RESEARCH NOTE

DOCLASP - Docking ligands to target proteins using spatial and electrostatic congruence extracted from a known holoenzyme and applying simple geometrical transformations [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]

Sandeep Chakraborty ^{1,2}¹Plant Sciences Department, University of California, Davis, CA, 95616, USA²Department of Biological Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, 400 005, India**V1** First published: 31 Oct 2014, 3:262
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<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.5145.3>**Abstract**

The ability to accurately and effectively predict the interaction between proteins and small drug-like compounds has long intrigued researchers for pedagogic, humanitarian and economic reasons. Protein docking methods (AutoDock, GOLD, DOCK, FlexX and Glide to name a few) rank a large number of possible conformations of protein-ligand complexes using fast algorithms. Previously, it has been shown that structural congruence leading to the same enzymatic function necessitates the congruence of electrostatic properties (CLASP). The current work presents a methodology for docking a ligand into a target protein, provided that there is at least one known holoenzyme with ligand bound - DOCLASP (Docking using CLASP). The contact points of the ligand in the holoenzyme defines a motif, which is used to query the target enzyme using CLASP. If there are no significant matches, the ligand cannot be docked in the protein. Otherwise, the holoenzyme and the target protein are superimposed based on congruent atoms. The same linear and rotational transformations are also applied to the ligand, thus creating a unified coordinate framework having the holoenzyme, the ligand and the target enzyme. This provides the docked ligand in the target enzyme. Previously, CLASP was used to predict and validate (in vivo) the inhibition of phosphoinositide-specific phospholipase C (PI-PLC) from *Bacillus cereus* by two dipeptidyl peptidase-IV (DPP4) inhibitors - vildagliptin and K-579. In the current work, vildagliptin was docked to the PI-PLC structure complexed with myo-inositol using

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1. Rahul Banerjee, Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata, India**2. Amarda Shehu**, George Mason University, Fairfax, USA

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DOCLASP. The docked ligand is free from steric clashes and interacts with the same side chain residues that bind myo-inositol, providing corroboration of the validity of the proposed methodology.

Keywords

protein, docking ligand, congruence

Corresponding author: Sandeep Chakraborty (sanchak@gmail.com)

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Introduction

The ability to computationally predict protein-ligand interactions with accuracy is an invaluable asset, since it allows for large scale screening at minimal costs^{1,2}. Consequently, computational methods that predict the favorable conformation of a protein-ligand complex have been the focus of intense research over the last few decades³. Protein docking methods are a subset of these methods, characterized by their ability to score a large number of possible conformations using fast algorithms. Among these, five programs - AutoDock⁴, GOLD⁵, DOCK⁶, FlexX⁷ and Glide⁸ - are the most cited, although it should be noted that 'the number of citations of a given paper is no measure of quality of the corresponding protein-ligand docking software program'⁹. Typically, a protein-ligand docking program has two distinct phases - conformational sampling (or searching) and scoring¹⁰. Despite the significant progress in the field, there are several challenges arising from protein or ligand flexibility, entropic considerations or the presence of water molecules that need to be addressed¹¹.

Previously, the conservation of spatial and electrostatic properties in cognate pairs of residues in the catalytic site of proteins with the same functionality has been used to develop a computational method (CLASP) for detecting binding and catalytic sites¹²⁻¹⁵. In the current work, this methodology has been extended by proposing a method for docking ligands into target proteins - DOCLASP (Docking using CLASP). DOCLASP takes as input a set of proteins with known structures which bind a particular ligand, and a target protein into which the ligand is to be docked. Each of these holo structures is used to define a motif consisting of the first four residues making non-hydrophobic interactions. These motifs are used to query the target protein, using an enhanced version of the search engine used by CLASP that uses precompiled databases¹⁶, and significant congruent matches are identified. These significant matches in the target protein are now superimposed to the binding residues (the motif) in the corresponding holoenzyme(s), thus creating a unified coordinate framework formed by the holoenzyme, the ligand and the target enzyme. This gives us the docked ligand to the target protein, which is outputted as a Pymol formatted file. In essence, the holoenzyme is replaced with the target enzyme if the contact points have a good spatial and electrostatic match in the target enzyme by aligning the congruent atoms. Thus, DOCLASP leverages the implicit search and scoring functions in CLASP to rank possible conformations.

