

# **Blast**

# **Basic Local Alignment Search Tool**

Adapted from the courses of the Bonsai team,

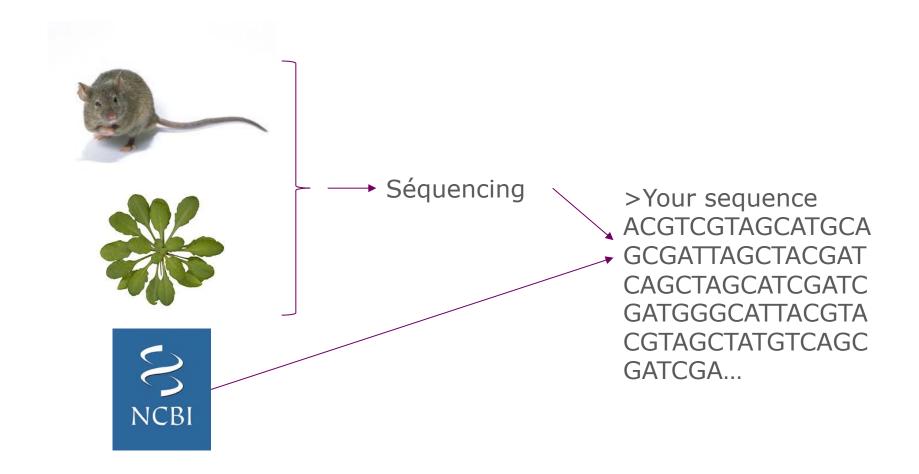
CRIStAL UMR 9189

Sylvain.legrand@univ-lille.fr

**Introduction** 

### challenge

 We assumed that you have a nucleotide or protein sequence obtained from a biological sample or from a database





# challenge

- You want to know if the sequence you have obtained is already known or is similar to other sequences in the databases
- A **sequence similarity searc**h often provides the first information about a new nucleotide or protein sequence
- → **inferring the function** from similar sequences



### challenge

• We have:

```
a query sequence q
a database T = \{t1, ..., tn\}
```

- What we want: to find significant alignments between q and ti
- Classical algorithms (e.g. Smith and Waterman's local alignment) do not work: too time consuming, need to find **workarounds**



### Blast, generalities

- Blast (NCBI definition): The Basic Local Alignment Search Tool (BLAST) finds regions of **local similarity between sequences**.
   The program compares nucleotide or protein sequences to sequence databases and calculates the **statistical significance** of the alignments
- Blast can be used to infer functional and evolutionary relationships between sequences and can also help identify members of a gene family

• Blast uses **heuristics**\* to deliver results quickly

<sup>\*</sup>A heuristic is a computational method that quickly provides a feasible solution, not necessarily an optimal one, it may miss some results



### Blast, generalities

- Since most proteins are modular (composed of functional domain(s)), Blast is made to find these domains between different sequences
- The algorithm also allows the alignment between mRNA and genomic sequences
- However, if 2 sequences are expected to be aligned to their full length (global alignment), it is possible that Blast will only return the most conserved parts of this alignment

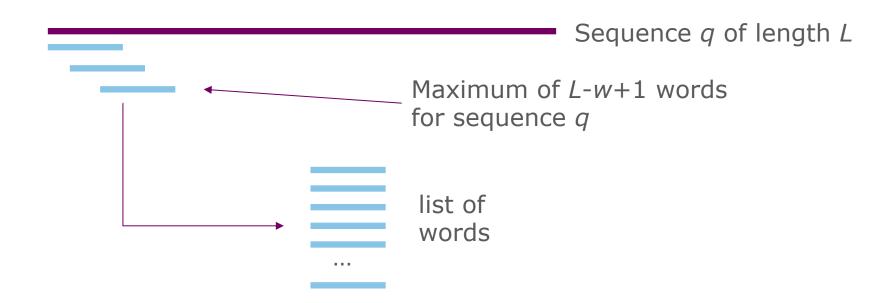


### History

- First version released by NCBI in 1990 (Altschul et al. 1990)
- This version only performs ungapped alignments, but provides a p-value that allows the user to assess the significance of the results
- A version allowing gaps (Blast2) appeared in 1997 (Altschul et al. 1997) and included the PSI Blast (see below)
- In 2009, NCBI released a new version of Blast (**BLAST+**) (Camacho et al. 2009)
- Currently BLAST+2.11.0 released (April 2021)

