

Programming for Biology
Similarity Searching II –

Practical search strategies

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1

1

Why is this material important?

- You might be asked to find a homolog
- You might be asked to what your gene/protein does
 - Annotated homologs are missed because databases are large and redundant
 - Short domains and short exons are missed because the “standard” matrix needs long alignments
 - Sometimes, alignments include non-homologous regions

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2

2

Effective Similarity Searching

1. Always search protein databases (possibly with translated DNA)
 2. Use E()-values, not percent identity, to infer homology
 - $E() < 0.001$ is significant in a single search
-
1. Search smaller (comprehensive) databases
 2. Change the scoring matrix for:
 - short sequences (exons, reads)
 - short evolutionary distances (mammals, vertebrates, α -proteobacteria)
 - high identity (>50% alignments) to reduce over-extension
 3. Is every aligned residue homologous?
 - alignment overextension
 4. (Tomorrow) All methods (pairwise, HMM, PSSM) miss homologs, and find homologs the other methods miss

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3

Review – Sequence Similarity - Conclusions

- Homologous sequences share a common ancestor, but most sequences are non-homologous
- Always compare Protein Sequences
- Sequence Homology can be reliably inferred from statistically significant similarity (non-homology cannot from non-similarity)
- Homologous proteins share common structures, but not necessarily common functions
- Sequence statistical significance estimates are accurate (verify this yourself) $10^{-6} < E() < 10^{-3}$ is statistically significant

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4

Similarity Searching II

1. What question to ask?
2. What program to use?
3. What database to search?
4. When to do something different (changing scoring matrices)
5. Is every aligned domain homologous?
6. (Tomorrow) – more sensitive methods (PSI-BLAST, HMMER)

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5

1. What question to ask?

- Is there an homologous protein (a protein with a similar structure)?
- Does that homologous protein have a similar function?
- Does XXX genome have YYY (kinase, GPCR, ...)?

Questions not to ask:

- Does this DNA sequence have a similar regulatory element (too short – never significant)?
- Does (non-significant) protein have a similar function/modification/antigenic site?

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6

2. What program to run?

- What is your query sequence?
 - protein – BLASTP (NCBI), SSEARCH (EBI)
 - protein coding DNA (EST) – BLASTX (NCBI), FASTX (EBI)
 - DNA (structural RNA, repeat family) – BLASTN (NCBI), FASTA (EBI)
- Does XXX genome have YYY (protein)?
 - TBLASTN YYY vs XXX genome
 - TFASTX YYY vs XXX genome
- Does my protein contain repeated domains?
 - LALIGN (UVA <http://fasta.bioch.virginia.edu>, EBI)

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7

NCBI BLAST Server blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

BLAST®

Home Recent Results Saved Strategies Help

Basic Local Alignment Search Tool

BLAST finds regions of similarity between biological sequences. The program compares nucleotide or protein sequences to sequence databases and calculates the statistical significance.

[Learn more](#)

Web BLAST

Nucleotide BLAST
nucleotide → nucleotide

blastx
translated nucleotide → protein

tblastn
protein → translated nucleotide

Protein BLAST
protein → protein

Always compare protein sequences

Enter organism common name, scientific name, or tax id

Human Mouse Rat Microbes

Search

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8

NCBI BLAST Server

BLAST Basic Local Alignment Search Tool

Home Recent Results Saved Strategies Help

NCBI/BLAST/blastp suite

blastn blastp blastx tblastn tblastx

Enter Query Sequence

BLASTP programs search protein databases using a protein query. [more...](#)

Enter accession number, GI, or FASTA sequence [?](#) [Clear](#)

Query subrange [?](#)

From

To

Or, upload file [Choose File](#) no file selected [?](#)

Job Title

Enter a descriptive title for your BLAST search [?](#)

☐ Align two or more sequences [?](#)

Choose Search Set

Database [Non-redundant protein sequences \(nr\)](#) [?](#)

Organism [Optional](#)

Enter organism name or id--completions will be suggested ☐ Exclude [+](#)

Enter organism common name, binomial, or tax id. Only 20 top taxa will be shown. [?](#)

Entrez Query [Optional](#)

Enter an Entrez query to limit search [?](#)

Program Selection

Algorithm

☒ blastp (protein-protein BLAST)

