

Aspen Tutorial #1: Aspen Basics

Outline:

- Introduction to Aspen
- Problem Description
- Beginning a Simulation
- Navigating the Aspen Window
- Creating a Process Flowsheet
- Data Input
- Running the Simulation

Introduction:

In industry complicated problems are often not solved by hand for two reasons: human error and time constraints. There are many different simulation programs used in industry depending on the field, application, and desired simulation products (entire process unit, one piece of equipment, etc.). When used to its full capabilities, Aspen can be a very powerful tool for a Chemical Engineer in a variety of fields including oil and gas production, refining, chemical processing, environmental studies, and power generation to name a few.

Over the course of these tutorials, you will be introduced to some of the basic features of Aspen as we build a simulation of an acetone/water extraction-distillation process. This problem is based very loosely on Example Problem 4.4-2 in Elementary Principles of Chemical Process by Felder and Rousseau. Because we will build on our existing simulation with each tutorial, it is highly recommended that you save your work every week so you do not have to start from scratch each time. The homework problems will emphasize one particular feature of Aspen that is covered in the tutorial for that week.

Problem Description:

A mixture containing 50.0 wt% acetone and 50.0 wt% water is to be separated into two streams – one enriched in acetone and the other in water. The separation process consists of extraction of the acetone from the water into methyl isobutyl ketone (MIBK), which dissolves acetone but is nearly immiscible with water. The overall goal of this problem is to separate the feed stream into two streams which have greater than 90% purity of water and acetone respectively.

This week we will begin by learning the basics of running Aspen and building a process flowsheet. This will be one of the longest tutorials of the quarter as it introduces you to a number of features that must be understood to complete even a basic simulation. Our goal at the end of this tutorial is to understand some of the features of Aspen while creating a simulation of the mixture of a feed stream of 100 lbs/hr of the 50/50 acetone-water mix with a solvent stream of 100 lbs/hr of MIBK.

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Beginning a Simulation:

1. Start the Aspen program. It can be found in the start menu under:
Start/Programs/ChemE/Aspen Plus User Interface
2. Choose what type of simulation you would like to use. Later on in the quarter you will want to open up an existing simulation, but now we will use the template option.

The window that appears can be seen in Figure 1. I mention it to again highlight the variety of problems that Aspen can solve as seen by the number of available templates.

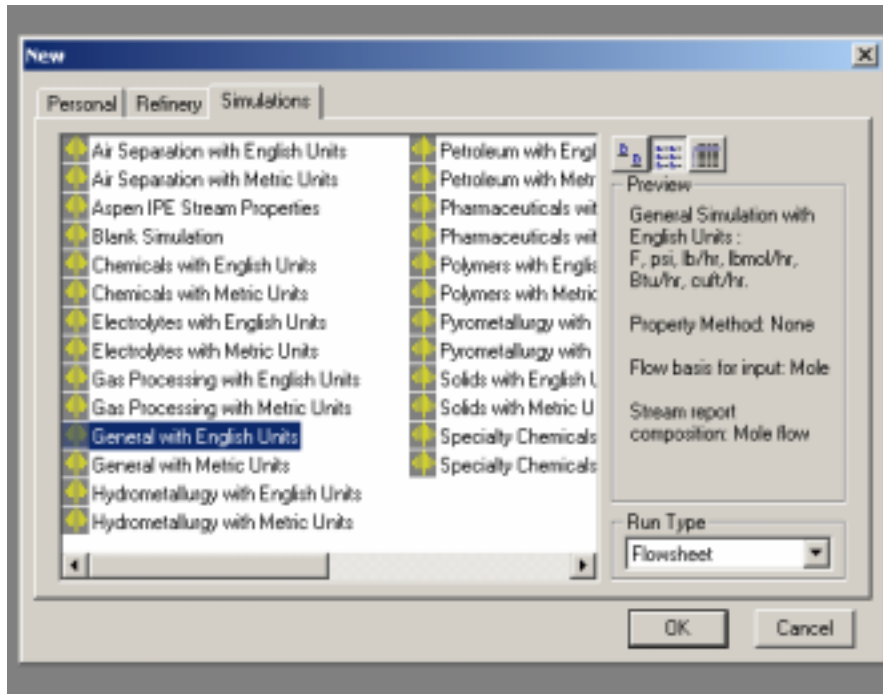


Figure 1: Available Simulation Templates

We will use the General with English Units option.

