

Keywords: neutron inelastic scattering, neutron instrumentation, pulsed neutron scattering

P01.15.96

Acta Cryst. (2008). A64, C200

Preparation and imaging of lipidic cubic phase based protein crystallization experiments

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Protein crystals grown by the cubic phase method diffract well and have been useful in determining high-resolution structures of several membrane proteins. The lipidic cubic phase methodology employed produces crystallization experiments that pose additional challenges to inspection. A versatile microscope platform, with automated x-y stage and various illumination and imaging options, has been developed with specific application to protein crystal detection. The DETECT-X microscope is a fully automated protein crystallization imaging instrument that operates in polarization, oblique angle and trans-illumination and UV-epi illumination fluorescence mode. Protein crystallization trials in traditional crystallization trays can be imaged in a fully automatic fashion. In its unique birefringence imaging mode the DETECT-X microscope produces false-color coded images of crystalline matter depicting the orientation of the slow optical axis of protein crystals and their orientation independent birefringence. Images that demonstrate the unique protein crystal imaging capabilities of the DETECT-X microscope are presented. The combination of the different observation modes allows the imaging of protein crystals that have strong contrast with respect to their facets as well as the interior body of the crystal. Colorless, transparent protein crystals appear colored. This enhanced contrast, along with UV epifluorescence, allows researchers to (i) see protein crystals through a layer of precipitate, (ii) discern between amorphous precipitate and non-faceted sphaerulites or precrystalline matter, (iii) identify crystal twins, and (iv) distinguish between protein and salt crystals.

Keywords: membrane protein crystallization, birefringence microscopy, lipidic mesophases

P01.15.97

Acta Cryst. (2008). A64, C200

Protein crystallization at the laboratory of molecular biology: Robotics, procedures and developments

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LMB scientists can undertake initial crystallization experiments and also crystal condition refinements for each new protein sample using automated protocols. The LMB protein crystallization facility is high-throughput and includes various robots. The protocols are straightforward and setting up plates is easy. The standard initial screening protocol is comprised of 17 MRC sitting-drop plates pre-filled with a wide variety of commercially available screen

kits. Process is fast and requires only small volume of protein. The 17 plates are set up within an hour using 272 ul of sample. 10,000 plates have been set up in 2007 for initial screening alone. Refinement, custom matrices and scale-up screens are made in any type of plate. A refinement screen in MRC plate is made in three minutes on the Sciclone i1000 workstation. New methods and tools are continuously developed and integrated into our crystallization facility. For example, The MRC multi-wavelength imaging system allows assessment of crystals regardless of clarity of the drops. The LMB screen database is a Web based tool to perform basic data mining about the initial screens. To further aid users, liquid handling advances, new micro-plates and specialized gas-tight and strong-binding plate seal developments have enabled the adoption of automated procedures for seeding, for experiments under oil and for crystallization at high temperature. A novel crystallization screen called Morpheus (commercialized by Molecular Dimensions) as also been developed recently. Each crystallization condition incorporates a broad range of small ligands that were found highly successful in co-crystallizations reported in the PDB.

Keywords: robotics, protein crystallization, Morpheus screen

P02.01.01

Acta Cryst. (2008). A64, C200

Structural studies of urate oxidase via powder diffraction

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Modern developments of the powder diffraction technique have allowed the investigation of systems with large unit cells like proteins [1]. Polycrystalline protein precipitates are frequently obtained under a variety of crystallisation conditions and thus powder methods can be employed for structural characterisation of small proteins when single crystals are unavailable. Urate Oxidase from *Aspergillus flavus* (Uox) is a protein used to reduce toxic uric acid accumulation and also in the treatment of hyperuricaemia which occurs during chemotherapy. In this study, we investigate the effects of pH, salt and polyethylene glycol (PEG) concentration on the structural characteristics of Uox uncomplexed and complexed with 8-azaxanthin (AZA). Powder diffraction data were collected at both room temperature and cryocooled conditions at the ESRF (Grenoble, France). A previously unknown orthorhombic phase of uncomplexed Uox was observed and novel crystallization methods were established. In the case of Uox complexed with AZA a different orthorhombic phase is identified. Correlations between the crystallisation conditions with the structural and micro structural characteristics of Uox will be presented.

[1] Margiolaki, I., Wright, J. P. (2008). *Acta Cryst.* A64, 169-180.