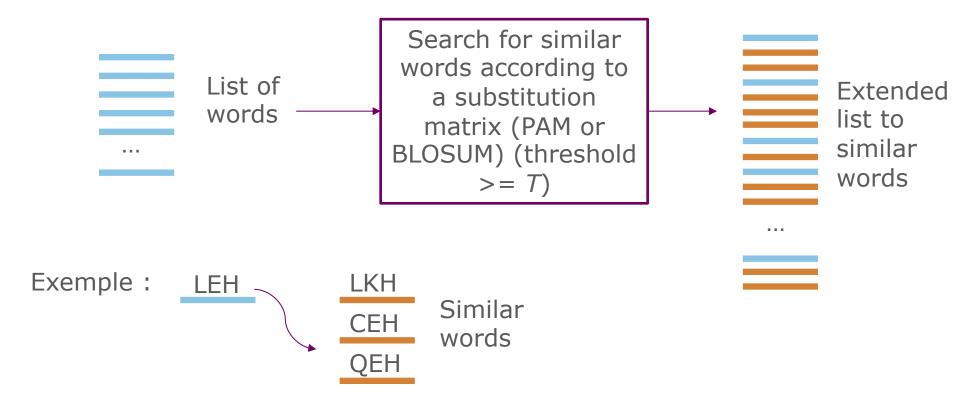


• <u>1st step</u>: define from the query sequence *q* **a list of words** (seeds) of defined size *w* (default size of 11 for DNA and 3 for proteins)





Particularity for proteins





- Clarification on similar words
  - For each word of size w=3, Blast generates the neighbouring words using a BLOSUM62 matrix with a score threshold T=11
  - Words with 3 amino acids: 20<sup>3</sup> possible alignments!

	$LEH \rightarrow score = 17$
	LKH→ score= 13
	$CEH \rightarrow score = 12$
Threshold	QEH $\rightarrow$ score= 11
	LMP→ score= 10
	LFH→ score= 9
	LER→ score= 9
	SEH→ score=9

- The neighbouring words are aligned with LEH and the alignment score is calculated from the BLOSUM matrix62
- Only words with a score ≥ to the threshold T are conserved



### Substitution matrix

- A substitution matrix is used to associate a score to each pair of residues in an alignment
- For nucleotide sequences, identical penalties are generally used for all substitutions

	A	C	G	Т
A	1			
C	-3	1		
G	-3	-3	1	
Т	-3	-3	-3	1

 For a given alignment, the score is the sum of the scores of each pair of residues

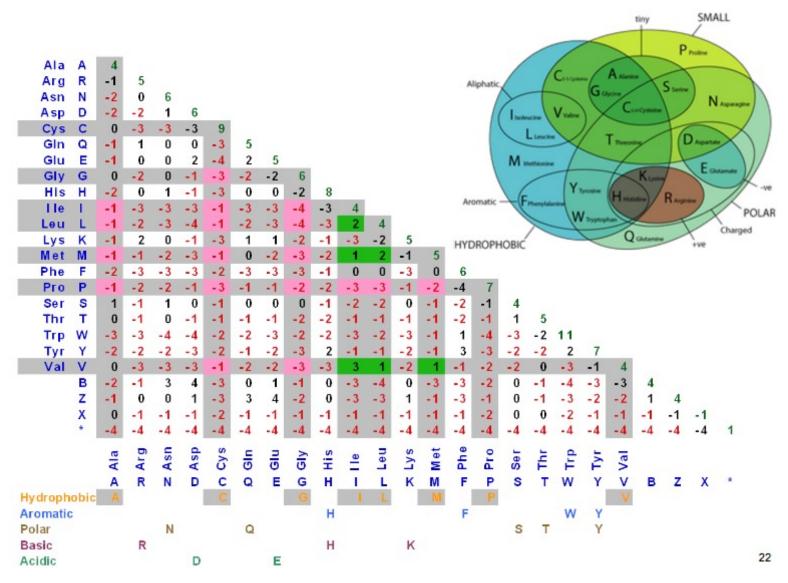


### Substitution matrix

- For protein sequences, **BLOSUM or PAM** matrices are used. They provide different scores depending on the substitutions
- Positive scores indicate frequent ("accepted") substitutions, i.e. substitutions observed more frequently than would be expected by chance
- **Negative values** indicate rare mutations, which are observed less frequently than at random. This is an indication of negative selection, suggesting that these mutations are unfavourable to the function of the protein



