



In the process of fluorescence energy transfer (FRET) the donor is excited and if the acceptor is in close proximity the excited state energy will be transferred. This leads to a reduction in the donor fluorescence intensity and excited state lifetime, and an increase in the acceptors emission intensity. Basic principle of the FRET technology is shown in Picture 1. The efficiency of energy transfer strongly depends on the distance between the donor and acceptor molecules and on the overlap of the donor emission and acceptor excitation spectra. (Picture 2.) Time-resolved fluorescence resonance energy transfer (TR-FRET) combines the advantages of time-resolved fluorescence and FRET. Time resolution is used to separate the energy transfer signal from the acceptor prompt fluorescence and background. The purpose of this paper is to describe the optimization process of measurement parameters using the scanning features of Thermo's Varioskan[®] and SkanIt[®] software[®]. The effect of the optimization is demonstrated by comparing the assay results with the default and the optimized parameters. The type of the assay used in this study was a tyrosine kinase assay utilizing terbium as donor and fluorescein as an acceptor.

Optimization of LanthaScreen Terbium-Fluorescein TR-FRET Assay with Varioskan Spectral Scanning Time-Resolved Fluorometer

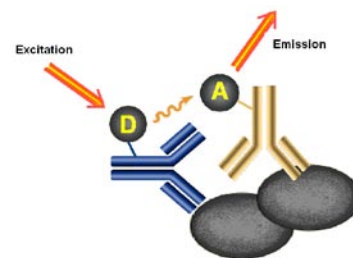
Hanna Granö, Jorma Lampinen, Veera Välisalo and Marika J. Raitio, Thermo Electron Oy, Vantaa, Finland

Abstract

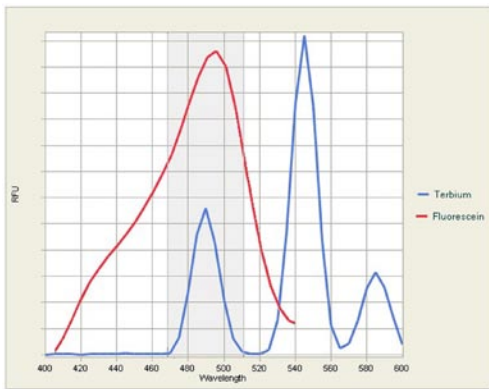
Time-resolved fluorescence energy transfer (TR-FRET) is a commonly used variation of fluorescence energy transfer (FRET), and it uses time-resolved fluorescence label as FRET donor. Compared to fluorescence intensity based FRET, it has a benefit of lacking biological background fluorescence because of the time dependent phenomena. In this work, measurement parameters for Lanthascreen[™] TR-FRET assay were optimized using Varioskan[®] spectral scanning microtiter plate fluorometer. Excitation and emission spectra of free donor and TR-FRET combination were measured using time-resolved spectral scanning and resulting spectra were analyzed to determine best possible

resolution between donor and TR-FRET emissions. Additionally, time-resolved fluorescence signal decay curves over the time from the donor and TR-FRET complex were measured to determine optimal measurement window for the TR-FRET assay.

Material and Methods

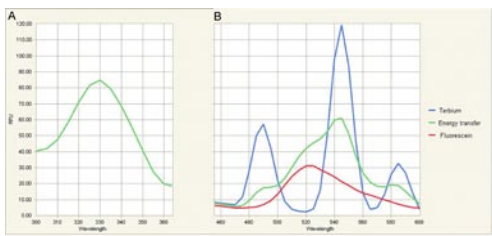


Picture 1. Principle of the FRET technology. A fluorescent donor (D) is excited at its specific fluorescence excitation wavelength. By a long-range dipole-dipole coupling mechanism, this excited state is then non-radiatively transferred to a second molecule, the acceptor (A). The donor returns to the electronic ground state and fluorescence signal is emitted by the acceptor.



Picture 2. The excitation and emission spectra of the used fluorochromes.

The overlap of the donor emission and acceptor excitation is marked with gray color on the image. Terbium's minor emission peak at 490 nm is used for the fluorescein excitation in this TR-FRET reaction. Fluorescein emission is measured at 520 nm where the donor emission is minimal. Legends: Blue line = Terbium emission spectra, Red line = Fluorescein excitation spectra.



Picture 3. Fluorescence spectra of pure labels and their TR-FRET complex

A) Excitation spectrum of terbium label in terbium-fluorescein TR-FRET complex.

B) Emission spectra of all three label combinations.

Legends: Blue line = terbium emission spectra, Red line = fluorescein emission spectra, Green line = terbium-fluorescein TR-FRET complex emission spectra.

