, despite its low resolution and reproducibility [3]. For  
13 complex polymer mixtures, GPC provides curves of molecular size distribution  
14 rather than discrete, separated peaks. However, obtaining accurate information  
15 from these curves is sometimes complicated. Table 1 shows a summary of  
16 advantages and drawbacks of GPC.  
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19 In its present state of development, High-Performance Thin-Layer  
20 Chromatography (HPTLC) is a mature technique particularly well suited to the  
21 analysis of low volatile, complex mixtures [4]. Despite this, application of HPTLC  
22 to the analysis of plastics and polymers, as with petroleum, has been scarce [5].  
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25  
26 In the field of polymers, developed HPTLC applications involve the detection,  
27 isolation and identification of additives. In contrast, very few methods have been  
28 developed or applied in the last years related to the characterization of  
29 polymers themselves [5]. We face a paradox: whilst a reliable HPTLC  
30 technology is currently available but there is almost no research activity in  
31 polymer characterization, a number of theoretical and experimental applications  
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1 were proposed in the 70-90s [6-18], when TLC technology had not yet reached  
2 an adequate stage of development.

3 Separations of different polymers according to MW were obtained under  
4 conditions of adsorption and Size-Exclusion TLC in silica gel. This was due to  
5 the pioneering work of Belenkii et al. [9-14], and other groups [6-9,15-19].  
6  
7 Research also involved the development of a theoretical frame to relate polymer  
8 migration to different physico-chemical parameters of the analytical silica gel  
9 system, including determination of an exclusion-adsorption critical transition  
10 point [9,10].  
11

12 From a practical approach, results were probably constrained by technology at  
13 the time. Existing sample application, development systems, and plate  
14 manufacturing and control technologies provided lower repeatabilities, and  
15 larger and less well formed peaks than those obtained using current technology.  
16  
17 Another factor that contributed decisively to a no further use of the results was  
18 the lack of availability of scanning densitometers which have allowed detection  
19 of separated peaks, and subsequent quantification to be carried out.  
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21 Therefore it seemed interesting to examine this issue, revisiting and re-  
22 evaluating the potential of current HPTLC technology to characterize polymers.  
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24 We present in this paper an HPTLC method based on adsorption which  
25 provides information on MWD in mixtures of polystyrenes (PS), in a similar way  
26 to that obtained using GPC. A special emphasis has been stressed in  
27 repeatability of separation and quantitation by densitometry. Instead of trying to  
28 understand how the variables that influence the system work with regard to a  
29 mechanistic approach, we have preferred to directly use those variables as  
30 allowed by current technology, and look for repeatable and quantitative  
31 conditions that allow us to carry out a separation.  
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In a first attempt, the study of PS has several advantages. As their separation by GPC has been well studied under different conditions, we have been able to compare the effect of the technology used here, under similar or equivalent experimental conditions to those used in the past. Likewise, PS are easily soluble, are of narrow MWD and have been used for calibrating GPC chromatograms of other polymers which have broader distributions and solubility problems.

Finally, comparative pros and cons of GPC and HPTLC for MWD are also discussed.

## 2. Experimental

### 2.1. Standards and samples

Polystyrene standards (PSs) of different molecular weights from Fluka Analytical (Buchs, Switzerland), Agilent Technologies (Palo Alto, California), and Waters (Milford, Massachusetts) were used in this work ([Table 2](#)). They are of narrow MWD, with  $M_w / M_n < 1.09$  where  $M_w$  is the weight-average molecular weight, and  $M_n$  the number-average molecular weight.

[Mixtures](#) of these standards were used to evaluate separation ([Table 3](#)) and quantitativity ([Tables 4 and 5](#)) of the method.

### 2.2. Solvents

HPLC-grade cyclohexane (Cy, 99.7 %), from Scharlab (Barcelona, Spain), and stabilisant-free tetrahydrofuran (THF, 99.9 %), from Panreac (Barcelona, Spain) were used. Prior to use in HPTLC runs, THF was eluted through an activated carbon-filled LC column (dimensions), using an iron (II) sulfate indicator, to avoid formation of peroxydes. THF was further kept under nitrogen.

### 2.3. Planar Chromatography experiments.

### 2.3.1. Plates.

1 High-performance silica gel HPTLC plates and Lichrospher plates, on glass, 10  
2 x 20 cm; 3-10  $\mu\text{m}$  particle size; 60  $\text{\AA}$  pore size; 0.2 mm thick layer, F<sub>254</sub>), from  
3 Merck (Darmstadt, Germany) were used.  
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7 Before sample application, plates were developed (90 mm) with THF using a  
8 conventional, vertical tank, and subsequently activated 30 min at 105 °C using  
9 the Camag TLC Plate Heater III (Camag, Müttenz, Switzerland).  
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### 13 2.3.2. Sample application.

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16 Samples were freshly prepared before each HPTLC run. They were dissolved in  
17 a 1:1 v/v mixture of Cy and THF. They were applied onto the plate using the  
18 Automatic TLC Sampler 4 (ATS4) from Camag, as 4 mm bands. Typically, up to  
19 31 samples were applied on the same plate with a distance of 2 mm between  
20 tracks. Two tracks were always kept free of sample application: a solvent blank  
21 run, and a blank run.  
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31 The first application position was 10 mm (x coordinate), and the distance from  
32 lower edge of plate was 10 mm (y coordinate)  
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36 Typical sample load and application volumes were between 0.1-1.2  $\mu\text{g}$  and 0.1-  
37 1.2  $\mu\text{L}$ , respectively.  
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### 41 2.3.3. Chromatographic development.