☐ PSI-BLAST (Position-Specific Iterated BLAST)

☐ PHI-BLAST (Pattern Hit Initiated BLAST)

Choose a BLAST algorithm [?](#)

BLAST Search database [Non-redundant protein sequences \(nr\)](#) using [Blastp \(protein-protein BLAST\)](#)

☐ Show results in a new window

[Algorithm parameters](#) CSHL Programming for Biology

9

3. What database to search?

- Search the smallest comprehensive database likely to contain your protein
 - vertebrates – human proteins (40,000)
 - NCBI Landmark sequences (human, mouse, no rat)
 - Quest for Orthologs reference proteomes (1,000,000)
- Search a richly annotated protein set (SwissProt, 500,000)
- Always search NR (> 50 million) *LAST*
- Never Search “GenBank” (DNA)

10

Effective Similarity Searching

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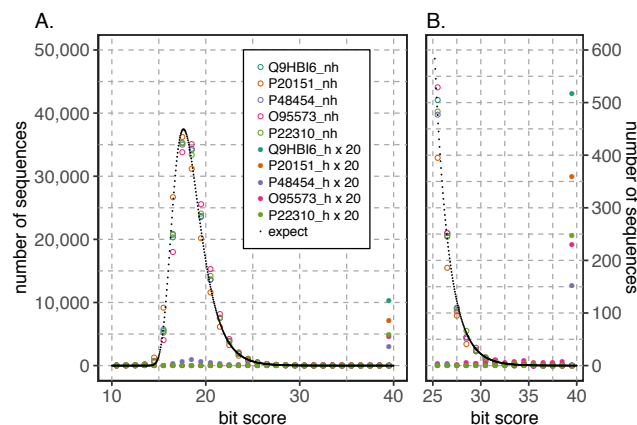
-
1. Search smaller (comprehensive) databases
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11

11

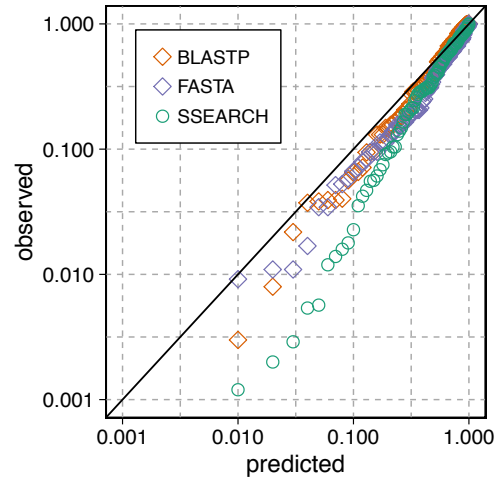
Homology inferences are reliable because
similarity statistics are accurate (I)
(we know how unrelated sequences behave)



Distributions of similarity scores in searches with 5 human enzymes. Open circles (_nh) show scores for non-homologs. Closed circles show homolog (_h) scores.

12

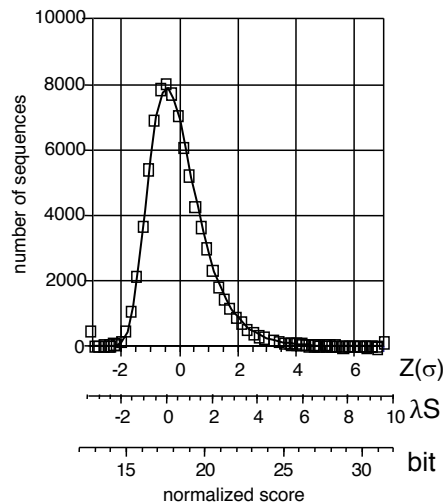
Homology inferences are reliable because
similarity statistics are accurate (II)
(we know how unrelated sequences behave)



Reported (observed) and expected probabilities of the highest scoring unrelated sequence in searches with 100 human enzymes vs 78 complete proteomes (~1 million sequences).

