

A COMPOSITE MAGNETIC RECORDING STRUCTURE HAVING A METAMAGNETIC LAYER WITH FIELD INDUCED TRANSITION TO FERROMAGNETIC STATE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to magnetic recording media, and in particular relates to magnetic recording media having improved thermostability and coercivity characteristics at normal recording and storage temperatures.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] There are many different forms of data recording. For example, magnetic data recording is one of the prevailing forms of data recording. Magnetic data recording may be implemented using different types of magnetic recording media, including tapes, hard discs, floppy discs, etc. Over the years, significant developments have been made to increase the areal data recording density in magnetic data recording.

[0003] Superparamagnetism is a major limiting factor to increasing magnetic recording areal density. Superparamagnetism results from thermal excitations perturbing the magnetization of grains in a ferromagnetic material, making the magnetization distribution unstable. As the magnetic media grain size is reduced for high areal density recording, superparamagnetic instabilities become more of an issue. The superparamagnetic effect is most evident when the grain volume V is sufficiently small that the inequality $K_u V / k_B T > 40$ can no longer be maintained. K_u is the material's magnetocrystalline anisotropy energy density, k_B is the Boltzmann's constant, and T is in absolute temperature. When this inequality is not satisfied, thermal energy demagnetizes the individual grains and the stored data bits will not be stable. Therefore, as the grain size is decreased in order to increase the areal density, a threshold is reached for a given material K_u and temperature T such that stable data storage is no longer feasible.

[0004] The thermal stability can be improved by employing a recording medium formed of a material having a very high K_u . Large K_u lead to increase of switching field characteristic of the medium (i.e., coercivity). However, the currently available recording heads are not able to provide a sufficient or high enough magnetic writing field to write on such a medium. The magnetic field delivered from the write head to reach magnetization reversal of the grain is currently limited to approximately 10 kOe.

[0005] Heat Assisted Magnetic Recording (HAMR), sometimes referred to as optical or thermal assisted recording, has been proposed to overcome at least some of the problems associated with the superparamagnetic effect. HAMR generally refers to the concept of locally heating a recording medium with a laser to reduce the coercivity of the recording medium, so that an applied magnetic writing field can more easily direct the magnetization of the recording medium during the temporary magnetic softening of the recording medium caused by the laser. By heating the medium, the K_u or the coercivity is reduced such that the magnetic write field is sufficient to write to the medium. Once the medium cools to ambient temperature, the medium has a sufficiently high value of coercivity to assure thermal stability of the recorded information. Considerable design developments have been accomplished to generate the thermal energy and to efficiently direct the thermal energy toward the writing location on the recording medium.

[0006] It would be desirable to develop a recording medium with improved thermostability and coercivity characteristics to facilitate magnetic data recording using current transducer designs.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention is directed to a novel magnetic recording medium having a composite magnetic recording structure comprising the combination of a hard magnetic layer and a metamagnetic layer that possesses a field induced metamagnetic transition characteristic at ambient operating temperature (i.e., in the absence of any applied external heating to assist in magnetic recording, beyond the temperature of the environment in which the magnetic recording medium operates). Under an applied external magnetic field (e.g., from the write head), the metamagnetic layer experiences

transition from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state, and the magnetic field induces magnetization of the metamagnetic layer, even in the absence of any applied external heating beyond the ambient temperature that is below the antiferromagnetic to ferromagnetic transition temperature of the metamagnetic layer. The hard magnetic recording layer is magnetically exchange coupled to the metamagnetic layer. This field induced magnetization of the metamagnetic layer and the exchange coupling with the hard magnetic layer results in the softening of the coercivity of the overall magnetic recording structure and reduction of the required switching field during the magnetic recording process. Upon removal of the applied magnetic field, the metamagnetic layer transitions back to an antiferromagnetic state and the coercivity of the hard magnetic layer is restored. This restoration allows the written bit to be stored at a high thermostability ratio and thus, preventing magnetization thermal decay of the data bit on long time scale.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] For a fuller understanding of the nature and advantages of the invention, as well as the preferred mode of use, reference should be made to the following detailed description read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. In the following drawings, like reference numerals designate like or similar parts throughout the drawings.