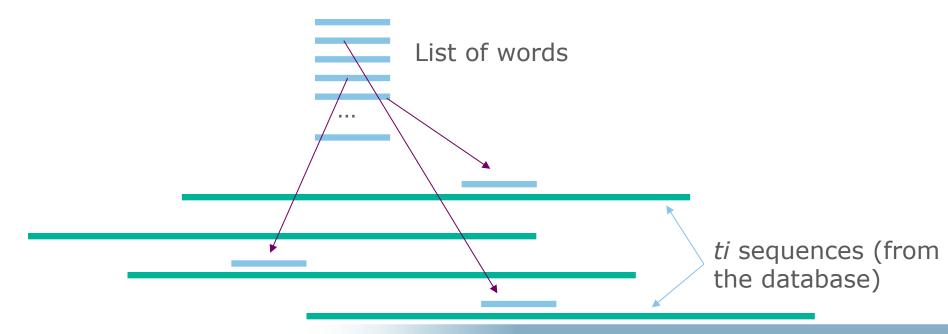
### BLOSUM62 matrix



From J. van Helden, Université d'Aix-Marseille



- **Step 2**: Search for exact matches between the words in the list (DNA) or the extended list (proteins) and the *ti* sequences in the database
- These alignments are *hits*
- A *hit* is therefore a "common" word of size *w* (and of score greater than *T* in the case of proteins) between the sequences *q* and *ti*





- **3rd step:** each hit is extended to the left and to the right: the extension is stopped when the *hit* score decreases by more than *X* (*X-drop*)
- Schematically



- Each extended hit forms an LMSP: Localy Maximal scoring Segment Pair
- Blast conserved only LMPSPs with a score higher than a given threshold score: the **HSPs**: High scoring Segment Pairs
- The most significant HSP is called MSP: Maximum scoring Segment Pair



Clarification on X-drop

```
Query q: Y A N C Q E H K M G S
Subject ti: D A P C Q E H K R G W P N D C
```

#### Starting hit

Xdrop=2 Score calculated from BLOSUM62

```
Y A N C Q E H K M G S
D A P C Q E H K R G W P N D C

5 10 18

Cumulative score
```

#### Extension to the right

```
Y A N C Q E H K M G S
D A P C Q E H K R G W P N D C

5 10 18 23 22 28 25

Cumulative score
```

Score decreases by 3 >Xdrop → the alignment is stopped

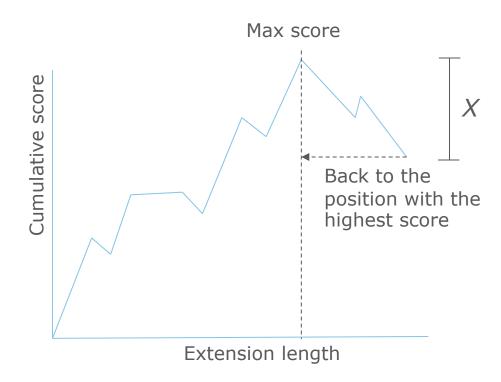
### Extension à gauche

```
Y A N C Q E H K M G S
D A P C Q E H K R G W P N D C
26 29 25 27 18 13 8

Cumulative score
```



Clarification on X-drop





# Gapped-Blast (BLAST2)

• Based on 2 hits with a maximum distance of A (BLASTP). To keep a good sensitivity, T is lowered from 13 to 11



- Extend the hits by allowing gaps
- This method is **faster** than the previous one





### Significance of alignments

- Two sequences can always be aligned
- There is always one (at least) **best** *S***-score** alignment between two sequences (an MSP)

#### Issues

- Is this score high enough to prove homology?
- Can we find a MSP with a better score in two random sequences?