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44 An Automatic Multiple Development (AMD2) system (Camag, Müttenz,  
45 Switzerland) was used for chromatographic development using a one-step,  
46 isocratic elution with Cy:THF (78:22, v:v). The total migration distance (m.d.)  
47 was 80 mm.  
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54 The mobile phase was prepared and the plate introduced into a vacuum-tight  
55 chamber. Chromatography was monitored, and the run stopped when the  
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selected developing distance was reached. The remaining solvent was withdrawn from the chamber by vacuum, and the plate was completely dried.

Repeatability of AMD2 was  $\pm 0.45$  mm.

Retention properties of polystyrenes are given as m.d., in mm, or  $R_f$  (polystyrene migration distance / solvent front migration distance).

#### 2.3.4. UV Scanning densitometry.

A TLC Scanner 3 (Camag, Müttenz, Switzerland) was used in UV mode (190 nm). Camag WinCats software was used for controlling ATS4, AMD2 and TLC Scanner 3, and also for data acquisition and treatment.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Separation of polystyrenes according to their MW

A repeatable separation of polystyrenes from 1920 to 520000 u.m.a has been obtained by the described HPTLC method using Lichrospher plates, elution with Cy:THF 78:22 v/v, and other conditions described in Experimental. [Figure 1A](#) shows superposed HPTLC chromatograms of studied PS, injected as individual standards under the above conditions.

Migration of polystyrenes strongly varies with slight variations in the relative proportion of cyclohexane and THF in the mobile phase. This allows different ranges of MW to be separated as a function of mobile phase composition. Therefore, PS from 1920 to 17300 have been separated by elution with Cy:THF 90:10 v/v; and from 1920 to 52100 using Cy:THF 85:15 v/v. A further increase of relative proportion of THF to 30% favoured PS standard migration but did not improve separation. When THF reached 50 %, PS standards were eluted with the solvent front.

[Figure 1B](#) shows the corresponding  $\log M_w$  vs  $R_f$  curve which relates elution properties of a given polymer with its MW for the different mobile phases used.



This curve gives similar information that those obtained from GPC in HPLC mode.

### 3.2. Repeatability of separation

Repeatability has been studied for the elution conditions that gave the wide range of separation for PS standards: Cy:THF 78:22 v/v.

$R_f$  and m.d. values for each PS, individually injected using the procedure described in Experimental, are given in [Table 2](#) together with repeatability parameters. Standard deviation ( $\sigma_{std}$ ), variability of  $R_f$  and of migration distance ( $\pm$  mm) for a given confidence interval, C.I. (95%) are also given in this Table, where

$$C.I. = X_m \pm t \sigma_{std} n^{-0.5}$$

where  $X_m$  is the migration distance average,  $t$  is the Student distribution, and  $n$  is the number of measurements. They have been obtained by applying three replicates in different plates and different days. Results show that the procedure has an adequate repeatability.

The lower the MW, the higher the  $R_f$  (or the longer the polymer m.d. with regard to the application point,  $R_f=0$ ). Therefore, separation is governed by adsorption.

In order to evaluate whether a matrix effect may exist,  $R_f$  of each polymer in mixtures was compared to those obtained as individual pure standard. As shown in [Table 3](#), Variations in  $R_f$  ( $\Delta R_f$ ) are within the experimental interval of variability for C.I. 95%. Therefore, matrix effects can be excluded. In this context, [Figures 2 and 3](#) shows the HPTLC chromatograms corresponding to the separation of polystyrenes in the studied mixtures using Cy:THF 78:22 v/v elution system.

1 Repeatability has been tested for a time after the study by random analyses of  
2 mixtures of PS. The results obtained are found mostly within the variability  
3 interval provided by the given confidence interval.  
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### 5 *3.3. Detection, calibration and quantitative analysis*

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7 UV signal provided at 190 nm is adequate for PS detection. In general,  
8 responses (expressed as Area counts per mass unit) decrease as MW  
9 increases. Thus, for example, response for PS 524000 is half that of PS 1920.  
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11 The possibility of doing quantitative analyses was assessed by using samples  
12 that include mixtures of two to five polystyrenes, which have known  
13 compositions (Table 4). Proposed mixtures include polystyrenes in different MW  
14 ranges. HPTLC chromatograms of mixtures in which PS are baseline-resolved  
15 (Figure 2) or unresolved (Figure 3) are shown. Their quantitative results are  
16 given in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.  
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29 Different calibration procedures have been tested for each polymer:  
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- 31 - intra-plate calibration : the corresponding polystyrene standards (n=5 per  
32 polymer) have been applied on the same plate that the corresponding problem  
33 mixtures  
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- 39 - inter-plate calibration: points from intra-plate calibration have been  
40 accumulated for each polymer to additional 5 points obtained from different  
41 plates. In total, n=10 per polymer  
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46 Therefore two calibration curves per polymer have been obtained, and  
47 polystyrenes have been analyzed in the mixtures using their corresponding  
48 curves.  
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53 Some of the proposed mixtures show polystyrenes with close MW values, which  
54 show unresolved peaks (Figure 3). As in the case of GPC-chromatograms,  
55 HPTLC chromatograms of complex polystyrene mixtures and mixtures  
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1 containing polymers with close MW do not usually show discrete peaks but  
2 rather curves of MW-distribution, with peaks which are not resolved to baseline.