3. When the Connect to Engine window appears, use the default Server Type (Local PC).

Navigating the Aspen Window:

Figure 2, on the next page shows the Aspen process flowsheet window. Some of the features are highlighted in the Figure and the most general of these will be discussed in the sections that follow.

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Some things worth mentioning:

- Your simulation efforts will be greatly aided by becoming familiar with the toolbar features. This will eliminate the need to search through the menu bar for the various features.
- Hitting the arrow on the side of either a piece of equipment or the stream will present a number of options for that particular item.
- The status bar will tell the user what each piece of equipment will do. This is useful when selecting pieces of equipment like columns or reactors for more complicated simulation work.
- The simulation status in the bottom right hand corner will notify the user when all of the required data has been input and the simulation can be run.

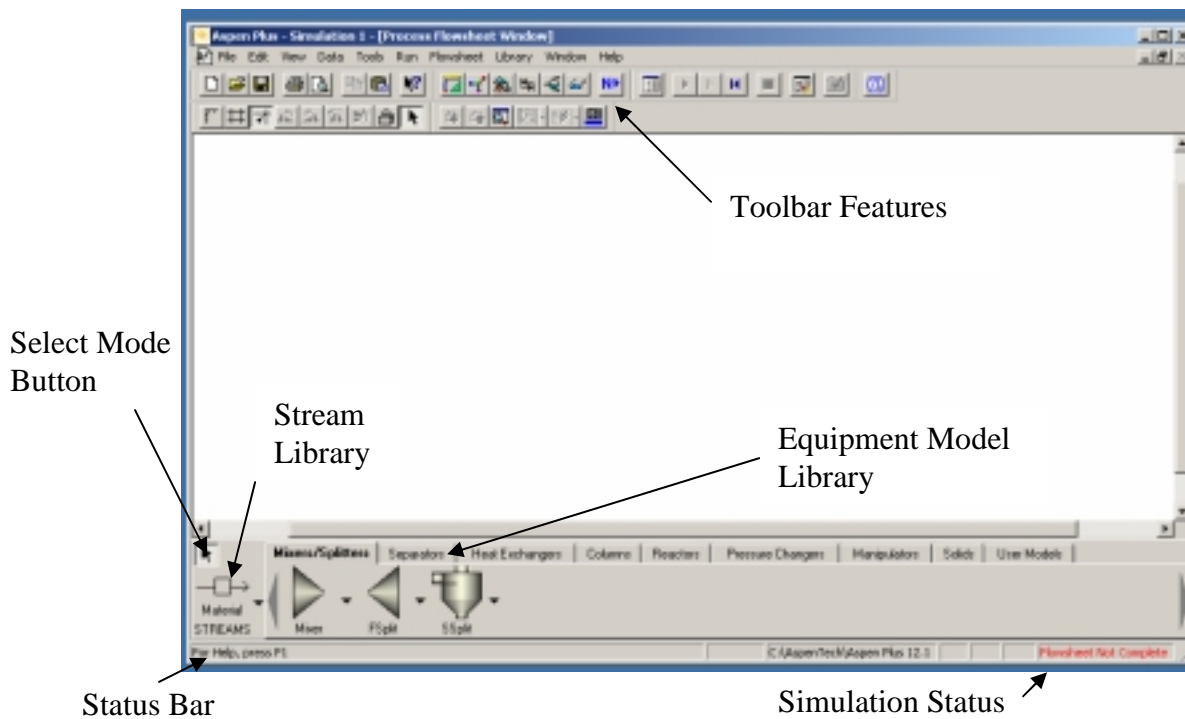


Figure 2: Process Flowsheet Window

Creating a Process Flowsheet:

To place a unit operation (or piece of equipment) into the flowsheet window, select it from the Equipment Model Library and then click on the flowsheet window where you would like the piece of equipment to appear. Do this for each piece of equipment that you would like to add to your simulation. For this week's simulation you will only need to add one Stream Mixer (found in the Mixers/Splitters Tab). You may want to go through the rest of the Equipment Model Library to see what other types of equipment are available in this program.