[0009] FIG. 1 is a pictorial representation of a disc drive incorporating the inventive magnetic recording medium in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[0010] FIG. 2 is a partially schematic side view of a perpendicular recording head and the inventive magnetic medium in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

[0011] FIG. 3a is a partially schematic side view of the hard magnetic layer in a perpendicular ferromagnetic state and the metamagnetic layer in an antiferromagnetic state.

[0012] FIG. 3b is a partially schematic side view of the hard magnetic layer in a perpendicular ferromagnetic state and the metamagnetic layer transitioning to a ferromagnetic state under the influence of the magnetic field (H) from the write head.

[0013] FIG. 3c is a partially schematic side view of the hard magnetic layer further switching its magnetic direction when the recording medium is further under the influence of the magnetic field (H) from the write head.

[0014] FIG. 3d is a partially schematic side view of the hard magnetic layer with the recorded data and the metamagnetic layer transitioning back to an antiferromagnetic state when the recording medium is no longer under the influence of the magnetic field from the write head.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] The present description is of the best presently contemplated mode of carrying out the invention. This description is made for the purpose of illustrating the general principles of the invention and should not be taken in a limiting sense. The scope of the invention is best determined by reference to the appended claims. This invention has been described herein in reference to various embodiments and drawings. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that variations and improvements may be accomplished in view of these teachings without deviating from the scope and spirit of the invention.

[0016] The present invention is directed to a magnetic recording medium for a data recording system, having a novel composite magnetic recording structure. Throughout the present disclosure, the term “metamagnetic” refers to the transition from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state under the influence of an external magnetic field, independent of temperature effect on such transition. As will be detailed below, the novel composite magnetic recording structure comprises the combination of a hard magnetic layer and a metamagnetic layer that possesses a field induced metamagnetic transition characteristic in ambient operating temperature (i.e., in the absence of any applied external heating to assist in magnetic recording, beyond the temperature of the environment in which the magnetic recording medium operates).

The material of the metamagnetic layer may experience transition from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state at a certain transition temperature. Under an applied external magnetic field from the write head, the metamagnetic layer experiences transition from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state, and the magnetic field induces magnetization of the metamagnetic layer, at temperatures below such transition temperature (i.e., even in the absence of any applied external heating beyond an ambient temperature that is below the antiferromagnetic to ferromagnetic transition temperature of the metamagnetic layer). The hard magnetic recording layer is magnetically exchange coupled to the metamagnetic layer. This field induced magnetization of the metamagnetic layer and the exchange coupling with the hard magnetic layer results in the softening of the coercivity of the overall magnetic recording structure and reduction of the required switching field during the magnetic recording process. Upon removal of the applied magnetic field, the metamagnetic layer transitions back to an antiferromagnetic state and the coercivity of the hard magnetic layer is restored. This restoration allows the written bit to be stored at a high thermostability ratio and thus, preventing magnetization thermal decay of the data bit.

[0017] By way of illustration and not limitation, the present invention will be described in connection with a magnetic recording disc drive system, and in particular a perpendicular magnetic recording disc drive system. Perpendicular magnetic recording, as used herein, generally refers to orienting magnetic domains within a magnetic recording medium substantially perpendicular to the direction of travel of the recording head and/or recording medium. Although one embodiment of the invention is described herein with reference to perpendicular magnetic recording, it will be appreciated that aspects of the invention may also be used in conjunction with other types of recording (e.g., longitudinal) where it may be desirable to deploy the inventive magnetic recording medium.

[0018] It is well contemplated that the novel magnetic recording medium of the present invention may be applied to other types of magnetic data recording system, such as tape drives, floppy disc drives, etc., which may comprise in addition to magnetic data recording, other forms of data reading, such as a magneto-optical recording system, without departing from the scope and spirit of the present invention. While the present invention is illustrated in reference to a magnetic recording system that does not apply

external heat beyond ambient heat to the magnetic medium, it is contemplated that the novel magnetic recording medium may be used in a HAMR system, for example, to reduce the amount of heat necessary to reduce the coercivity of the recording medium.