3 In these cases, two procedures of quantification have been tried here:

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5 - resolving the overlapped peaks by a valley-to-baseline integration (dashed  
6 lines in Figure 3), using for quantitative analysis the corresponding calibration  
7 curve of each polymer (○ in curves in Figure 3)

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12 - integrating the whole area of the overlapped peaks, and using an average  
13 calibration curve (continuous line in curves of Figure 3) which come from the  
14 accumulation of the points corresponding to the curves of each polymer.  
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19 A similar approach was also used in the case of mixture 7 (Figure 2). Although  
20 in this case there are no overlapped peaks, the peak at 10 mm covers in fact  
21 two peaks corresponding to PS-215000 and PS-524000 which have been  
22 integrated as a single peak. Therefore an average calibration curve has been  
23 used with calibration points coming from both polymers.  
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32 Tables 4 and 5 gives the normalized results of quantitative analyses using the  
33 above-mentioned calibration procedures compared to the known weight  
34 percentages of the polymers in each mixture. Results indicate that a  
35 quantitative approach is possible. Results show that both intra- (n=5) and inter-  
36 plate (n=10) procedures can be used. This suggests that an accumulation of  
37 calibration points from different plates may even improve quantitative results.  
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39 The calibration approach for unresolved peaks which uses an average  
40 calibration curve from a joint integration of the overlapped peaks (Table 5)  
41 provides percentages close to reference values although it shows a tendency to  
42 underestimate low-MW and overestimate high-MW polystyrenes. The higher  
43 deviation with regard to known weight percentages has been found in mixture 7  
44 which contains the higher-MW polystyrenes.  
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## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Issues related to the described method

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3 We have confirmed that little differences in the composition of mobile phase  
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5 provide important differences in polystyrene migration. This was pointed out  
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7 elsewhere [15]. In our opinion, this influence, although important, may have  
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9 been overestimated in the literature. It was reported, for example, that a  
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11 difference of 1 % in ketone, in a ternary Cy-benzene-acetone eluant, provided  
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13 important changes in migration [10]. Some of results obtained in the past which  
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15 concerns variations in elution conditions might be due to an inadequate  
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17 repeatability of runs derived from existing technology rather than to small  
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19 differences in composition.  
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24 Both factors may have contributed to discredit results in the past.

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26 Anyway, with the current state of HPTLC technology it seems possible to  
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28 control the different steps of chromatographic process and obtain repeatable  
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30 methods. According to our results, experimental conditions must be strictly  
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32 followed so that migration of the polymers are within the variability of the  
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34 method.  
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39 The key points to obtain a repeatable method have been: the use of  
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41 Lichrosphere HPTLC-plates; the use of freshly-prepared samples; and the need  
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43 of a controlled elution.  
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47 The use of Lichrospher plates has been crucial for method repeatability. Their  
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49 use provided better peaks, and had a clear impact on the inter-plate  
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51 repeatability of the experiment probably due to the shape of particles, and pore  
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53 and particle size distribution. Under the described conditions, Lichrospher plates  
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55 provide separation by adsorption and not by exclusion.  
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1 We were unable to obtain a repeatable method for PS using conventional HPLC  
2 silica gel plates. In five runs, migration distances were out of the variability  
3 interval. Likewise, we noticed in some runs exclusion effects from a given  
4 polystyrene MW (Figure 4). Previous works showed that the adsorption  
5 mechanism is overlapped by the size-exclusion mechanism for PS [8,15].  
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8 Samples must be freshly prepared and should not be stored in the freezer.  
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10 Elution should be carefully controlled. Separation in conventional, vertical tank  
11 was studied before the use of AMD. Although some separation was obtained,  
12 peaks were wide and the baseline, deficient. It was also noticed that the  
13 saturation of the vertical tank had no effect on PS migration, unlike what was  
14 suggested elsewhere [19].  
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17 An adequate separation has been obtained using AMD. It provides a better  
18 baseline and narrower peaks than those obtained from a conventional tank.  
19 Likewise, AMD allows a tighter control of the elution conditions, with controlled  
20 drying and vacuum steps. Probably, other automatic chambers, simpler and  
21 cheaper than AMD and not necessarily based on multiple development, may be  
22 used to obtain repeatable and well-formed peaks [4]. In principle, AMD was  
23 selected because of the possibility of using elution gradient. However, it was not  
24 possible to separate PS according to their molecular weight using a Cy-THF  
25 gradient.  
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28 On the other hand, adsorption has been favoured against exclusion. Plate  
29 heating prior to chromatographic development was done to reduce moisture  
30 and increase the active groups in the adsorption of silica gel surface.  
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33 The possibility of separating PS up to 500000 using Cy-containing binary  
34 mixtures was pointed out elsewhere using silica gel with pore diameter of 110 Å  
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1 or higher [19]. In this study we have used silica gel with 60 Å pore diameter  
2 which is the most common pore size in commercially available silica gel plates.  
3 Separations of polystyrenes up to 1800000 with Cy-toluene-methyl ethyl ketone  
4 mixtures were also reported elsewhere [12], using silica gel with 500 Å pore  
5 diameter. However, we were unable to reproduce this separation using a 60 Å  
6 sorbent.  
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11 Results suggest that quantitative analysis of mixtures of polystyrenes by HPTLC  
12 is possible and open the door to a reliable polymer characterization using  
13 HPTLC. Calibration can be done either in the same plate or by accumulation of  
14 calibration points from different plates.  
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17 Polystyrene MWD derived from GPC chromatograms are usually interpreted in  
18 comparative or semiquantitative terms, for a comparative evaluation of  
19 production or operation parameters. This information can be also provided by  
20 HPTLC chromatograms.  
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#### 22 *4.2. HPTLC as a potential technique for MWD of polymers*