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It should be pointed out that after adding your desired unit operations you must click on the Select Mode Button to reposition or resize the icon. If you do not select this button, you will continue to add equipment to the process flowsheet. To delete extraneous equipment, simply highlight that object and hit the delete key on the keyboard.

To add Material Streams to your simulation select the appropriate stream from the Stream Library (other options include heat and work, but we will not be using those at this time). It should be pointed out that Aspen has a feature that will indicate to you where streams are required. When you select the material stream option, a number of arrows will appear on each of the unit operations. Red arrows indicate a required stream and blue arrows indicate an optional stream. This is shown in Figure 3 below.

Streams can be added by clicking on the process flowsheet where you would like the stream to begin and clicking again where you would like the stream to end. To connect to a piece of equipment you must have the desired stream type selected and then begin or end on one of the arrows shown on the piece of equipment (depending on if your stream is a feed to or product from the equipment). In a similar fashion to the equipment, each click will add a new stream to the process flowsheet until you click on the Select Mode Button.

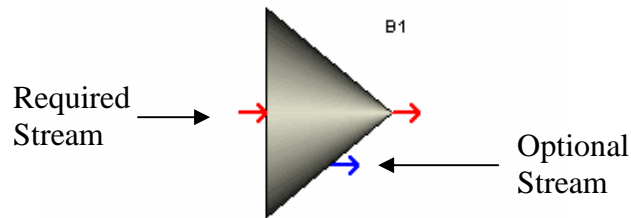


Figure 3: Required Stream Locations

For this tutorial, you will need to add two streams feeding into the mixer, and one product stream leaving the mixer.

Some features of Aspen that should be mentioned at this point are the ability to rotate, resize, and rename both the streams and the unit operations. To do this, simply select the object that you would like to manipulate and right click on it. This will present you with a number of options for changing each object. I would recommend renaming both the material streams and the mixer to names that will better distinguish them (rather than the default numbers and letters).

At this point your process flowsheet should be complete and it should somewhat resemble the one shown in Figure 4. Notice the simulation status has been changed from “Flowsheet not Complete” to “Required Input Incomplete”.

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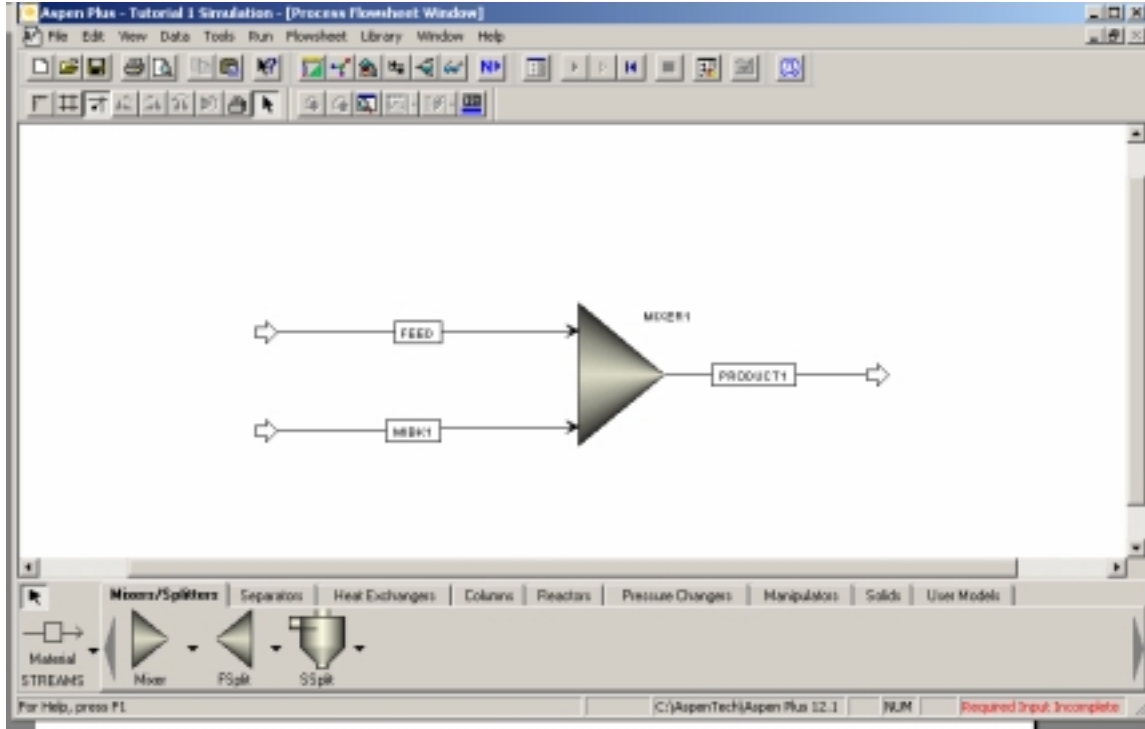