13

Why smaller databases are better – statistics



$$S' = \lambda S_{\text{raw}} - \ln K m n$$

$$S_{\text{bits}} = (\lambda S_{\text{raw}} - \ln K) / \ln(2)$$

$$P(S' > x) = 1 - \exp(-e^{-x})$$

$$P(S_{\text{bits}} > x) = 1 - \exp(-mn2^{-x})$$

$$E(S' > x \text{ ID}) = P D$$

Bonferroni correction

$$P(B \text{ bits}) = m n 2^{-B}$$

$$P(40 \text{ bits}) = 1.5 \times 10^{-7}$$

$$E(40 \mid D=4000) = 6 \times 10^{-4}$$

$$E(40 \mid D=60E6) = 9$$

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14

14

Local similarity statistics

$$S' = \lambda S_{\text{raw}} - \ln K m n \quad m: \text{query length, } n: \text{subj length}$$

$$S_{\text{bit}} = (\lambda S_{\text{raw}} - \ln K) / \ln(2)$$

$$P(S' > x) = 1 - \exp(-e^{-x})$$

$$P(S' > x) = e^{-x} \quad (\text{for } P < 0.1)$$

$$P(S_{\text{bits}} > \text{bits}) = 1 - \exp(-mn2^{-x})$$

$$P(S_{\text{bits}} > \text{bits}) = mn2^{-\text{bits}} \quad (\text{for } P < 0.1)$$

$$E(S', S_{\text{bits}} \text{ ID}) = PD$$

$$E(S_{\text{bits}} \text{ ID}) = D mn2^{-\text{bits}} \quad \text{Bonferroni correction}$$

$$\text{dblength} = D n$$

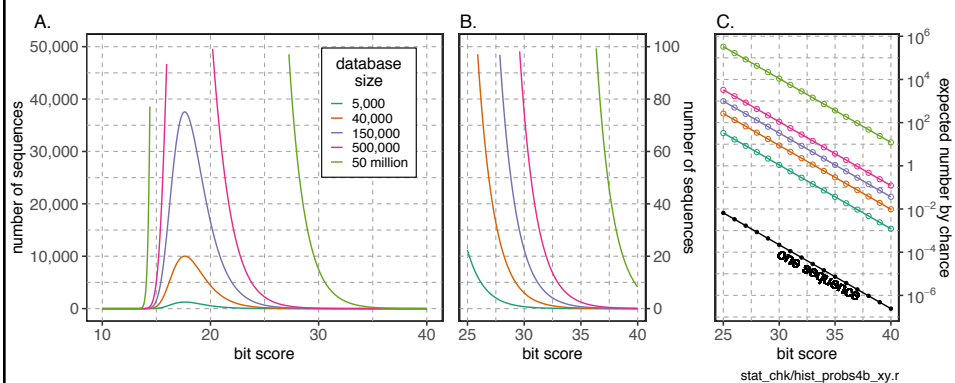
$$E(S_{\text{bit}}) = m \text{dblength} 2^{-\text{bits}} \quad (\text{BLAST})$$

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15

Smaller databases increase sensitivity



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16

16

NCBI – selecting sequences with Entrez

The screenshot shows the NCBI BLAST suite interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'blastn', 'blastp', 'blastx', 'tblastn', and 'tblastx'. The 'blastp' tab is selected. Below the tabs, there is a section titled 'Enter Query Sequence' with a text input field for 'Enter accession number, gi, or FASTA sequence'. To the right of this field is a 'Clear' button and a 'Query subrange' section with 'From' and 'To' input fields. Below the text field is a section for 'Or, upload file' with a 'Choose File' button and 'no file selected' text. Below this is a 'Job Title' input field with a placeholder 'Enter a descriptive title for your BLAST search'. There is a checkbox for 'Align two or more sequences'. Below this is a 'Choose Search Set' section with a 'Database' dropdown menu set to 'Reference proteins (refseq_protein)'. Below the database dropdown is an 'Organism' section with a text input field set to 'human (taxid:9606)' and an 'Exclude' checkbox. Below the organism field is an 'Entrez Query' section with a text input field for 'Enter an Entrez query to limit search'.

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17

What is a “bit” score (I)?