23 In general, advantages of HPTLC are derived from the inherent ones of a planar  
24 technique with regard to those of HPLC (column technique) which can be  
25 summarized as follows [4]:  
26

- 27 - the whole sample is scanned. This provides a complete, quantitative analysis
- 28 - rapid, flexible analysis with low solvent consumption
- 29 - analysis in parallel; samples and standards can be run on the same plate  
30 under the same conditions
- 31 - non-destructive analysis. The plate is an storage device that can be re-  
32 scanned or re-developed under different conditions

33 While these advantages are important, the main ones in our case are its rapidity  
34 (several minutes for sample application, 15 min elution, scanning in seconds)  
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1 and high sample throughput (30 samples per plate under the described  
2 conditions). Likewise, there is no need for detector stabilization, and the  
3 complete process is flexible and semi-automatized.  
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5 Several labels have been unfairly branded to HPTLC. HPTLC has become, in  
6 its present state of development, a repeatable technique which provides  
7 adequate separation and quantitative analysis when calibration is properly  
8 performed. Likewise, the availability of a commercial TLC-MS interphase and  
9 the possibility of performing mass spectra on the plate surface (MALDI, DART,  
10 etc. [20]) can open the door to a further development of hyphenation with other  
11 techniques.  
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22 However, HPTLC has limitations with regard to the obtention of polymers MWD.  
23 The potential use of silica gel by exclusion is limited because practically only  
24 one pore size distribution is commercialized.  
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29 In the context of adsorption, results show that different ranges of MW can be  
30 separated by using different elution sequences. The application of the  
31 developed HPTLC method to polymers other than PS should be done by using  
32 other stationary phases. In the past, a study on PS separation using reversed-  
33 phase HPTLC was reported [18]. However, we were unable to reproduce the  
34 described separation. Other works should be revisited using the modern HPTLC  
35 technology. Likewise, other recently developed stationary phases should also  
36 be tested.  
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## 48 **5. Conclusions**

## 49 **Acknowledgements**

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54 Authors thank the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (MICINN) and  
55 FEDER (UE) for financial support (Plan Nacional de I+D+I, project CTQ2008-  
56 00959)  
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## Captions for Figures

**Figure 1.-** HPTLC-UV chromatograms (**A**) of PS, injected as pure standards: PS-1920 (a), PS-4330 (b), PS-5460 (c), PS-6890 (d), PS-10850 (e), PS-17300 (f), PS-27500 (g), PS-52100 (h), PS-62300 (i), PS-96000 (k), PS-215000 (m), PS-524000 (n). (Lichrospher plates; 78:22 v/v Cy:THF as mobile phase; see other conditions in Experimental).

Log  $M_w$  vs  $R_f$  calibration curves (**B**) for the above polystyrenes under different elution conditions using Cy:THF proportions (v/v): 78:22 (●), 85:15 (Δ), 90:10 (⋈)

**Figure 2.-** HPTLC-UV chromatograms of PS mixtures with baseline resolved peaks: mixture 1 (**A**), mixture 5 (**B**), mixture 7 (**C**), mixture 3 with detail of calibration curve for each peak, using replicate samples (**D**). Composition of mixtures are given in Table 4. (Lichrospher plates; 78:22 v/v Cy:THF as mobile phase). Equations: inter-plate PS-17300 (Δ):  $y = 17246 x + 766.4$  ( $r^2 = 0.9667$ ); PS-4330 (○):  $y = 23118.5 x + 762.3$  ( $r^2 = 0.9971$ )

**Figure 3.-** HPTLC-UV chromatograms of PS mixtures with details of averaged calibration curves for unresolved peaks: mixture 2 (**A**), mixture 4 (**B**), mixture 6 (**C**). Composition of mixtures are given in Table 4. (Lichrospher plates; 78:22 v/v Cy:THF as mobile phase). Example of equations for (A): inter-plate PS-6890 (⋈):  $y = 21936 x + 995.8$  ( $r^2 = 0.9799$ ); PS-4330 (□):  $y = 23118.5 x + 762.3$  ( $r^2 = 0.9971$ ). Average curve (-):  $y = 22527 x + 879.1$  ( $r^2 = 0.9878$ )

**Figure 4.-** HPTLC chromatograms showing mixed adsorption / exclusion effects on elution of PS, applied as pure standards: PS-1920 (a), PS-4330 (b), PS-5460 (c), PS-6890 (d), PS-10850 (e), PS-17300 (f), PS-27500 (g), PS-52100 (h), PS-62300 (i), PS-96000 (k), PS-215000 (m), PS-524000 (n), PS-1056000 (o), PS-2522000 (p). Conditions: silica gel HPTLC plates; 76:24 v/v Cy:THF as mobile phase; see other conditions in Experimental