Figure 4: Completed Mixer Flowsheet

Data Input:

All of the data input for Aspen is entered in the Data Browser window. This window can be opened by clicking on the eyeglass icon or by going to Data/Data Browser in the Menu Bar. Aspen has two features in the Data Browser window that can both help and hurt the user. The first of these can be seen on the right hand side. Aspen highlights the areas where the input has been complete and has not been completed with the use of either a blue check mark or a half filled red circle, as seen in Figure 5. However, you can not always assume that all of the required input has been entered, especially if you are simulating a more complex problem. This feature will only track the minimal data input required to run a simulation and may cause problems in getting simulations to converge successfully. I recommend going through each icon on the left hand side one by one to make sure that you input all of the desired data for your particular application.

Aspen also has a tool in the toolbar that will automatically take the user through the required data input in a stepwise fashion. The button that does this is the blue N with the arrow (Next), also seen in Figure 5. Again, this feature steps through only the minimal data input and I would recommend avoiding the use of it until you are more experienced with Aspen.

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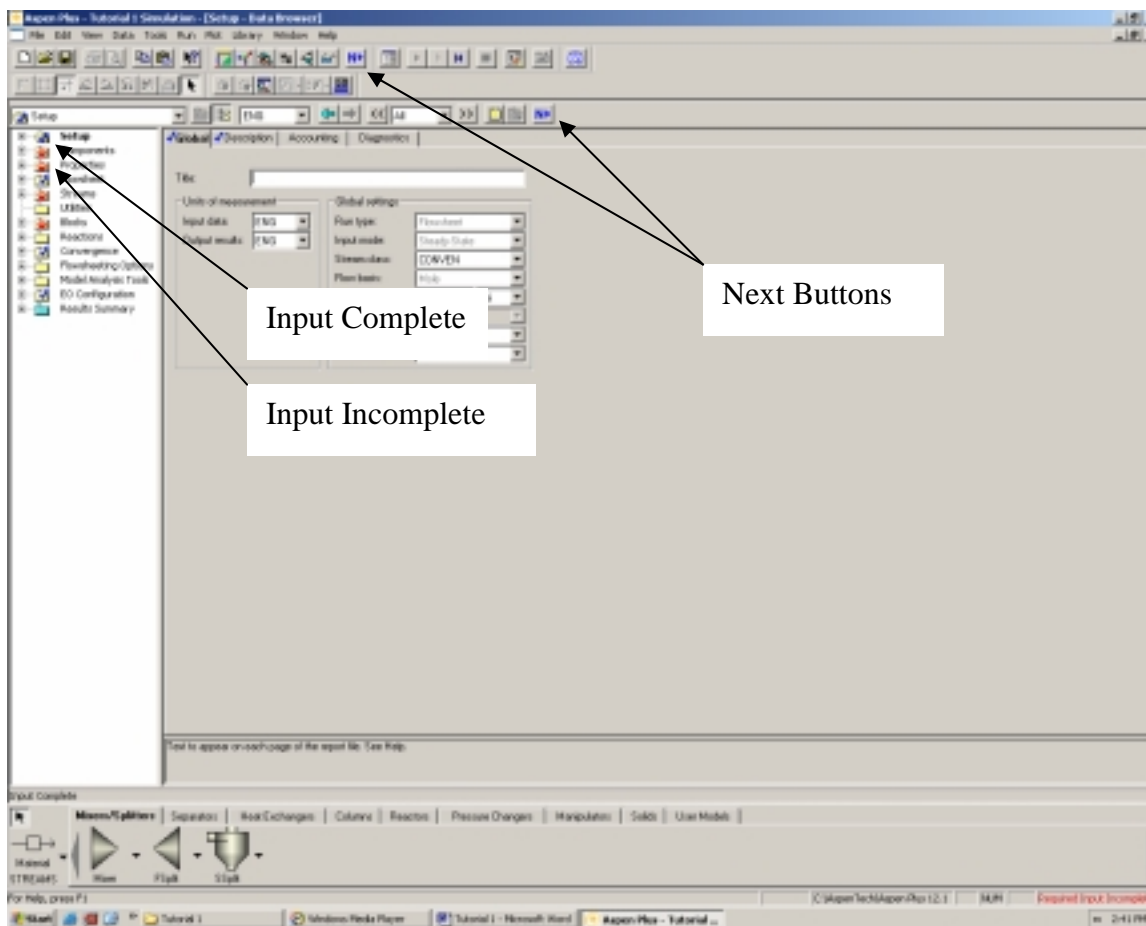