### Significance of alignments

- S is the score obtained by the alignment of 2 sequences
- The **p-value** measures the **probability** that 2 random sequences of the same length and composition have an MSP of score ≥ S
- The **E-value** measures the esperance E of the number n of MSPs of score ≥ S in 2 random sequences of the same length and composition
- $\rightarrow$ For example, if the E-value is equal to 10 for a HSP with score S, it means that 10 HSPs with score  $\geq S$  can be found by chance! So probably your alignment is not significant!



### Calculation of the E-value

According to Karlin and Altschul, 1991

$$E = Kmne^{-\lambda s} p = 1 - e^{-E}$$

With m the size of the sequence q, n the size of the database, S the score of the HSP, K and D ambda depend on the score matrix, K can be adjusted according to the cost of the gaps

- If S is the score for a hit
- The bit-score (normalized score) is:  $S' = \frac{\lambda s lnK}{ln2}$
- The E-value is then:  $E = mn2^{-S'}$



### Variation in E-value

- If the size of the query sequence increases: the E-value ...
- If the size of the database is divided by two: the E-value ...
- If the score increases: the E-value ...
- What bit-score to obtain an E-value of 0.05 for a sequence of length 250 and a bd of length 50000000?
- If we increase the E-value to 0.01, what will be the bit-score?



### Variation in E-value

- If the size of the query sequence increases: the E-value increases
- If the size of the database is divided by two: the E-value decreases
- If the score increases: the E-value decreases
- What bit-score to obtain an E-value of 0.05 for a sequence of length 250 and a bd of length 50000000?
- If we increase the E-value to 0.01, what will be the bit-score? 40 bits



Run Blast!

### Home page

#### **Web BLAST**



#### blastx

translated nucleotide ▶ protein

#### tblastn

protein ▶ translated nucleotide



$Query \setminus Database$	nucléique	protéique	nucléique traduit
nucléique	blastn	x	×
protéique	х	blastp	tblastn
nucléique traduit	×	blastx	tblastx

ftp://ftp.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pub/factsheets/HowTo\_BLASTGuide.pdf



### Home page

### **Specialized searches**

SmartBLAST

Find proteins highly similar to your query

Primer-BLAST

Design primers specific to your PCR template Global Align

Compare two sequences across their entire span (Needleman-Wunsch) **CD-search** 

Find conserved domains in your sequence

GEO

Find matches to gene expression profiles

IgBLAST

Search immunoglobulins and T cell receptor sequences VecScreen

Search sequences for vector contamination

CDART

Find sequences with similar conserved domain architecture

**Targeted Loci** 

Search markers for phylogenetic analysis

**Multiple Alignment** 

Align sequences using domain and protein constraints

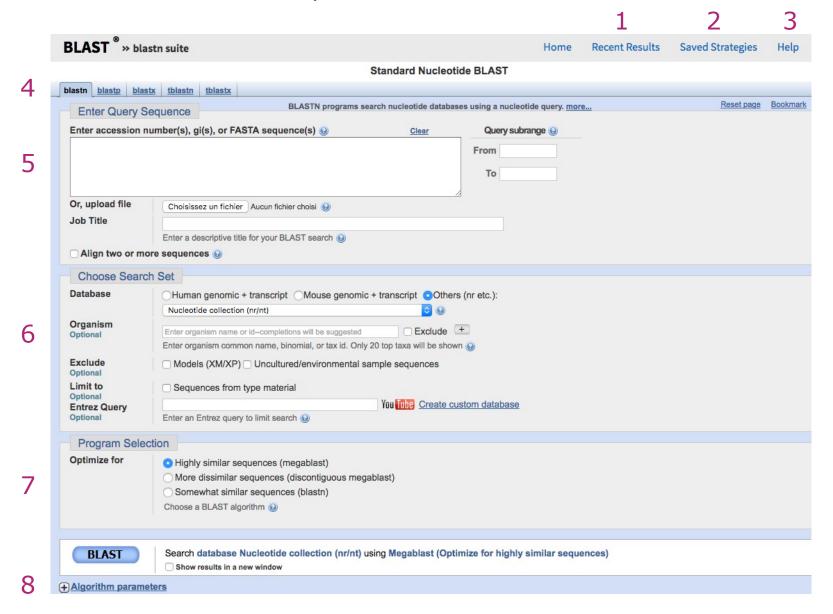
**BioAssay** 

Search protein or nucleotide targets in PubChem BioAssay MOLE-BLAST

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Establish taxonomy for uncultured or enviromental sequences