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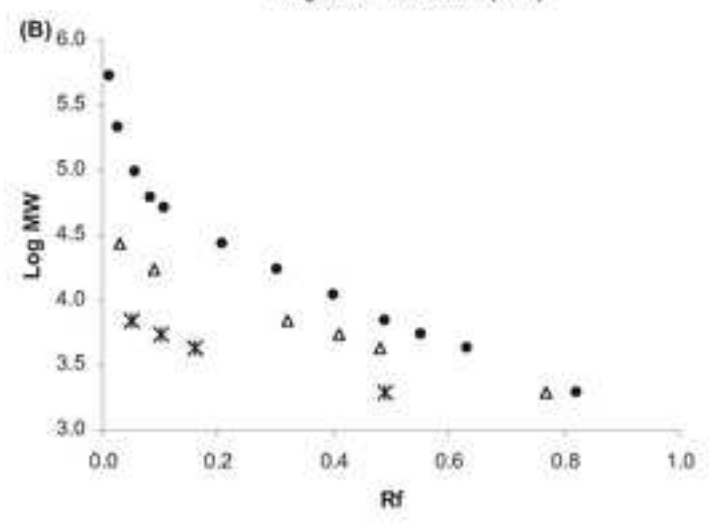
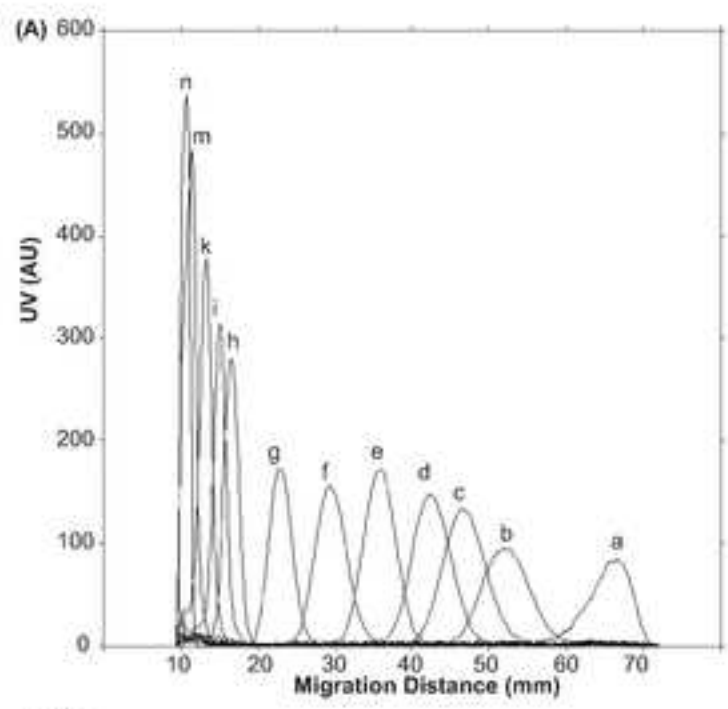


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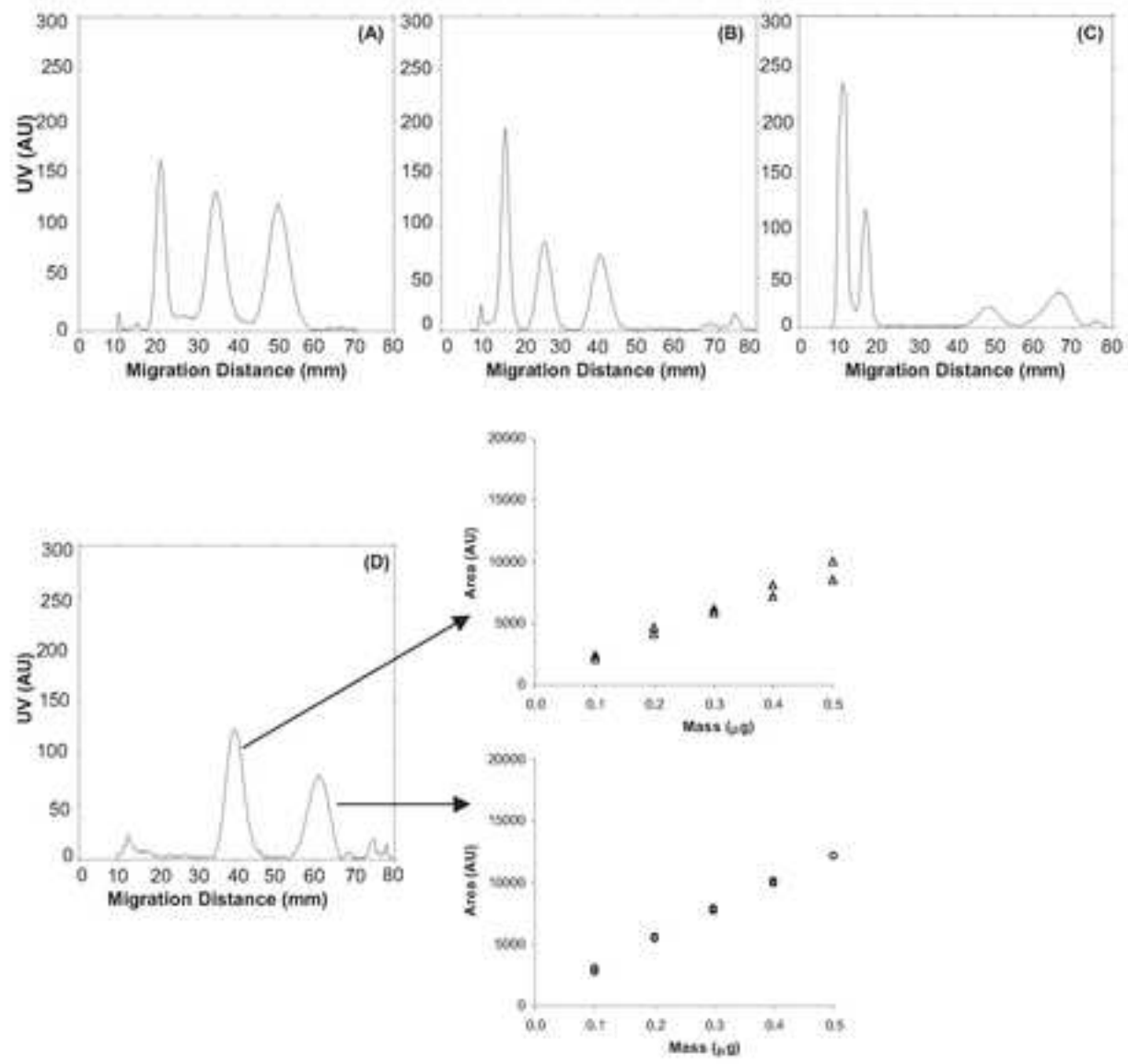