Figure 5: Data Browser Window

Under the Setup tab, in the Specifications folder you can input features such as a simulation title and a description of the project that you are working on. These are useful features for tracking your work and for tracking changes that you make to your work over time. Other features that are worth mentioning are the Units-Sets option and the Report Options. In the Units-Sets tab a user can input a new base set of units based on what they would like for their specific application. For now we will stick with the default base set. Under the Report Options the user can change how and what information is provided after a simulation is completed and converged. We will discuss this more thoroughly in next week's tutorial.

Under the Components tab the user will input what components will be used in this simulation. Aspen has a huge database of commonly used (and some not so commonly used) components and their physical properties. It also has an option where a user can define components that are not included in the database. Under the Specifications option we will input our components in the Selection tab. In the box marked component name, enter each of the components one at a time and hit the enter key. When you enter Methyl Isobutyl Ketone the find wizard will open up. Select MIBK from the list of possible matches, hit the add button, and then close the find window. You must also input a Component ID for all of the components (although a default one will appear for MIBK).

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If you do not, the program will not recognize that component later on. When you have entered all three components your screen should look similar to that in Figure 6.

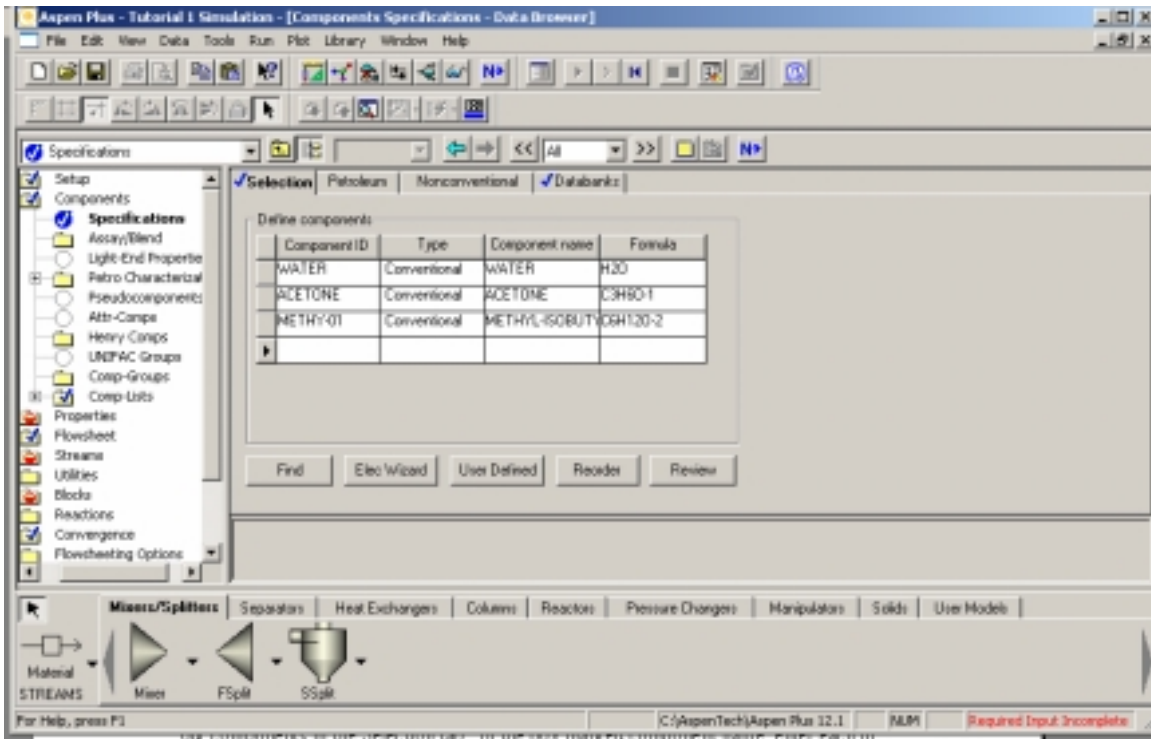


Figure 6: Component Selection