- 1 Recent Results: The results of your searches over the last 36 hours. If you are registered on MyNCBI, you can access your results from any machine. If not, only searches from the active browser session are kept
- 2 Saved Strategies: allows you to save the parameters of a Blast search in order to restart a search with the same parameters later (connection to MyNCBI required)
- 3 Help: documentations, links and tutorials
- 4: type of Blast



### 5 Enter Query Sequence

Copy/paste or upload your query sequence(s). You can also define a search range in your sequences. You can give a title to your search. The "Align two or more sequences" function allows you to compare sequences between them without using a database

#### 6 Choose Search Set

Select your database. You can limit your search to specific organisms or exclude organisms. You can exclude sequences produced from genome annotation projects or from non-cultured/bred organisms. You can limit your search to model specimens and strains

### 7 Program Selection

Allows you to optimise your search for different scenarios (e.g. intra or inter species searches)

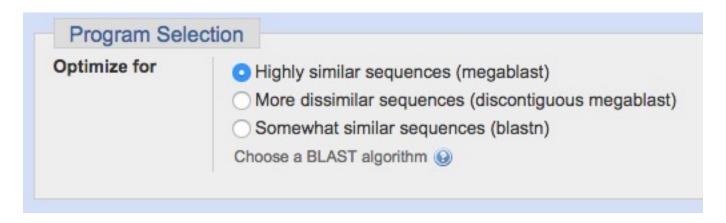


# 8 Algorithm parameters

This is the place to modify the parameters of the BLAST agoritm that has been selected (see dedicated section)



### Nucleotide Blast



### Megablast:

- a Faster Blast when searching for high similarity
- Implementation: use larger word sizes (28 vs 11)
- To be reserved when searching for very similar sequences or when we want to know if our sequence is in the database



#### Nucleotide Blast

- Discontigous megablast:
- Use a spaced seed rather than an exact word (contiguous seed)
- Useful for inter-species comparisons
- Example of contiguous seed: 1 1 1 1 1 1: an exact word (without mismatch) of 6 nucleotides
- Example of spaced seed: 1 1 1 0 1 0 1 1 : a word of 8 nucleotides, with 6 interrogated positions (represented by "1"). So, in this example, positions 4 and 6 may represent mismatches since they are not interrogated (represented by "0")



### Spaced seeds vs contiguous seeds

- We consider a sequence q of length l=26
- A seed (word) of size 6
- We can therefore define a maximum of 26-6+1=21 seeds
- The sequence *ti* is identical to *q*: therefore all seeds can be aligned with *ti*

```
ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA : q
ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA : ti
111111
 111111
  111111
   111111
    111111
     111111
      111111
       111111
        111111
         111111
          111111
           111111
            111111
             111111
              111111
               111111
                 111111
                  111111
                   111111
                    111111
                     111111
```



# Spaced seeds vs contiguous seeds

```
ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
                                      ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
                                      ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
                                      11101011
111111
 111111
                                       11101011
  111111
                                        11101011
   111111
                                          11101011
    111111
                                           11101011
     111111
                                           11101011
      111111
                                             11101011
       111111
                                              11101011
        111111
                                               11101011
                                                11101011
         111111
          111111
                                                 11101011
                                                  11101011
           111111
            111111
                                                   11101011
             111111
                                                    11101011
              111111
                                                     11101011
               111111
                                                      11101011
                111111
                                                       11101011
                 111111
                                                        11101011
                  111111
                                                         11101011
                   111111
                     111111
```

Spaced seeds behave in the same way as contiguous seeds in this example



# Spaced seeds vs contiguous seeds

Now let's introduce a mismatch between q and ti...

```
ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
                                  ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
1111.
ATCTGCTCGATCGATCGATCGA
                                  ATCTGCTCGATGGATGGATCGTTCGA
                                  11101011
111111
                                   11101011
 111111
                                     11101011
 111111
  111111
                                     11101011
                                      11101011
   111111
    111111
                                       11101011
                 Some seeds (in red)
                                        11101011
     111111
                 are lost
      111111
                                         11101011
       111111
                                          11101011
        111111
                                           11101011
                 Spaced seeds can be
         111111
                                            11101011
                 permissive
          111111
                                             11101011
           111111
                                              11101011
            111111
                                               11101011
             111111
                                                11101011
              111111
                                                 11101011
               111111
                                                  11101011
                                                   11101011
                111111
                                                    11101011
                 111111
                  111111
                  111111
```