[0019] **FIG. 1** is a pictorial representation of a disc drive **10** that can utilize a magnetic recording medium in accordance with this invention. The disc drive **10** includes a housing **12** (with the upper portion removed and the lower portion visible in this view) sized and configured to contain the various components of the disc drive. The disc drive **10** includes a spindle motor **14** for supporting and rotating at least one magnetic recording medium **16** within the housing, in this case a magnetic disc (which may comprise the perpendicular magnetic recording medium **40** described below). At least one arm **18** is contained within the housing **12**, with each arm **18** having a first end **20** with a recording head or slider **22**, and a second end **24** pivotally mounted on a shaft by a bearing **26**. An actuator motor **28** is located at the arm's second end **24** for pivoting the arm **18** to position the recording head **22** over a desired sector or track of the disc **16**. The actuator motor **28** is regulated by a controller **29**.

[0020] **FIG. 2** is a partial schematic side view of a perpendicular recording head **50** and a magnetic recording medium **40** having a composite magnetic recording structure in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. The recording head **50** may include a writer section comprising a main write pole **52** and a return pole **54** that are magnetically coupled by a yoke **56**. The magnetization coil **55** surrounds the write pole **52** for energizing the recording head **50**. It will be appreciated that the recording head **50** may be constructed with a write pole **52** only and no return pole **54** or yoke **56** and that the magnetization coil **55** may surround the yoke **56** instead of the write pole **52**. The recording head **50** also may include a read head, not shown, which may be any conventional type read head as is generally known in the art. The magnetic recording medium **40** is positioned adjacent to or under the recording head **50** and travels in the direction of the arrow **A**. An air bearing surface **59** separates the recording head **50** from the medium **40** by a small distance.

[0021] The medium **40** is schematically represented as having a layered structure, including a substrate **42**, a soft magnetic underlayer **44**, a magnetic recording structure comprising a metamagnetic layer **38** and a hard magnetic layer **46**, and a protective overcoat **48**. In the illustrated embodiment, the aforementioned layers are stacked (e.g.,

by deposition) in the sequence shown in **FIG. 2**. However, it is contemplated that to the extent it is consistent with the features, functions and purpose of the present invention disclosed herein, the various layers may be stacked in a different sequence not shown. Intermediate layer or layers of materials (e.g., a buffer layer, a primer layer) may be present or provided between the layers mentioned. The reference herein to one layer being adjacent to, above, below, on, or under another layer does not necessarily mean immediately adjacent to, above, below, on, or under, and does not preclude the addition of intermediate layer or layers. Also, certain layer or layers disclosed herein may be omitted or replaced by other equivalent or different layer or layers of material. Furthermore, one or more of the layer structures may include a multilayered structure having sub-layers which are made of same or different materials. The layer structures shown need not be of a continuous structure (e.g., the magnetic layer may comprise a bit patterned hard magnetic material, or a self assembled monolayer of hard magnetic material). The layers need not be of uniform thickness (e.g., a bit patterned hard magnetic layer, or a self assembled monolayer of hard magnetic material). Other variations may be implemented without departing from the scope and spirit of the present invention.

[0022] The substrate **42** may be made of any suitable material for hard discs, such as rigid materials including ceramic glass, amorphous glass, Al, or NiP plated AlMg. For floppy discs and magnetic tape applications, suitable flexible materials may be used for the substrate. The soft magnetic underlayer **44** may be made of any suitable material such as, for example, alloys or multilayers comprising Co, Fe, Ni, Pd, Pt or Ru, such as CoFe, FeAlN, NiFe, CoZrNb, CoNiFe, FeTaN. The soft magnetic underlayer **44** may comprise one or more soft sublayers, which may be made of the same or different materials. Suitable hard magnetic materials for the perpendicular magnetic layer **46** may include, for example, FePt, CoCrPt, CoPd, CoPt, and FePd alloys having a relatively high magnetic anisotropy at ambient temperature, such as the $L1_0$ phases of such alloys, in a multilayer structure. Other types of magnetic recording materials may be used instead for other types of magnetic recording, such as longitudinal recordings, and magneto-optical recordings. Suitable metamagnetic materials for the metamagnetic layer **38** may include materials such as $YMn_6Sn_{6-x}Ga_x$ with $x \approx 0.1$ to 0.2 and $Y_{1-x}La_xMn_2Ge_2$ with $x \approx 0.25$. Further details of these materials may be referenced to Zhang et al., Phys. Rev. B, 64, 212404 (2001); and Fuji et al., J. Magn. Magn. Mat., 54-