This is the only option where we will need to input data under the Components tab. It should be noted that there are a number of options for entering pseudo components or refining crude assays, etc. which is a commonly used feature in some industrial applications.

The user input under the Property tab is probably the most critical input required to run a successful simulation. This key input is the Base Method found under the Specifications option. The Base Method is the thermodynamic basis for all of the simulation calculations and this will be discussed in much greater detail in a later tutorial. For now select the Ideal method. In future applications, you may wish to use a Process type that is specific to your particular project. However, for now we will stick with the default All and this will complete our inputs under the Properties tab. The completed Property tab screen is shown in Figure 7.

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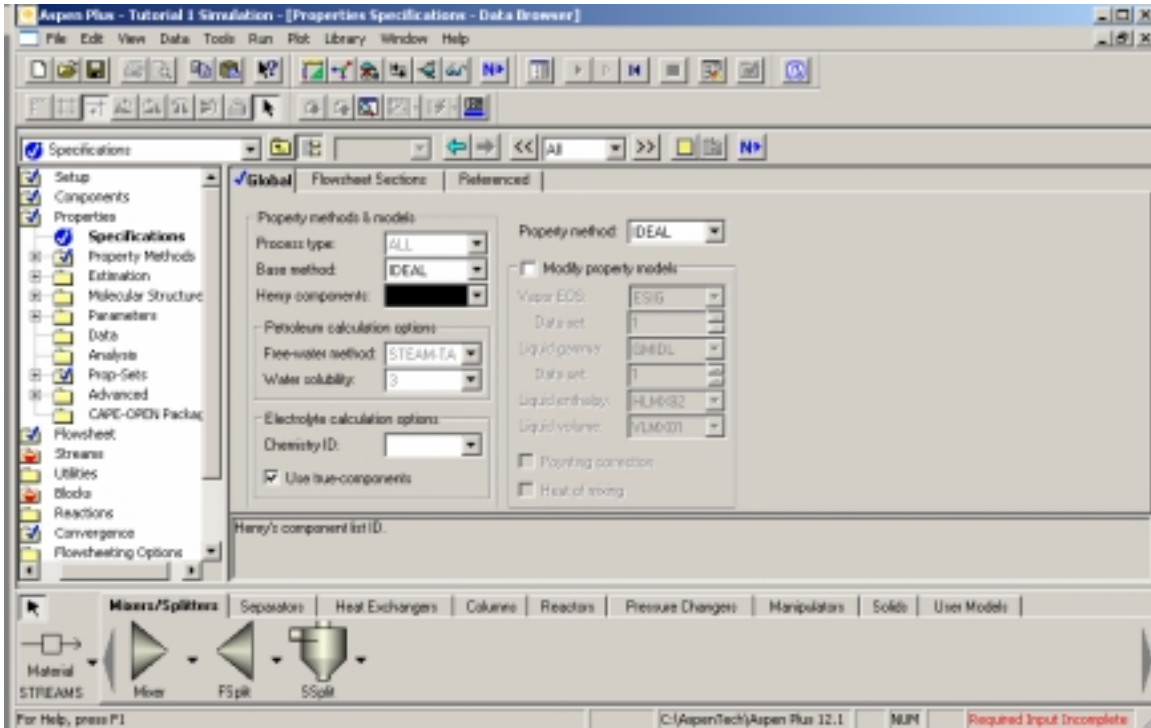


Figure 7: Completed Properties Screen

Under the Streams tab, we will enter in all of the specifications for each of the feed streams one at a time. Remember one feed stream is 100 lbs/hr of a 50/50 wt% mixture of Acetone and Water and the other stream is 100 lbs/hr of pure MIBK. For this simulation we will use a temperature of 75° F and a pressure of 50 psi. Take notice of the many ways you can input the stream data (i.e. temperature/pressure/vapor fraction, mole/mass basis, and stream compositions based on percent flow/mass flow/mole flow etc.). Input the appropriate data for both your feed and solvent streams (mine are named Feed and MIBK1). You will either need to switch the basis for the streams or do some hand calculations to convert the problem's mass flow to the default mole flow (I suggest switching the basis). When complete, the window should look like the one seen in Figure 8.