# Spaced seeds vs contiguous seeds

Then, Let's introduce more mismatches between q and ti . ...

```
ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
                                  ATCTGATCGATCGATCGATCGA
ATCTGCTCGATGGATGGATCGTTCGA
                                  ATCTGCTCGATGGATGGATCGTTCGA
                                  11101011
111111
 111111
                                   11101011
                                    11101011
  111111
                                     11101011
  111111
   111111
                                      11101011
    111111
                                       11101011
                                        11101011
     111111
                   In that case the ti
      111111
                                         11101011
                   sequence could only
                                          11101011
       111111
                   have been found by
        111111
                                           11101011
         111111
                                            11101011
                   a spaced seed!
          111111
                                             11101011
           111111
                                             11101011
                                              11101011
            111111
                                               11101011
             111111
                                                11101011
              111111
                                                 11101011
               111111
                111111
                                                  11101011
                111111
                                                   11101011
                 111111
                  111111
```



### Protein Blast



### PSI-BLAST :

- Initial search with blastp
- Construction of a multiple alignment and then a profile from the best hits → position-specific score matrix (PSSM)
- New search with the profile



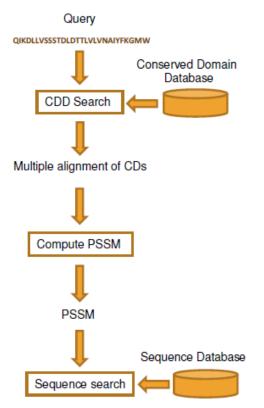
### Protein Blast

### PHI-BLAST:

- Input: a protein sequence and a motif (regular expression)
- Restriction of the library to sequences for which the motif is found

### DELTA-BLAST

- Use of PSSMs built from a NCBI CDD (conserved domain database)
- Faster than PSI-BLAST, also more sensitive

