

Methods in Molecular Biology

Volume 4

New Nucleic Acid Techniques

Edited by

John M. Walker

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The Hatfield Technology, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK

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**Methods in
Molecular Biology**

Volume 4

**New Nucleic
Acid Techniques**

Biological Methods

Methods in Molecular Biology edited by *John M. Walker*

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by *Max Costa*, 1980

Preface

In recent years there has been a tremendous increase in our understanding of the functioning of the cell at the molecular level. This has been achieved in the main by the invention and development of new methodology, particularly in that area generally referred to as "genetic engineering."

Although this revolution has been taking place in the field of nucleic acids research, the protein chemist has at the same time developed fresh methodology to keep pace with the requirements of present day molecular biology. Today's molecular biologists can no longer be content with being experts in one particular area alone. They need to be equally competent in the laboratory at handling DNA, RNA, and proteins, moving from one area to another as required by the problem that is being solved. Although many of the new techniques in molecular biology are relatively easy to master, it is often difficult for a researcher to obtain all the relevant information necessary for setting up and successfully applying a new technique. Information is of course available in the research literature, but this often lacks the depth of description that the new user requires. This requirement for in-depth practical details has become apparent by the considerable demand for places on our Molecular Biology Workshops held at Hatfield each summer.

Volume 2 of this series described practical procedures for a range of nucleic acid techniques frequently used by research workers in the field of molecular biology. Because of the limitations on length necessarily inherent in producing any

book, one obviously had to be selective in the choice of titles for Volume 2. The production of Volume 4 therefore allows the development of the theme initiated in Volume 2. This volume contains a further selection of detailed protocols for a range of analytical and preparative nucleic acid techniques and should be seen as a continuation of Volume 2. In particular we have introduced protocols for the rapidly developing area of plant molecular biology. Companion Volumes 1 and 3 provide protocols for protein methodology.

Each method is described by an author who has regularly used the technique in his or her own laboratory. Not all the techniques described necessarily represent the state of the art. They are, however, dependable methods that achieve the desired result.

Each chapter starts with a description of the basic theory behind the method being described. The main aim of this book, however, is to describe the practical steps necessary for carrying out the method successfully. The Methods section, therefore, contains a detailed step-by-step description of a protocol that will result in the successful execution of the method. The Notes section complements the Methods section by indicating any major problems or faults that can occur with the technique, and any possible modifications or alterations.

This book should be particularly useful to those with no previous experience of a technique, and, as such, should appeal to undergraduates (especially project students), postgraduates, and research workers who wish to try a technique for the first time.

John M. Walker

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Contents

Preface	<i>v</i>
Contributors	<i>xiii</i>
CH. 1. Electrophoresis of RNA Denatured with Glyoxal or Formaldehyde <i>Christopher F. Thurston, Caroline R. Perry, and Jeffrey W. Pollard</i>	<i>1</i>
CH. 2. Northern Blotting <i>Jeffrey W. Pollard, Caroline R. Perry, and Christopher F. Thurston</i>	<i>13</i>
CH. 3. Hybrid-Release Translation <i>Adrian Slater</i>	<i>27</i>
CH. 4. Hybrid-Arrested Translation <i>Keith Dudley</i>	<i>39</i>
CH. 5. In Vitro Translation and Analysis of Early Events in Protein Synthesis Initiation in Nonreticulocyte Mammalian Cells <i>Jeffrey W. Pollard and Michael J. Clemens</i>	<i>47</i>
CH. 6. Use of Elutips to Purify DNA <i>Paul D. Van Helden</i>	<i>61</i>
CH. 7. Plasmid Preparation on Sephacryl S1000 <i>Paul D. Van Helden and Eileen G. Hoal</i>	<i>69</i>
CH. 8. Electrophoresis of DNA in Nondenaturing Polyacrylamide Gels <i>Robert McGookin</i>	<i>75</i>

CH. 9. Use of ^{35}S Nucleotides for DNA Sequencing <i>Paul D. Van Helden</i>	81
CH. 10. Direct Dideoxy DNA Sequencing <i>Alexander Graham, J. Steven, and D. McKechnie</i>	89
CH. 11. Computer Applications to Molecular Biology: DNA Sequences <i>Robert Harr and Petter Gustafsson</i>	103
CH. 12. Detection of Sequence-Specific Protein–DNA Interactions by the DNA-Footprinting Technique <i>Mark A. Plumb and Graham H. Goodwin</i>	139
CH. 13. Oligonucleotide Synthesis Using the Manual Phosphotriester Method <i>Daniel M. O'Callaghan and William J. Donnelly</i>	165
CH. 14. Manual Oligonucleotide Synthesis Using the Phosphoramidite Method <i>H. A. White</i>	193
CH. 15. Purification of Synthetic Oligonucleotides by Preparative Gel Electrophoresis <i>Robert McGookin</i>	215
CH. 16. Isolation of High Molecular Weight DNA Suitable for the Construction of Genomic Libraries <i>John Steven, Douglas McKechnie, and Alexander Graham</i>	221
CH. 17. Construction of Mammalian Genomic Libraries Using λ Replacement Vectors <i>Alan N. Bateson and Jeffrey W. Pollard</i>	235