57, 1345 (1986); which are fully incorporated by reference as if fully set forth herein. Other specific compounds disclosed in these references may also be used for the metamagnetic layer **38** with different magnetic transition characteristics of different temperatures and magnetic fields. The metamagnetic layer **38** may comprise one or multiple metamagnetic sub-layers, which may be made of the same or different materials. The protective overcoat **48** may include a diamond-like carbon layer.

[0023] The relative thicknesses of the metamagnetic layer **38** and the hard magnetic layer **46** and the choice of materials for these layers may be selected to obtain the necessary magnetic exchange coupling (e.g., $> 10 \text{ erg/cm}^2$) in relation to the operating magnetic field of the write head **52** and the recording density to be achieved. By way of example and not limitation, for a perpendicular magnetic hard disc drive designed to achieve a data recording density of at least $150,000 \text{ Mbits/cm}^2$, using a write head that is designed to deliver a magnetic field of at most $H = 10 \text{ kOe}$ at the hard magnetic layer, which has a coercivity of at least H_c of 10 kOe , operating at an external ambient operating temperature of about 20°C , and an internal (at the inside of the drive housing) ambient temperature of about 80°C , the thickness of the metamagnetic layer **38** may be in the range of $30 - 100 \text{ nm}$, and the thickness of the hard magnetic layer **46** may be in the range of $10 - 30 \text{ nm}$. The thicknesses of the metamagnetic layer **38** and/or the hard magnetic layer **46** may be chosen with further consideration given to the thickness and choice of material for the soft underlayer **44**.

[0024] The various layers of the recording medium **40** may be formed by known conventional process steps, such as sputtering, deposition, coating, etc., which may also include the steps of polishing, prepping, heat treatment (e.g., annealing), sintering, etching, lithographic masking, etc.

[0025] During the recording operation, the recording medium **40** is passed under the recording head **50** in the direction indicated by arrow **A**. A current is applied to the magnetization coil **55**, which induces a magnetic flux **58** that is directed from the write pole **52** perpendicularly through the magnetic layer **46** and the metamagnetic layer **38**, then back to the opposing pole **54**. The soft underlayer **44** provides a flux path, which directs the magnetic flux **38** back to the opposing pole **54**. It will be appreciated that the magnetic recording medium may be constructed without a soft underlayer for non-

perpendicular recording, for example, without departing from the scope and spirit of the present invention.

[0026] FIGS. 3a to 3d illustrate the sequence of changes to the magnetization of the recording medium **40** according to one embodiment of the present invention. **FIGS. 3a to 3d** schematically represent the composite magnetic recording structure that comprises the metamagnetic layer **38** and the hard magnetic layer **46**. The soft underlayer **44** and the protective overcoat **38** are omitted in these figures for simplicity. The drawings schematically show the magnetization reversal in the magnetic layer **46**. A reference numeral **81** shown in the drawing denotes a data bit consisting of several magnetic particles **51**. The relative sizes of the arrows in the magnetic particles **51** represent the relative magnitude of the magnetization and the direction of the magnetization. For purpose of discussion, at the initial stage, all the magnetization in each magnetic particle **51** in the magnetic layer **46** is set to direct upward. By applying a magnetic field H (in the direction of arrow **83**) to the medium, the magnetization transition is formed. The medium is moved in the direction of arrow **A**.

[0027] FIG. 3a represents the state of the recording structure in the absence of the applied magnetic field. The hard magnetic layer **46** is shown in a ferromagnetic state and the magnetic moments of its particles are directed upward. The metamagnetic layer **38**, on the other hand, is shown in an antiferromagnetic state and the magnetic moments of its particles are approximately zero.