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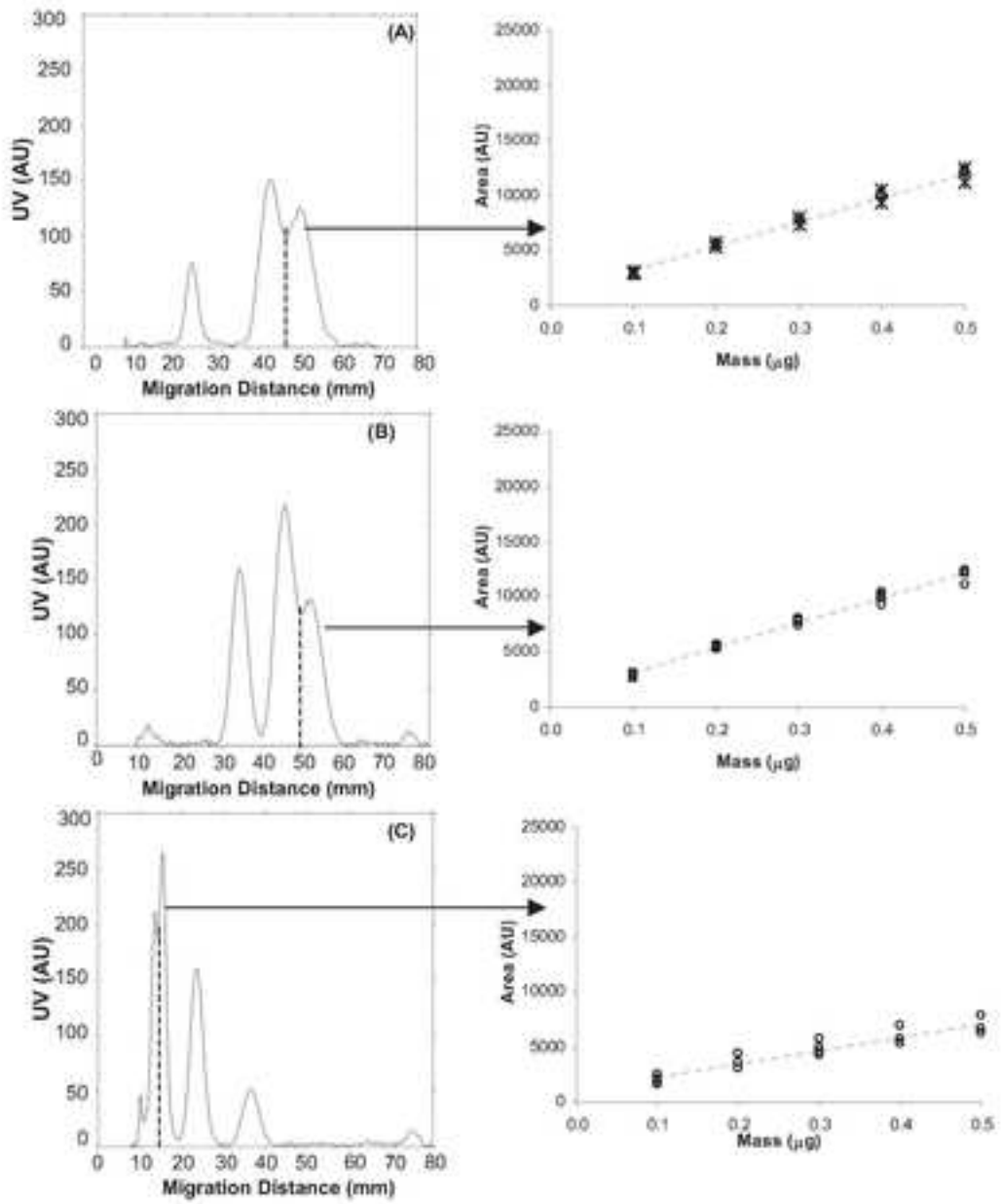