- Scoring matrices (PAM250, BLOSUM62, VTML40) contain “log-odds” scores:
 - $s_{i,j} \text{ (bits)} = \log_2(q_{i,j}/p_i p_j)$ ($q_{i,j}$ freq. in homologs / $p_i p_j$ freq. by chance)
 - $s_{i,j} \text{ (bits)} = 2 \rightarrow$ a residue is $2^2=4$ -times more likely to occur by homology compared with chance (at one residue)
 - $s_{i,j} \text{ (bits)} = -1 \rightarrow$ a residue is $2^{-1} = 1/2$ as likely to occur by homology compared with chance (at one residue)
- An alignment score is the maximum sum of $s_{i,j}$ bit scores across the aligned residues.
 - A 40-bit score is 2^{40} more likely to occur by homology than by chance.
- How often should a score occur by chance? In a $400 * 400$ alignment, there are $\sim 160,000$ places where the alignment could start by chance, so we expect a score of 40 bits would occur: $P(S_{\text{bit}} > x) = 1 - \exp(-mn2^{-x}) \sim mn2^{-x}$
 - $400 \times 400 \times 2^{-40} = 160,000 / 2^{40} (10^{13.3}) = 1.5 \times 10^{-7}$ times
 - Thus, the probability of a 40 bit score in ONE alignment is $\sim 10^{-7}$

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18

What is a “bit” score (II)?

4. But we did not ONE alignment, we did 4,000, 40,000, 500,000, or 20 million alignments when we searched the database:
- $E(S_{\text{bit}} | D) = p(40 \text{ bits}) \times \text{database size}$
 - $E(40 | 4,000) = 10^{-7} \times 4,000 = 4 \times 10^{-4}$ (significant)
 - $E(40 | 40,000) = 10^{-7} \times 4 \times 10^4 = 4 \times 10^{-3}$ (not significant)
 - $E(40 | 500,000) = 10^{-7} \times 5 \times 10^5 = 0.05$ (not significant)
 - $E(40 | 20 \text{ million}) = 10^{-7} \times 2.0 \times 10^7 = 2.0$ (not significant)

Not significant does not mean not-homologous

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19

How many “bits” do I need?

$E() = p() \times \text{database size}$

$$E(40 | 4,000) = 10^{-7} \times 4,000 = 4 \times 10^{-4} \quad (\text{significant})$$

$$E(40 | 40,000) = 10^{-7} \times 4 \times 10^4 = 4 \times 10^{-3} \quad (\text{not significant})$$

$$E(40 | 500,000) = 10^{-7} \times 5 \times 10^5 = 0.05 \quad (\text{not significant})$$

To get $E() \sim 10^{-3}$, how many bits do I need? $p = m n 2^{-\text{bits}}$

$$\text{bits} = -\log_2(p/(m n)) = -\log_2(E()/(database_size m n))$$

$$\text{genome (10,000)} \quad p \sim 10^{-3}/10^4 = 10^{-7}/160,000 = \mathbf{40 \text{ bits}}$$

$$\text{SwissProt (500,000)} \quad p \sim 10^{-3}/10^6 = 10^{-9}/160,000 = \mathbf{47 \text{ bits}}$$

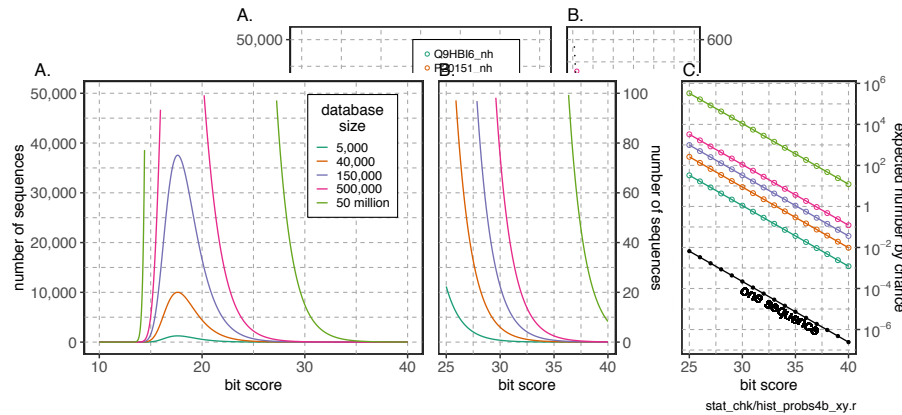
$$\text{Uniprot/NR (10}^8\text{)} \quad p \sim 10^{-3}/10^8 = 10^{-11}/160,000 = \mathbf{53 \text{ bits}}$$

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20

How many “bits” do I need?