[0028] FIG. 3b represents the state of the recording medium **40** in the early stage of a data bit recording process. An applied magnetic field **83** is emitted from the write pole of the write head and travels perpendicularly through the magnetic layer **46** and into the plane of the metamagnetic layer **38**. Due to the high coercivity of the hard magnetic layer **46**, the magnetic flux is not high enough to reverse the magnetization in the magnetic layer **46** and thus, the recording is not yet performed. However, the magnetic flux from the write head is sufficiently high enough to change the metamagnetic layer **38** from a antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state as shown by the arrows showing the magnetization direction and magnitude.

[0029] FIG. 3c represents the state of the recording medium **40** in the latter stage of a data bit recording process. Under the continuing influence of the applied magnetic

field **83**, the metamagnetic layer **38** is shown to have changed from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state with the magnetization directions pointing downward. Since the metamagnetic layer **38** is located next to the magnetic layer **46**, there is exchange coupling interaction between the two layers. This exchange coupling interaction temporarily reduces the coercivity of the magnetic layer **46** to a level that allows recording to be performed by the write head. As a result, the magnetization of the magnetic layer **46** is reversed to the downward direction.

[0030] FIG. **3d** represents the state of the recording medium **40** after the recording process is completed and the applied magnetic field is removed from the recording medium **40**. The metamagnetic layer **38** is shown reverting back to an antiferromagnetic state and the magnetic moments of its particle returning to zero (or near antiferromagnetic state with near zero magnetic moments due to differences arising from hysteresis). Since the metamagnetic layer **38** returns to an antiferromagnetic state, and is no longer magnetically coupled to the hard magnetic layer **46**, the coercivity of the magnetic layer **46** returns to its original value (or near the original value due to differences arising from hysteresis). The result is a recording of a data bit to a thermally stable recording medium that was temporarily softened to reduce the coercivity of its magnetic layer through the assistance of a metamagnetic layer and an applied external magnetic field.

[0031] It can be seen from the above disclosure that the present invention makes use of a metamagnetic layer to effectively temporarily reduce the coercivity of the hard magnetic layer during data write operation. A weaker write head of lower magnetic field strength may be deployed to work with the hard magnetic layer that ordinarily has coercivity too high for writing with the same write head at ordinary operating ambient temperature. The metamagnetic layer is made of a material that undergoes a reversible magnetic phase transition from antiferromagnetic in the absence of an applied magnetic field, to ferromagnetic state under the influence of an applied magnetic field. During data recording, the magnetic write head creates a magnetic flux of sufficient magnitude to temporarily cause the metamagnetic layer to change from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state. Since the metamagnetic layer is adjacent to the hard magnetic layer (in the disclosed embodiment, the metamagnetic layer is immediately adjacent the hard magnetic layer), the magnetic exchange coupling between the two layers

effectively reduces the coercivity of the hard magnetic layer. This temporary softening of both layers allows the weaker write head to reverse the magnetization of the data bit in the magnetic layer, resulting in a data bit being recorded in the magnetic layer. Once the magnetic direction of the hard magnetic layer is set, the applied magnetic field can be removed from the recording medium. Without the applied magnetic field, the metamagnetic layer undergoes transition from a ferromagnetic state back to an antiferromagnetic state and thus, removing the exchange coupling between the two magnetic layers and restoring the coercivity of the hard magnetic layer to its original value. The result is that the data bit is recorded and stored in a thermally stable high bit density medium. Accordingly, the present invention allows writing to the recording material using the write field capability of available write head even without heat assisted recording, while providing a stable medium for preserving the magnetic moment of each data bit.