CH. 18. Cosmid Library Construction	257
<i>John D. Haley</i>	
CH. 19. Construction of cDNA Libraries in λ gt10 or λ gt11	285
<i>Michael M. Burrell</i>	
CH. 20. Immunoscreening of λ gt11 Expression Libraries Using an Avidin–Biotin Detection System	301
<i>Robert McGookin</i>	
CH. 21. Primed Synthesis and Direct Sequencing in the Isolation of cDNA Clones Using Short Oligonucleotides	307
<i>John D. Haley</i>	
CH. 22. Constructing Expression cDNA Libraries Using Unphosphorylated Adaptors	319
<i>Keith K. Stanley, Joachim Herz, and Harald Haymerle</i>	
CH. 23. Expression Screening of cDNA Libraries in pEX	329
<i>Keith K. Stanley</i>	
CH. 24. Producing Antibodies of Predetermined Spec- ificity from <i>Escherichia coli</i> Hybrid Proteins	343
<i>Keith K. Stanley</i>	
CH. 25. Epitope Mapping Using pEX	351
<i>Keith K. Stanley</i>	
CH. 26. DNA Transfection of Mammalian Cells Using Polybrene	363
<i>William G. Chaney, Daniel R. Howard, Jeffrey W. Pollard, Sandra Sallustio, and Pamela Stanley</i>	

CH. 27. Expression of Foreign Genes in Mammalian Cells <i>Martin J. Page</i>	371
CH. 28. Dot-Blot Hybridization Method <i>Hans E. N. Bergmans and Wim Gaastra</i>	385
CH. 29. Detection of Unique or Low Copy Number DNA Sequences in Complex Genomes <i>Domingo Gallardo and Albert Boronat</i>	391
CH. 30. Photobiotin-Labeled DNA and RNA Hybridization Probes <i>James L. McInnes, Anthony C. Forster, and Robert H. Symons</i>	401
CH. 31. Enzyme-Labeled DNA Probes <i>J. Lesley Woodhead, Rachel Fallon, Hermia Figueiredo, and Alan D. B. Malcolm</i>	415
CH. 32. Luminescent Detection of Specific DNA Sequences <i>J. Lesley Woodhead, Hermia Figueiredo, and Alan D. B. Malcolm</i>	421
CH. 33. Detection of DNA Sequences Using Biotinylated Probes <i>J. Lesley Woodhead, Hermia Figueiredo, and Alan D. B. Malcolm</i>	425
CH. 34. Crosslinking of Single-Stranded DNA to Resins <i>J. Lesley Woodhead, Jane A. Langdale, and Alan D. B. Malcolm</i>	431
CH. 35. Extraction of RNA from Plants <i>Adrian Slater</i>	437

<i>Contents</i>	<i>xi</i>
CH. 36. Isolation of Plant Nuclei <i>Richard D. Henfrey and Robert J. Slater</i>	447
CH. 37. In Vitro Transcription in Plant Nuclei <i>Richard D. Henfrey and Robert J. Slater</i>	453
CH. 38. Large-Scale Isolation of Ti Plasmid DNA <i>Kevan M. A. Gartland</i>	465
CH. 39. Transformation and Regeneration of Dicotyledonous Plants <i>Kevan M. A. Gartland and Nigel W. Scott</i>	471
CH. 40. Plant Protoplast Fusion <i>Neil Fish, Keith Lindsey, and Michael G. K. Jones</i>	481
CH. 41. Plant Tissue Culture <i>Michael G. K. Jones, Neil Fish, and Keith Lindsey</i>	499
CH. 42. Direct Gene Transfer into Plant Protoplasts <i>Keith Lindsey, Michael G. K. Jones, and Neil Fish</i>	519
CH. 43. Isolation of Wheat Chloroplasts and Chloroplast DNA <i>Matthew Clement Jones</i>	537
CH. 44. DNA Labeling by Isolated Wheat Chloroplasts <i>Matthew Clement Jones</i>	545
INDEX	555

Chapter 1

Electrophoresis of RNA Denatured with Glyoxal or Formaldehyde

***Christopher F. Thurston, Caroline R. Perry,
and Jeffrey W. Pollard***

1. Introduction

The first successful method for electrophoretic analysis of the full size range of cellular RNA molecules was described by Loening (1), and its introduction allowed for major advances, most particularly in the molecular biology of eukaryotic organisms. The method had, nevertheless, two significant disadvantages in that the gels (composed of acrylamide at very low concentrations) were mechanically fragile, and the migration of RNA molecules did not necessarily reflect their size because RNA secondary structure was not disrupted.

More modern methods have consequently sought to incorporate conditions under which RNA is fully denatured and that avoid the use of very fragile gels. Fragility of the gel was overcome by use of agarose either in combination with, or in place of, acrylamide. The problem of RNA denaturation is, however, more complex. It is necessary both for analysis of the