Statistics describe the NULL hypothesis –
similarity scores that occur by chance

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21

21

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22

Scoring matrices

- Scoring matrices can set the evolutionary look-back time for a search
 - Lower PAM (PAM10/VT10 ... PAM/VT40) for closer (10% ... 50% identity)
 - Higher BLOSUM for higher conservation (BLOSUM50 distant, BLOSUM80 conserved)
- Shallow scoring matrices for short domains/short queries (metagenomics)
 - Matrices have “bits/position” (score/position), 40 aa at 0.45 bits/position (BLOSUM62) means 18 bit ave. score (50 bits significant)
- Deep scoring matrices allow alignments to continue, possibly outside the homologous region

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23

Scoring matrices and alignment length

Pam40

	A	R	N	D	E	I	L
A	8						
R	-9	12					
N	-4	-7	11				
D	-4	-13	3	11			
E	-3	-11	-2	4	11		
I	-6	-7	-7	-10	-7	12	
L	-8	-11	-9	-16	-12	-1	10

Pam250

	A	R	N	D	E	I	L
A	2						
R	-2	6					
N	0	0	2				
D	0	-1	2	4			
E	0	-1	1	3	4		
I	-1	-2	-2	-2	-2	5	
L	-2	-3	-3	-4	-3	2	6

$$\lambda S_{i,j} = \log_b \left(\frac{q_{i,j}}{p_i p_j} \right)$$

q_{ij} : homolog frequency wat PAM40, 250

$$q_{R:N(40)} = 0.000435$$

$$p_R = 0.051$$

$$q_{R:N(250)} = 0.002193$$

$$p_N = 0.043$$

$$\lambda_2 S_{ij} = \lg_2 (q_{ij}/p_i p_j) \quad \lambda_e S_{ij} = \ln(q_{ij}/p_i p_j) \quad p_R p_N = 0.002193$$

$$\lambda_2 S_{R:N(40)} = \lg_2 (0.000435/0.00219) = -2.333$$

$$\lambda_2 = 1/3; S_{R:N(40)} = -2.333/\lambda_2 = -7$$

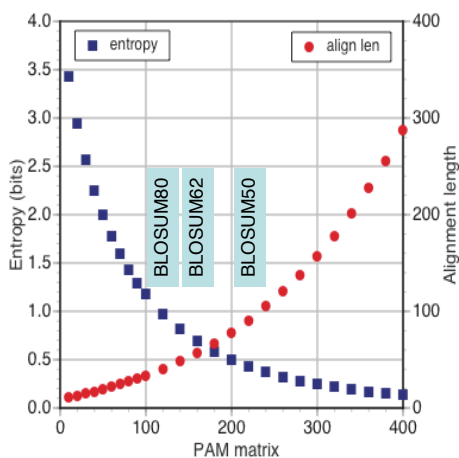
$$\lambda S_{R:N(250)} = \lg_2 (0.002193/0.002193) = 0$$

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24

PAM matrices and alignment length



Short domains require “shallow” scoring matrices

Altschul (1991) "Amino acid substitution matrices from an information theoretic perspective" *J Mol Biol* 219:555-565

25

25

Empirical matrix performance (median results from random alignments)

Matrix	target % ident	bits/position	aln len (50 bits)
VT160 -12/-2	23.8	0.26	192
BLOSUM50 -10/-2	25.3	0.23	217
BLOSUM62* -11/-1	28.9	0.45	111
VT120 -11/-1	27.4	1.03	48
VT80 -11/-1	51.9	1.55	32
PAM70* -10/-1	33.8	0.64	78
PAM30* -9/-1	45.5	1.06	47
VT40 -12/-1	72.7	2.76	18
VT20 -15/-2	84.6	3.62	13
VT10 /16/-2	90.9	4.32	12

HMMs can be very "deep"

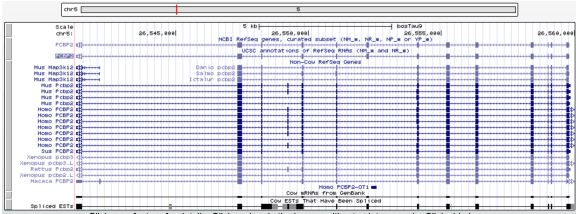
Pearson (2013) *Curr. Prot. Bioinformatics* 3.5.1