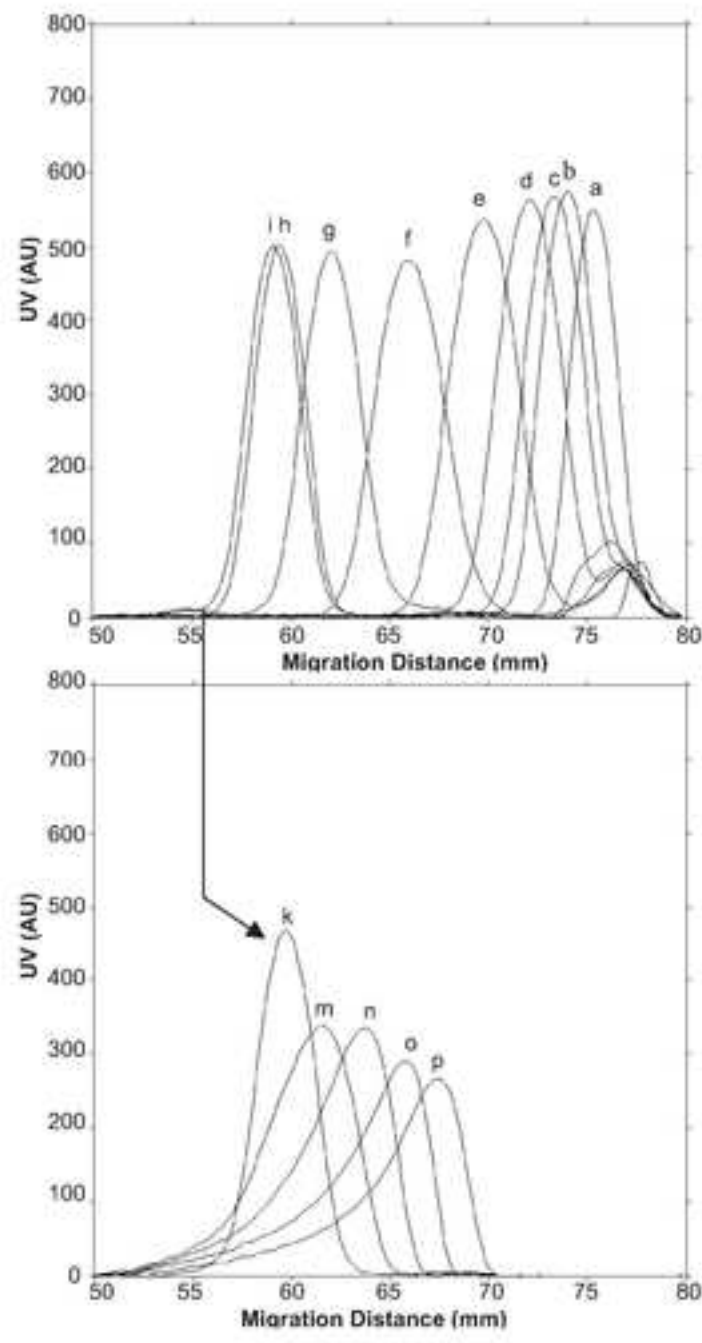
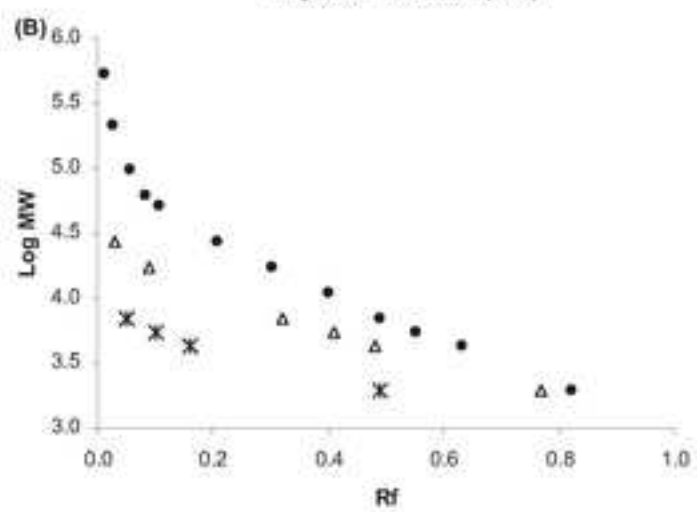
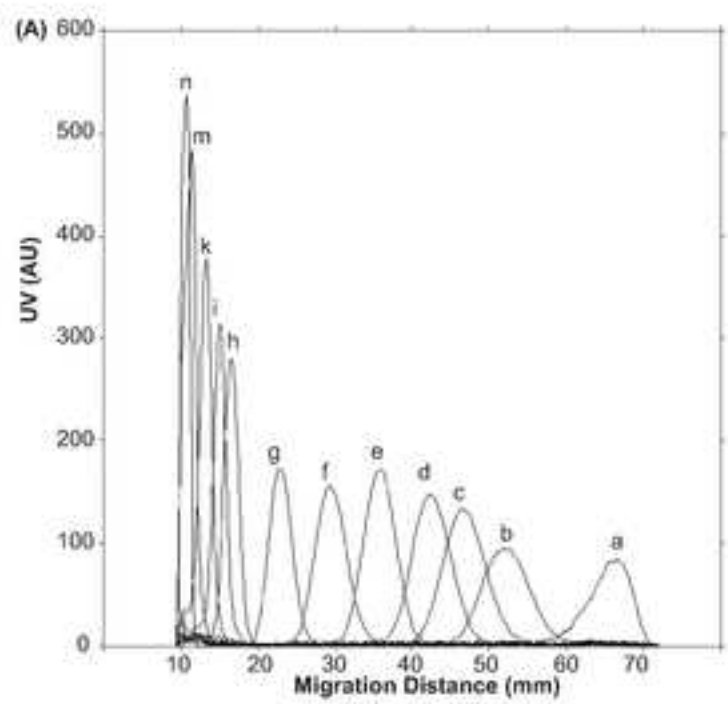