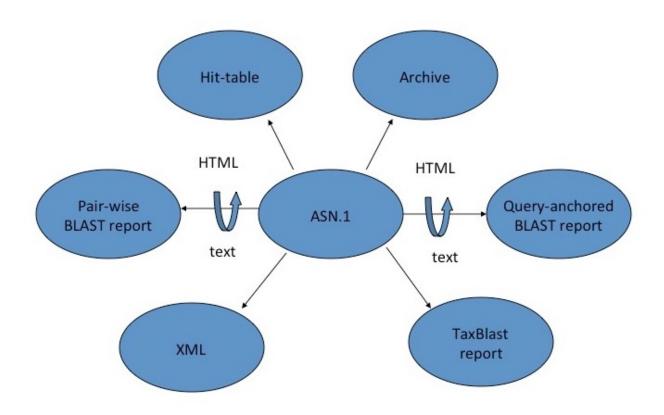




Boratyn et al 2012

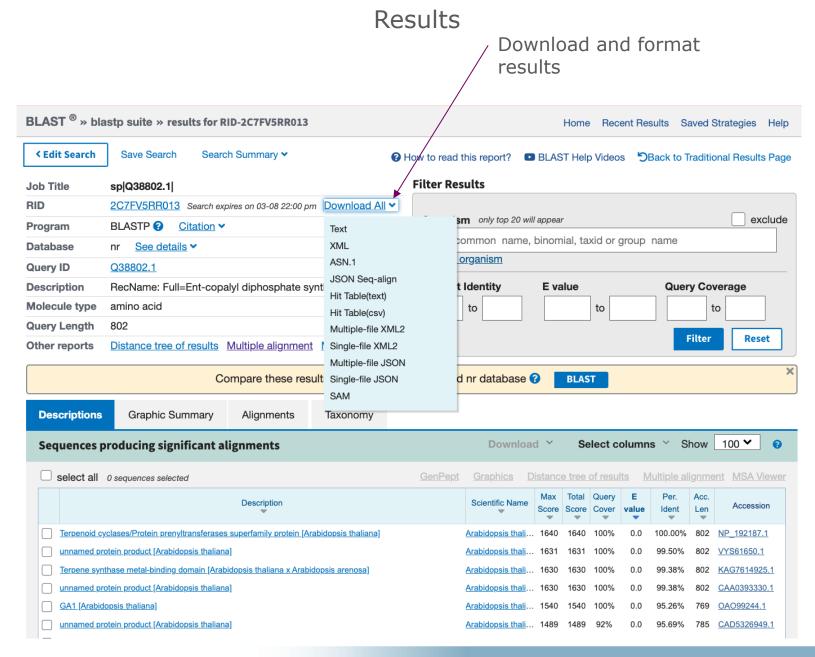
**Blast results** 

• Structured results: a flexible output



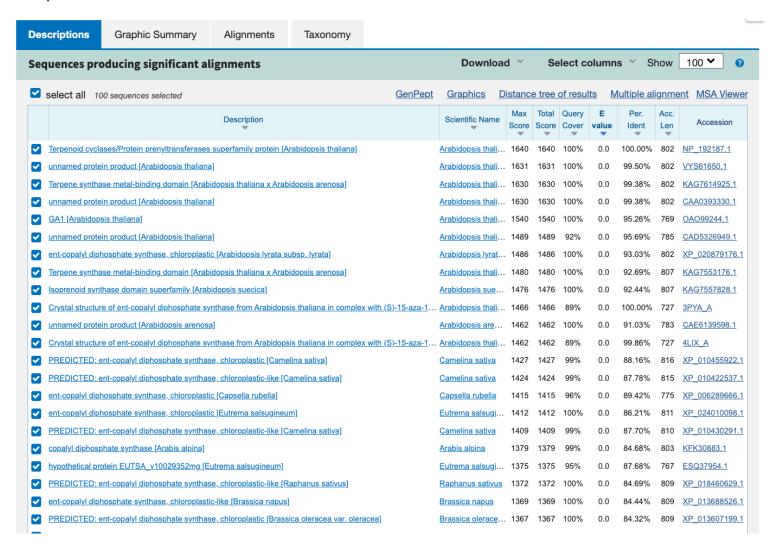






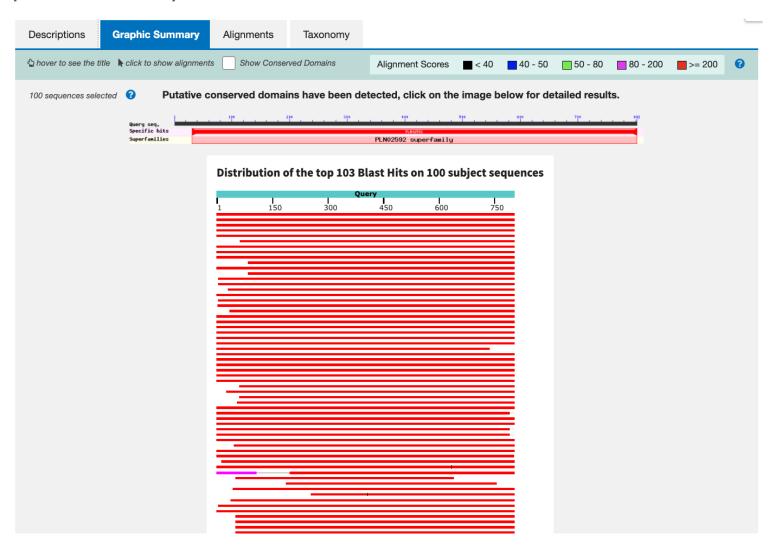


# Descriptions



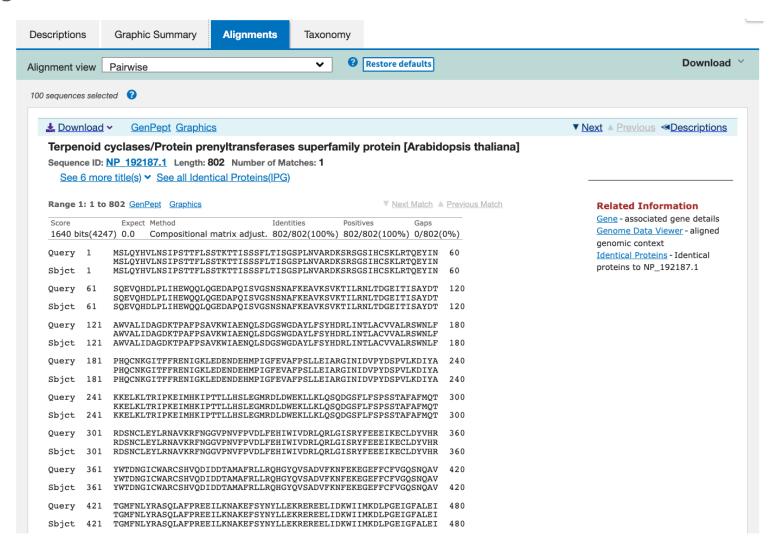


Graphic summary



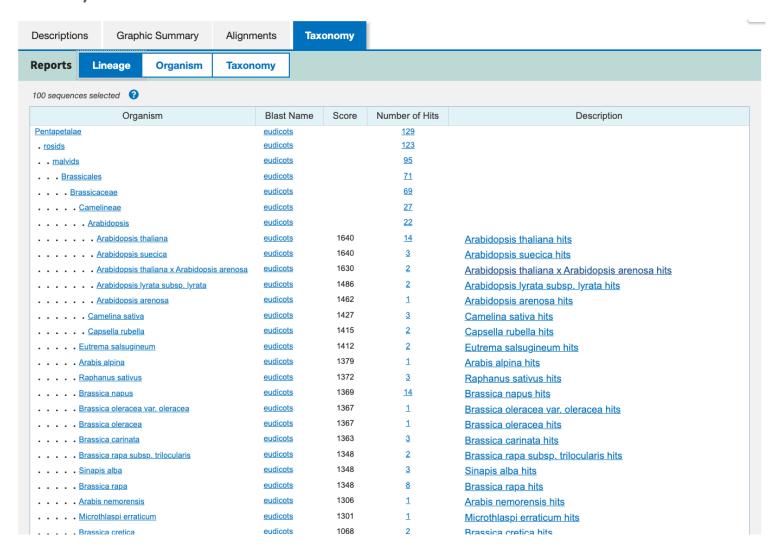


# Alignments





# Taxonomy





Alignments

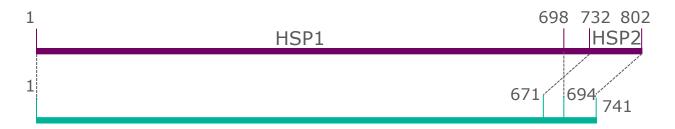
HSPs





# Blast vs global alignment

Graphical overview of the Blast alignment



Global alignment obtained using Needle





## Blast vs global alignment

#### Blast alignment Felis Catus/ Nyctereute 1 ttcttcctaccctgcccgctcatgctgctgctctactgggccacg | 145 ggcgagc. 