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26

26

Scoring matrices, alignment length, and exon detection – bovine PCBP2



```

human [ 10 20 ] 30 [ 40 ] 50 60 70 80
MDTGVIEGGLNVTITIRLLMHGKEVGSIIKKGESVKMRESGARINISEGNCPERIITLAGPTNAIFKAFAMIIDKLE
bovin MDTGVIEGGLNVTITIRLLMHGKEVGSIIKKGESVKMRESGARINISEGNCPERIITLAGPTNAIFKAFAMIIDKLE
human [ 90 100 110 120 ] 130 140 150 160
EDISSMTNSTAASRPVTLRLVVPASQCGLIGKGGCKIKETRESTGAQVQVAGDMLPNSTERAITIAGIPOSIECVK
bovin EDISSMTNSTAASRPVTLRLVVPASQCGLIGKGGCKIKETRESTGAQVQVAGDMLPNSTERAITIAGIPOSIECVK
human [ 170 180 190 ] 200 210 220 230 240
QICVVMLETLSSPPKGVIPYRKPSSSPVIFAGGQDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLEAYTIQGYAIPQ
bovin QICVVMLETLSSPPKGVIPYRKPSSSPVIFAGGQDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLEAYTIQGYAIPQ
human [ 250 260 ] 270 280 290 300 310 320
PDLTKLHQLAMQSHFPMTHGNTGFSAGLSSSPVIFAGGQDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLEAYTIQGYAIPQ
bovin PDLTKLHQLAMQSHFPMTHGNTGFSAGLSSSPVIFAGGQDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLEAYTIQGYAIPQ
human [ 330 340 350 ] 360
IKIANPVGSGTDRQVTITGSAASISLAQYLINVLRSSETGGMGSS
bovin IKIANPVGSGTDRQVTITGSAASISLAQYLINVLRSSETGGMGSS

```

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27

Scoring matrices, alignment length, and exon detection – bovine PCBP2

name	start	end	len	MD10	bits	BP62	bits
ex_1	1	23	23	=	58	+5	45
ex_2	24	31	8	=	30	-	<25
ex_3	32	42	11	=	36	+1	27
ex_4	43	81	39	=	88	=	61
ex_5	82	125	44	=	96	=	66
ex_6	126	168	43	=	96	+5	65
ex_7	169	197	29	=	69	+2	50
ex_8	198	228	31	=	76	+43	53
ex_9	229	242	14	+4	40	+4	32
ex_10	243	266	24	+5	60	+87	45
ex_11	267	280	14	=	42	+38	32
ex_12	281	297	17	=	49	+2	34
ex_13	298	354	57	=	120	=	78
ex_14	355	365	11	=	37	=	32

MD10

qRegion: bits=71.5; Id=1.000; exon_8-8

```

sp|Q15 QDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLE
chr5:2 QDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLE

```

BP62

qRegion: 181-197 : bits=1.6; Id=0.500; exon_7-7
qRegion: 198-228 : bits=52.7; Id=1.000; exon_8-8
qRegion: 229-242 : bits=0.0; Id=0.333; exon_9-9
qRegion: 243-255 : bits=5.4; Id=0.286; exon_10-10

```

sp|Q15 PYRKPSSSPVIFAGGQDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLEAYTIQGYAIPQPDLTSLHQLAMQSH
chr5:2 PWRLKSSIYP-----QDRYSTGSDSASFHTTSPMCLNPDLEGPPLE---VRGD--VQSPRLTQSFRLSRDCQH

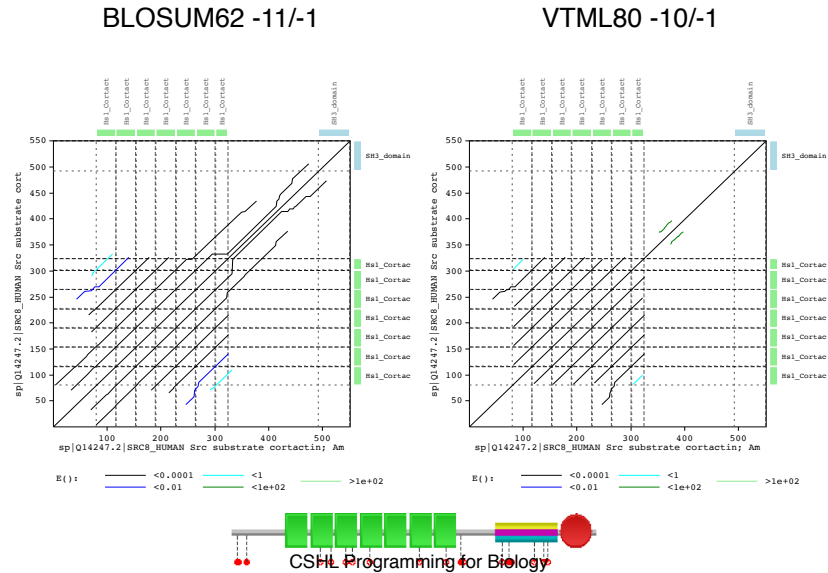
```