Keywords: proteins, powder diffraction, synchrotron radiation

P02.01.02

Acta Cryst. (2008). A64, C200-201

A new performing space group determination algorithm

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A new space group determination algorithm is described that follows the structure solution step rather than preceding it. It is based on an analysis of the average phase differences between symmetry equivalent reflections following the solution of the structure in space group P1. It is shown that this method performs very well for cases that are troublesome for space group determination algorithms based on an analysis of systematic extinct reflections. Examples illustrating the method include the analysis of weak data sets, faulty data sets, centrosymmetric/non-centrosymmetric ambiguity, ambiguous cases without systematic extinct reflections, data sets missing critical reflections, powder data and data from incommensurate crystal structures. The algorithm can be used as well for the analysis of missed higher symmetry.

Keywords: space group determination, structure solution, algorithm

P02.01.03

Acta Cryst. (2008). A64, C201

Tracing the protein main chain down to 5.5 Angstroms

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The crystals of many large protein assemblies diffract only to low resolution. To facilitate however their automatic structure determination a dedicated computational method has been developed that works with low resolution data down into the 5 Angstrom regime and even at very moderate phase quality. The method first recognises secondary structure elements and extends the main chain beyond these. It employs different tracing techniques to create an ensemble of candidate traces that are averaged to yield a solution in a robust way. The tracing techniques are supposed to introduce diversity into the ensemble in the way that they pick up noisy features at different places to different extent such that upon averaging this noise will to a good deal cancel out. For the ensemble average to be straightforwardly applicable a consensus between trace candidates is found with the help of clustering, trace alignment and majority voting. Typical positional errors of main chain CA atoms are not higher than of the order of 1 Angstrom. Through the use of sequence information and secondary structure prediction from sequence, restraints can be applied to the length of the main chain in between identified secondary structure elements as weights to ensemble participants. The software will be available as part of the ARP/wARP software suite whose version 7 as released in 2007 already contains the secondary structure modelling tool, a key component of the method proposed.

Keywords: structure determination, statistical analysis, low-resolution phasing

P02.01.04

Acta Cryst. (2008). A64, C201

SAXS, synchrotron CD and chemical cross-linking for structural study of complex biological systems

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Crystallography and NMR are unrivaled structural approaches for producing data-rich, atomic-resolution macromolecular structures though both suffer from stringent sample requirements. Furthermore, these techniques may not be the best approaches to use in cases where the biological questions relate to dynamics, transient interactions, non-stoichiometric complexes or flexible proteins. Various alternative structural biology approaches give different and complimentary information. Solution x-ray scattering can reveal the shape of a protein and the nature of quaternary interactions and dynamics. Circular dichroism reports on secondary structure and can be used dynamically. Chemical cross-linking with mass spectrometry can provide information on tertiary structure and protein-protein interfaces. Here I present the use of circular dichroism, small-angle x-ray scattering and cross-linking to study the structure of the filamentous actin binding protein cortactin and its effect on actin filaments. I also present the use of high-throughput synchrotron radiation circular dichroism and small-angle x-ray scattering to match uncharacterised proteins from a structural genomics project with protein of similar structure from the protein data bank.

Keywords: protein structure, small angle x-ray scattering, circular dichroism

P02.01.05

Acta Cryst. (2008). A64, C201

RAELS: A program for crystal structures that change across interfaces

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Two simple examples of structures changing across interfaces are twins and stacking faults. In the interface region the structure is different to the structure on either side of the interface. Crystals where this alternative structure extends for multiple layers are being observed but often ignored for the lack of a program that allows the coexistence of prototype structures and refinable rules for the creation of the observed diffraction patterns. Often the possibilities can be derived from an idealized, often disordered, parent structure of higher symmetry. Commensurability need not extend to three dimensions and may be approximate only, requiring lattice distortion at an interface. Chemical composition need not be the same for each prototype structure. Packing arguments can be used to show that many of these crystals should contain ordered layers but have different rules for relating adjacent layers. The asymmetric units for different prototype structures may be only approximately related by simple rules and comprehensive constraint and restraint options are then very useful. Crystals will vary in their population-type parameters and co-refinement of different crystals at the same temperature is useful. The author is completing his refinement program RAELS08 for the refinement of such structures and will discuss the comprehensive sets of options necessary for refining crystal structures that change across interfaces.

Keywords: refinement, twin-disorder, prototype structures