1 ttcttcctaccctgcccgctcatgctgctgctctactgggccacg 181 ggc.agcccggacggcacccccggccgccccccgacggcac 46 ttccggggcctgcggcgctgggaggcgctcgccaggccaagctg 46 ttccggggcctgcggcgctgggaggccgcgcgtcgggccaagctg 225 ccccgatgacacccccgacgccaccccctgccccccgcccccgc 91 cactgccgggcgcctcgtcggcccagcggccccggcccaccgccc 153 ccccgacgccgtcgcgcccccgacgccgtcccagccgagccgcc 91 cacggccggacaccgcgagacccagcggcccggccaccc 270 ccccgacgccgccgccccccgccgccgaccctgcggagcccag 136 cccga.ggt. 136 cccgacggtacccccggccccccgacggcagccccgac 315 gtggcagccacgcaagcggagacgcgccaagatcacgggccggga 243 gcgcaaggccatgagggtcctgccggtggtggtc 360 gcgcaaggccatgagggtcctgccggtggtggtc Global alignment global



Sylvain Legrand
Maître de Conférences
UMR CNRS 8198 EVO-ECO-PALEO
Evolution, Ecologie et Paléontologie
Université de Lille - Faculté des Sciences et Technologies
Bât SN2, bureau 208 - 59655 Villeneuve d'Ascq

sylvain.legrand@univ-lille.fr | http://eep.univ-lille.fr/ Tél. +33 (0)3 20 43 40 16