[0032] While particular embodiments of the invention have been described herein for the purpose of illustrating the invention and not for the purpose of limiting the same, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that numerous variations of the details, materials, and arrangements of parts may be made without departing from the scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A magnetic recording medium, comprising:
a hard magnetic recording layer; and
a metamagnetic layer coupled to the hard magnetic recording layer, wherein the metamagnetic layer has a characteristic of magnetic field induced transitioning from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state when it is subject to an external applied magnetic field.
2. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, wherein the metamagnetic recording layer has a transition temperature at which it undergoes transition between the antiferromagnetic state and the ferromagnetic state in the absence of the external applied magnetic field, and wherein the metamagnetic recording layer undergoes transition from the antiferromagnetic state to the ferromagnetic state at below the transition temperature in the presence of the external applied magnetic field.
3. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, wherein the metamagnetic layer is magnetically exchange coupled to the hard magnetic layer when the metamagnetic layer is at the ferromagnetic state.
4. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, wherein the coercivity of the hard magnetic layer is effectively reduced when the metamagnetic layer is at the ferromagnetic state.
5. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, wherein the metamagnetic layer is immediately adjacent to the hard magnetic layer.
6. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, further comprising a magnetically soft layer adjacent to the metamagnetic layer and the hard magnetic layer.
7. The magnetic recording medium of claim 6, further comprising a substrate supporting the hard magnetic layer, the metamagnetic layer, and the soft layer.
8. The magnetic recording medium of claim 7, wherein the substrate comprises at least one of a rigid material and a flexible material.

9. The magnetic recording medium of claim 8, wherein the hard magnetic layer comprises magnetic domains configured for perpendicular recording.
10. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, wherein the metamagnetic layer undergoes transition from the ferromagnetic state to the antiferromagnetic state in the absence of the external applied magnetic field.
11. The magnetic recording medium of claim 10, wherein the metamagnetic layer magnetically decouples from the hard magnetic layer at the antiferromagnetic state, to return the hard magnetic layer to higher coercivity.
12. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, wherein the metamagnetic layer comprises at least one of $\text{YMn}_6\text{Sn}_{6-x}\text{Ga}_x$ with $x \approx 0.1$ to 0.2 and $\text{Y}_{1-x}\text{La}_x\text{Mn}_2\text{Ge}_2$ with $x \approx 0.25$.
13. The magnetic recording medium of claim 1, wherein the hard magnetic layer has a coercivity of at least 10 kOe, and wherein at the ferromagnetic state, the metamagnetic layer effectively lowers the coercivity of the hard magnetic layer, to permit data recording at the hard magnetic layer, reaching a data recording density of at least $150,000 \text{ Mbits/cm}^2$, when subject to the external applied magnetic field of at most $H = 10 \text{ kOe}$.
14. A perpendicular magnetic recording medium, comprising:
 - a hard magnetic recording layer configured for perpendicular recording; and
 - a metamagnetic layer coupled to the hard magnetic recording layer, wherein the metamagnetic layer has a characteristic of magnetic field induced transitioning from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state when it is subject to an external applied magnetic field.
15. A magnetic recording structure in a magnetic recording medium, comprising:
 - a hard magnetic recording layer; and
 - a metamagnetic layer coupled to the hard magnetic recording layer, wherein the metamagnetic layer has a characteristic of magnetic field induced transitioning from an

antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state when it is subject to an external applied magnetic field.

16. A data storage system, comprising:
 - a magnetic recording medium as in claim 1;
 - a data recording head directing a magnetic field at the magnetic recording medium; and
 - an actuator supporting and positioning the data recording head with respect to the data recording medium to effect data recording.
17. The system of claim 16, wherein the magnetic recording medium is configured for perpendicular data recording and the data recording head is supported and positioned by the actuator relative to the data recording medium to effect perpendicular magnetic recording on the magnetic recording medium.
18. A method of magnetic data recording, comprising the steps of:
 - providing a magnetic recording medium as in claim 1;
 - providing a data recording head to direct a magnetic field at the magnetic recording medium; and
 - supporting and positioning the data recording head with respect to the data recording medium to effect data recording.
19. A method of making a magnetic recording medium, the method comprising:
 - forming a hard magnetic recording layer; and
 - coupling a metamagnetic layer to the hard magnetic recording layer, wherein the metamagnetic layer has a characteristic of magnetic field induced transitioning from an antiferromagnetic state to a ferromagnetic state when it is subject to an external applied magnetic field.
20. The method of claim 19, wherein the hard magnetic recording layer is formed adjacent to the metamagnetic layer.