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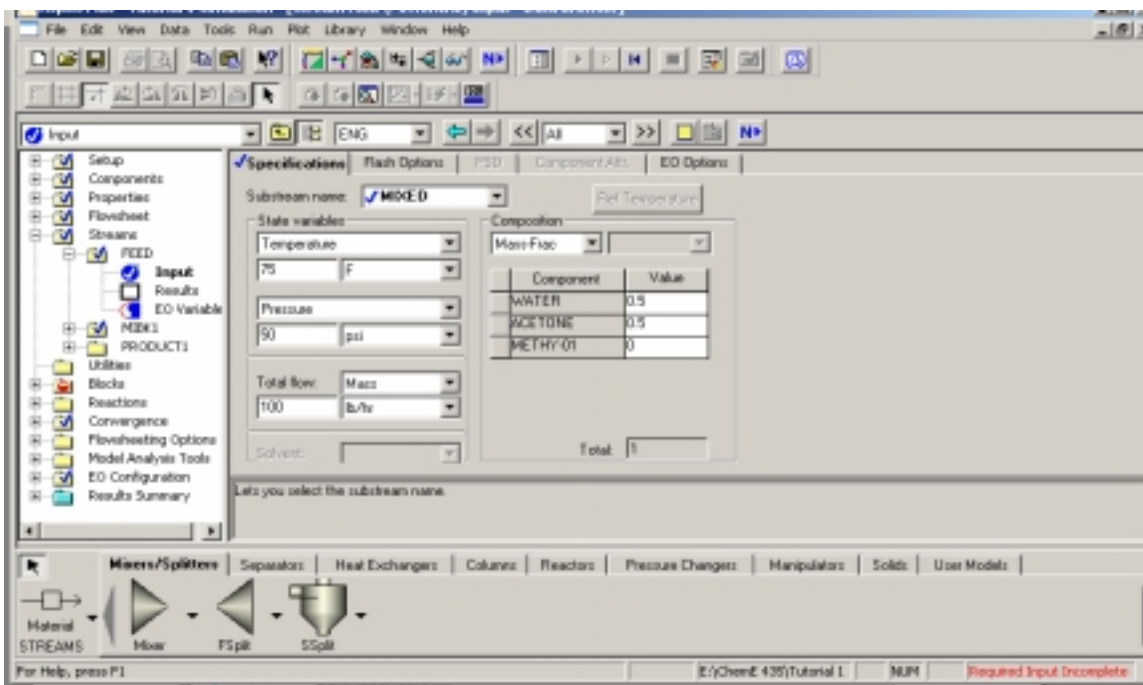


Figure 8: Completed Feed Stream Input

The final area that requires input is the Blocks tab. Open up this feature and the tab corresponding to the mixer. Under this unit operation we have the option of forcing the feed streams to mix at a desired pressure or with valid phases. In our mixer we are not changing the temperature or pressure so we will specify that liquids are the only valid phases because both of the feed streams are liquid at these conditions. After this is input you will notice that the Simulation Status changes to “Required Input Complete”.

There are a number of other features in the Data Browser that we will work with over the course of the quarter, but for now our input is complete and you are ready to run the simulation.

Running the Simulation:

There are a few ways to run the simulation. The user could select either the Next button in the toolbar which will tell you that all of the required inputs are complete and ask if you would like to run the simulation. The user can also run the simulation by selecting the run button in the toolbar (this is the button with a block arrow pointing to the right). Finally, the user can go to run on the menu bar and select run.

After the simulation is run and converged, you will notice that the Results Summary Tab on the Data Browser Window has a blue check mark. Clicking on that tab will open up the Run Status. If your simulation has converged it should state “Calculations were completed normally”. If you have received this message you have successfully completed Tutorial #1.

Next week: Convergence and Presentation of Results