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*Table 1.- Advantages and drawbacks of GPC*

<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Drawbacks</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Diversity of columns (phase, distributions of pore size, connections between columns)</li><li>- Coupling to mass selective detectors (viscosity, LALLS, etc.)</li><li>- Application to a wide range of polymers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Low resolution. Distribution curves rather than discrete peaks are obtained</li><li>- Low inter-lab reproducibility [3]</li><li>- Difficulty in obtaining accurate data from chromatograms (artefacts in connections between columns and between detectors, problems associated to particular detectors such as differential refractometry, etc).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Possibility of working at temperature</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adsorption phenomena</li></ul>



Table 2.- Molecular Weight averages of standards, migration values ( $R_f$ , m.d.)<sup>a</sup> and repeatability parameters

Polystyrene (PS)	$M_w^b$ (g mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$M_n^c$ (g mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$M_w/M_n^e$	$R_f$	$R_f$ variability ( $\pm$ )	m.d. (mm)	m.d. variability ( $\pm$ mm)
PS-1920	1920	1770	1.08	0.82	0.3	67.6	1.6
PS-4330	4330	4160	1.04	0.63	0.6	54.1	4.1
PS-5460	5460	5301	1.03	0.55	0.6	48.9	4.1
PS-6890	6890	6720	1.03	0.49	0.5	44.5	3.6
PS-10850	10850	10637	1.02	0.40	0.5	37.8	3.7
PS-17300	17300	16900	1.03	0.30	0.6	31.2	3.7
PS-27500	27500	26600	1.04	0.21	0.5	24.4	3.6
PS-52100	52100	50750	1.03	0.11	0.4	17.6	2.7
PS-62300	62300	60600	1.03	0.08	0.3	15.8	1.8
PS-96000	96000	92000	1.04	0.06	0.2	13.9	1.4
PS-215000	215000	203000	1.06	0.03	0.2	11.9	1.0
PS-524000	524000	502000	1.04	0.01	0.1	10.9	0.5
PS-1056000	1056000 (Mp <sup>d</sup> )		1.03	0.01	0.1	10.7	0.5
PS-2522000	2522000	2437000	1.03	0.01	0.1	10.7	0.6

<sup>a</sup> using Cy:THF (78:22, v:v), other conditions in experimental, <sup>b</sup>  $M_w = \frac{\sum W_i}{\sum M_i}$ , <sup>c</sup>  $M_n = \frac{\sum W_i}{\sum \frac{W_i}{M_i}}$

<sup>d</sup> Mp is the molecular weight corresponding to that of the maximum of the GPC chromatographic peak (provided by the manufacturer), <sup>e</sup> polydispersity

Table 3.- Composition of studied PS mixtures and migration data of standards using the elution sequence Cy:THF (78:22, v:v)

Mixture	Mw (g mol <sup>-1</sup> )	R <sub>f</sub>		ΔR <sub>f</sub>
		In mixture	As pure standard	
Mixture 1	PS-5460	0.58	0.55	0.03
	PS-17300	0.35	0.30	0.05
	PS-52100	0.15	0.11	0.04
Mixture 2	PS-4330	0.58	0.63	0.05
	PS-6890	0.35	0.49	0.14
	PS-27500	0.15	0.21	0.06
Mixture 3	PS-4330	0.64	0.63	0.01
	PS-17300	0.38	0.30	0.08
Mixture 4	PS-4330	0.59	0.63	0.04
	PS-6890	0.51	0.49	0.02
	PS-17300	0.35	0.30	0.05
Mixture 5	PS-10850	0.42	0.40	0.02
	PS-27500	0.22	0.21	0.01
	PS-62300	0.09	0.08	0.01
Mixture 6	PS-10850	0.37	0.40	0.03
	PS-27500	0.19	0.21	0.02
	PS-62300	0.08	0.08	0.00
	PS-96000	0.05	0.06	0.01
Mixture 7	PS-1920	0.80	0.82	0.02
	PS-5460	0.55	0.55	0.00
	PS-52100	0.10	0.11	0.01
	PS-215000	0.02	0.03	0.01
	PS-524000	0.02	0.01	0.01

Table 4.- HPTLC-based quantitative analysis of baseline-resolved PS mixtures using intra-plate and inter-plate calibration procedures

Mixture	Mw (g mol <sup>-1</sup> )	wt %	wt % by HPTLC method	
			Intra-plate calibration <sup>a</sup>	Inter-plate calibration <sup>a</sup>
Mixture 1	PS-5460	37.4		36.2
	PS-17300	32.8	n.m. <sup>b</sup>	35.4
	PS-52100	29.8		28.4
Mixture 3	PS-4330	43.8	36.4	34.6
	PS-17300	56.2	63.6	65.4
Mixture 5	PS-10850	28.6	24.8	23.3
	PS-27500	30.8	31.4	30.6
	PS-62300	40.6	43.8	46.1
Mixture 7	PS-1920	21.2	15.2	16.2
	PS-5460	10.3	6.4	6.7
	PS-52100	28.0	26.1	24.8
	PS-215000	40.5	52.3 <sup>c</sup>	52.3 <sup>c</sup>
	PS-524000			

<sup>a</sup> Normalized results

<sup>b</sup> Not measured

<sup>c</sup> Integration was performed as a single peak. Calibration using an average curve from both polymer's points (see text)

Table 5.- HPTLC-based quantitative analysis of baseline-unresolved PS mixtures

Mixture	Mw (g mol <sup>-1</sup> )	wt %	wt % by HPTLC method		
			Intra-plate calibration <sup>a</sup>	Inter-plate calibration <sup>a</sup>	Inter-plate calibration using average curve <sup>b</sup>
Mixture 2	PS-4330	39.8	n.m. <sup>c</sup>	37.1	81.8
	PS-6890	44.5		43.9	
	PS-27500	15.7		19.0	18.2
Mixture 4	PS-4330	26.3	24.9	23.8	68.2
	PS-6890	44.0	43.1	43.6	
	PS-17300	29.7	32.0	32.6	31.8
Mixture 6	PS-10850	10.6	9.4	8.2	7.6
	PS-27500	38.2	39.1	37.8	35.1
	PS-62300	34.8	35.1	35.8	57.3
	PS-96000	16.4	16.4	18.2	

<sup>a</sup> Normalized results

<sup>b</sup> Whole integration of overlapped peaks was used. Calibration was performed using an average curve (see text)

<sup>c</sup> Not measured