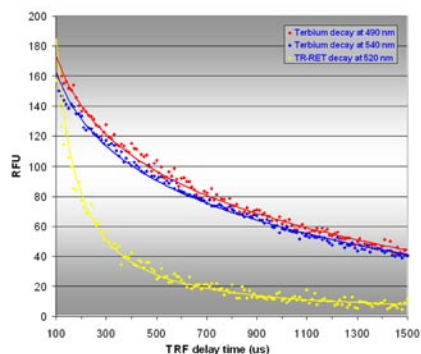
LanthaScreen[®] TR-FRET Tyrosine kinase assay was used as an example of TR-FRET optimization. This assay uses a terbium chelate labelled anti-phosphotyrosine peptide specific antibody as a TR-FRET donor and phosphorylated fluorescein labelled substrate peptide as TR-FRET acceptor (LanthaScreen TR-FRET Tyrosine kinase assay kit, prod. no. PV3149 with Tb-PY72 terbium labelled antibody, prod. no. PV3554, and fluorescein -PTK substrate, positive control, prod. no. PV35249, all from Invitrogen Corp., Carlsbad, CA). All assays were made according to the kit insert with white 110 ul 384 square well plate (Thermo Electron Corp., prod. no 8225). The optimal measurement parameters for Varioskan with this assay were determined from the fluorescence spectra and decay curves. These parameters were compared with the default measurement parameters from the kit instructions.

First, a fluorescence excitation spectrum of terbium label was determined to ensure the most efficient excitation of the FRET measurement. Then, fluorescence emission spectra were determined from terbium label alone, fluorescein label alone and their TR-FRET complex. Optimal measurement wavelengths were determined based on these spectra. TRF decay curves were measured from major terbium emission peaks at 490 and 540 nm using pure terbium label and TR-FRET decay curve was determined using terbium-fluorescein FRET complex as a sample. These curves were used to determine the optimal timing of the FRET measurement. Terbium decay curves were also compared to the theoretical decay profile based on the standard TRF decay math-

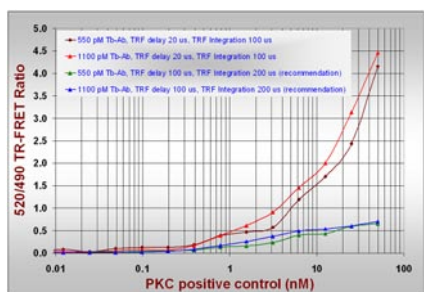
ematics. Optimized measurement parameters were then verified by determining the titration curve of the positive control peptide, fluorescein PTK substrate, with constant terbium antibody concentration. All measurements were made with Varioskan spectral scanning microplate fluorometer and SkanIt[®] software (version 2.2).

Results

Determined fluorescence spectra of both labels and their TR-FRET complex are shown in Picture 3. From these spectra, the optimal excitation and emission wavelengths were chosen for further measurements. As seen from the Picture 3., the terbium excitation spectrum has an excitation maximum is at 330 nm and this wavelength was chosen as the test setting for all subsequent measurements. Emission wavelengths to be used in the assay were selected from the spectra shown in Picture 3. As expected, terbium secondary peak was located at the emission maximum at 490 nm and this was chosen for donor emission measurement in TR-FRET assay. Fluorescein emission maximum was achieved at 520 nm where terbium emission was minimal. This wavelength gives also the maximum difference between TR-FRET emission and donor emission and that wavelength was selected to be used for acceptor emission measurements. The TRF decay curves were determined for the terbium label and for the terbium-fluorescein TR-FRET complex and the decay curves are shown in Picture 4. By analyzing the difference between the decay curves and calculated data the optimal delay



Picture 4. TRF decay curves of terbium and terbium-fluorescein TR-FRET complex
TRF decay curves were determined from both major emission peaks of terbium label and from terbium-fluorescein TR-FRET complex.



Picture 5. PKC positive control titration curve with two terbium-antibody concentrations.

and integration times were chosen for the assay. Optimal assay parameters determined from the TRF spectra and decay curves are collected into Table I. Positive control peptide titration curves with two Terbium antibody concentrations determined with both the optimal and manufacturer's recommended measurement parameters are shown in Picture 5.

Conclusions

- Assay optimization process can be easily and effectively be performed with a spectral scanning time-resolved fluorometer.
- Varioskan is an excellent instrument for assay optimization because it can be used for both TR-FRET assay optimization and actual measurement. Because of the possibility to visually examine the results, the optimization process is informative. The spectral data can be processed easily; e.g. the blank spectra reduced from the sample

data. This makes the analysis of the matrix and its possible effect easier, which is important for a homogeneous assay type.

- TR-FRET complex shows significantly shorter fluorescence lifetimes than the TRF label used in the complex. This has very strong effect on the FRET ration because 490 nm emission has different lifetime from the 520 nm. Because of this, it is recommended to measure TR-FRET reactions with very short TRF integration times.
- Optimization has an effect on the assay performance, specially changes in TRF delay time have a strong effect on the FRET ratio. As a general rule one should choose as short delay time as the assay's prompt fluorescence background and instrument performance allows.

Table I. Optimized assay parameters for terbium-fluorescein TR-FRET measurement with Varioskan.

	Recommended parameters	Optimized parameters
Donor excitation (nm)	340	330
Acceptor emission (nm)	520	520
Donor emission	490	490
Delay (us)	100	20
Integration time (us)	200	100
Measurement time (ms)	1000	1000

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North America: USA +1 866 984 3766, Canada +1 905 332 2000
Europe: Belgium +32 2 482 30 30, Denmark +45 48 16 62 00,
 Finland +358 9 329 100, France +33 2 28 03 20 00, Germany/
 Austria/Switzerland +49 6103 4081012, Italy +39 02 251 1141,
 Netherlands +31 76 571 4440, Russia/CIS +7 095 755 9045,
 Spain/Portugal +34 93 223 3154, Sweden +46 8 742 03 90,
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