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28

Scoring matrices affect alignment boundaries (homologous over-extension)



29

29

Scoring Matrices - Summary

- PAM and BLOSUM matrices greatly improve the sensitivity of protein sequence comparison – low identity with significant similarity
- PAM matrices have an evolutionary model - lower number, less divergence – lower=closer; higher=more distant
- BLOSUM matrices are sampled from conserved regions at different average identity – higher=more conservation
- Shallow matrices set maximum look-back time
- Short alignments (domains, exons, reads) require shallow (higher information content) matrices

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30

30

Effective Similarity Searching

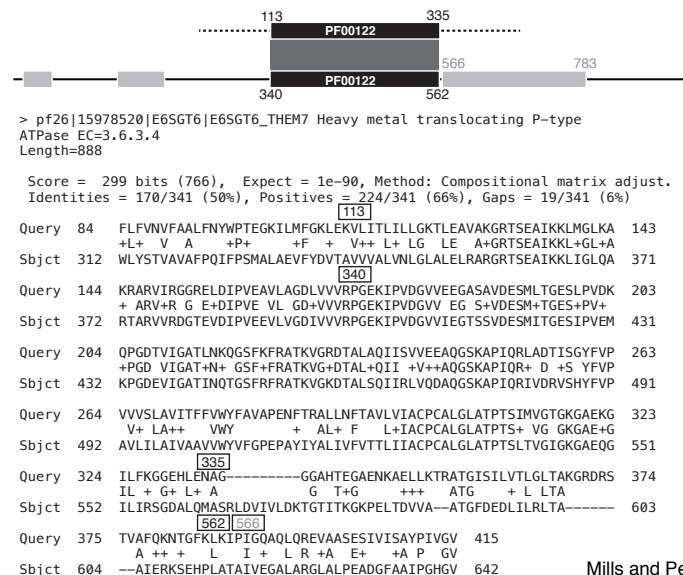
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31

31

Over-extension into random sequence

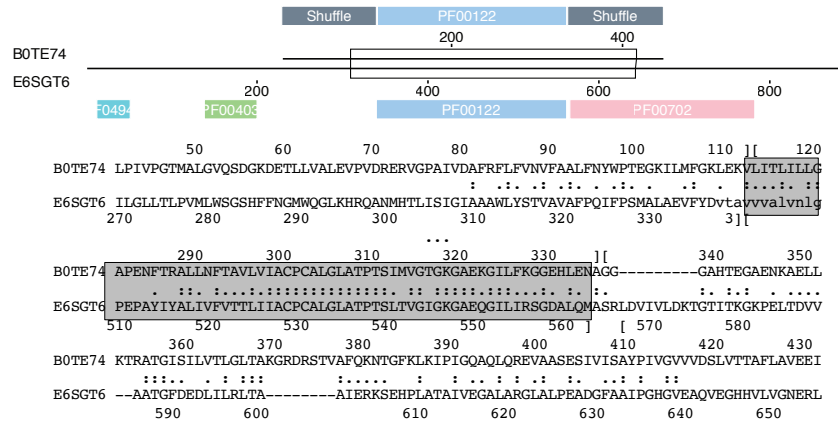
Mills and Pearson (2013)
Bioinformatics 29:3007-32

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Sub-alignment scoring detects over-extension

```
>>sp|EGSGTG7|PEGSGTG7_THM7 Heavy metal translocating P-type ATPase EC=3.6.3.4 (888 aa)
Region: 81-112:309-340 : score=15; bits=12.3; Id=0.219; Q=0.0 : Shuffle
qRegion: 113-335:341-563 : score=736; bits=232.8; Id=0.641; Q=644.7 : PF00122
Region: 336-415:564-642 : score=14; bits=12.0; Id=0.236; Q=0.0 : Shuffle
Region: 81-111:309-339 : score=11; bits=11.1; Id=0.194; Q=0.0 : NODOM :0
Region: 112-334:340-562 : score=736; bits=232.8; Id=0.641; Q=644.7 : PF00122 Pfam
Region: 338-415:566-642 : score=16; bits=12.6; Id=0.244; Q=0.0 : PF00702 Pfam
s-w opt: 632 Z-score: 1048.6 bits: 204.2 E(274545): 3.7e-51
Smith-Waterman score: 765; 49.7% identity (73.3% similar) in 344 aa overlap (81-415:309-642)
```



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33

33

Scoring matrices, alignment length, and exon detection – bovine PCBP2

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ex_4	43	81	39	=	88	=	61
ex_5	82	125	44	=	96	=	66
ex_6	126	168	43	=	96	+5	65
ex_7	169	197	29	=	69	+2	50
ex_8	198	228	31	=	76	+43	53
ex_9	229	242	14	+4	40	+4	32
ex_10	243	266	24	+5	60	+87	45
ex_11	267	280	14	=	42	+38	32
ex_12	281	297	17	=	49	+2	34
ex_13	298	354	57	=	120	=	78
ex_14	355	365	11	=	37	=	32

MD10

qRegion: bits=71.5; Id=1.000; exon_8~8

```
sp|Q15 QDRYSTGSDSASFPHPTTPSMCLNPDLEGPPLE  
:::  
chr5:2 QDRYSTGSDSASFPHPTTPSMCLNPDLEGPPLE
```

BP62

gRegion: 181-197 : bits=1.6; Id=0.500: exon_7-7

qRegion: 198-228 : bits=52.7; Id=1.000: exon_8-8

gRegion: 229-242 : bits=0.0; Id=0.333; exon_9-9
gRegion: 243-255 : bits=5.4; Id=0.386; exon_10-10

```
qRegion: 243-255 : bits=5.4; id=0.286; exon_10~10
          190      ][00      210      220
```

```

sp|Q15 PYRKPSPSSPVIFAGGQDRYSTGSDSASFPHHTTPSMCLNPDLEGPPELAYTIQGGYAIQPDLTKLHQLAMQKSH
      . . . : . : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : : . . . . . : . . . :
chr5:2 PWRLKSSIYP-----QDRYSTGSDSASFPHHTTPSMCLNPDLEGPPE---VRGD---VQSPRLTQSFRLSRDCQH

```

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34

34

Homology, non-homology, and over-extension

- Sequences that share statistically significant sequence similarity are homologous (simplest explanation)
- But not all regions of the alignment contribute uniformly to the score
 - lower identity/Q-value because of non-homology (over-extension) ?
 - lower identity/Q-value because more distant relationship (domains have different ages) ?
- Test by searching with isolated region
 - can the distant domain (?) find closer (significant) homologs?
- Similar (homology) or distinct (non-homology) structure is the gold standard
- Multiple sequence alignment can obscure over-extension
 - if the alignment is over-extended, part of the alignment is NOT homologous

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35

35

Effective Similarity Searching

1. Always search protein databases (possibly with translated DNA)
 2. Use E()-values, not percent identity, to infer homology
 - $E() < 0.001$ is significant in a single search
-
1. Search smaller (comprehensive) databases
 2. Change the scoring matrix for:
 - short sequences (exons, reads)
 - short evolutionary distances (mammals, vertebrates, a-proteobacteria)
 - high identity (>50% alignments) to reduce over-extension
 3. Is every aligned residue homologous?
 - alignment overextension
 4. (Tomorrow) All methods (pairwise, HMM, PSSM) miss homologs, and find homologs the other methods miss

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36

36

workshop II – parsing blast results

Goto:

fasta.bioch.virginia.edu/mol_evol/pfb_python_matrices.html

Your goal is to reproduce a version of this table:

Matrix	target % ident	align_len	evalue
VT160	29.7	67	2.1
BLOSUM50	34.0	121	1.2
BLOSUM62* -11/-1	31.2	90	0.37
VT80	66.7	50	1.8
VT40	72.7	11	1.3

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37