The native activity of phosphoinositide-specific phospholipase C (PI-PLC) was previously shown to be inhibited by two dipeptidyl peptidase-IV (DPP4) inhibitors - vildagliptin (LAF-237) at micromolar concentrations, and K-579 at nanomolar concentrations using *in vitro* experiments based on CLASP analysis¹⁵. Since 'comparing docking programs can be difficult'⁹, the DOCLASP methodology is validated by docking vildagliptin to the PI-PLC structure in complex with myo-inositol¹⁷. The docked ligand is free from steric clashes and interacts with the exact side chain residues that bind myo-inositol, providing corroboration of the validity of the proposed methodology. Thus, the current work presents a fast methodology for docking ligands into protein structures based on spatial and electrostatic congruence of known binding sites to putative binding targets.

Materials and methods

DOCLASP uses the basic hypothesis of CLASP - the non-triviality of the spatial and electrostatic congruence in cognate pairs seen across different structures of the same catalytic function, which is extended to the related concept of ligand binding¹². It takes as input a set of M proteins with known structures (Equation 1) which bind a particular ligand (Lig), and a target protein into which Lig is to be docked (P_{target}). Each of these M holo structures is used to define a motif consisting of N ($=4$) residues (Equation 2), taking the first four closest non-hydrophobic interactions into account (Algorithm 1).

$$\Phi_{proteins}^{Lig} = \{P_1, P_2 \dots P_M\} \quad (1)$$

$$\Phi_{motifs}^{Pi} = \{R_1, R_2 \dots R_4\} \quad (2)$$

Each position of the motif has a set of amino acids specified to allow for stereochemically equivalent matches at that particular position (Equation 3), such that while matching amino acid type of r_i should belong to $GROUP_i$.

$$\Phi_{groups} = \{GROUP_1, GROUP_2 \dots GROUP_4\} \quad (3)$$

Previously, the K sets of N residues were obtained in P_{target} using an exhaustive search procedure similar to the one used in SPASM¹⁸. An enhanced algorithm now precompiles all possible motifs of a set ($N=4$ in this case) of predefined amino acid residues from a protein structure that occur within a specified distance¹⁶, and selects the appropriate ones based on each motif (Equation 4). Any match below a user defined threshold score (S_{thresh}) is discarded.

$$\begin{aligned} \Phi_{matches}^{Pi} &= \{M_1^{Pi}, M_2^{Pi} \dots M_K^{Pi}\}, \\ \forall (j=1 \dots K) [M_j^{Pi} &= \{r_1, r_2 \dots r_N\}, \forall (p=1 \dots N) [AminoAcidType(r_p) \in GROUP_p]], \\ [CScore_{M_1^{Pi}} &< CScore_{M_2^{Pi}}, CScore_{M_2^{Pi}} < CScore_{M_3^{Pi}} \dots], \\ CScore_{M_K^{Pi}} &< S_{thresh} \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

In Case $\Phi_{matches}^{Pi}$ is null, the ligand Lig can not be docked to the target protein P_{target} . M_1^{Pi} , the first element, has the minimum $CScore$ and represents the putative binding site in P_{target} based on the holoenzyme P_i . The set of putative binding sites $\Phi_{bindsite}$ is thus defined (Equation 5).

$$\Phi_{bindsite} = \{M_1^{P_1}, M_1^{P_2} \dots M_1^{P_M}\} \quad (5)$$

Each element of $\Phi_{bindsite}$ (M_1^{Pi}) is now superimposed to the corresponding holoenzyme, based on the motif binding Lig in P_i . In order to superimpose these motifs, linear and rotational transformations are applied on all atoms such that the first three atoms lie on the same plane ($Z=0$), the first atoms are the origin of the coordinate axis and the second atoms lie on the Y axis. This creates a unified coordinate framework having the holoenzyme, the ligand and the target enzyme, thus providing the docked ligand in the target enzyme. Essentially, the holoenzyme is replaced with the target enzyme if the contact points have a good spatial and electrostatic match in the target enzyme by aligning the congruent atoms. This docked ligand is now outputted as a Pymol formatted file.

Algorithm 1. GetMotif(): Choose n closest atoms, excluding hydrophobic interactions

```

Input: Protein :
Input: Ligand :
Input: n: number of closest atoms to choose
Output:  $\phi_{motif} = \{atom_1 \dots atom_n\}$ 
begin
  /* Output Motif */
   $\phi_{motif} = \emptyset$ ;
  /* Accepted atom pairs - exclude hydrophobic interactions*/
   $\phi_{AcceptedAtomPair} = [O-N, N-O, O-H, H-O, O-O, N-N, N-H, H-N, S-H, H-S]$ ;
   $ATOMS_{Lig} = \text{atoms of all residues of Ligand}$ ;
  /* Initial radius in Å */
  Radius = 2.5 ;
  foreach  $atom_i$  in  $ATOMS_{Lig}$  do
     $\phi_{atoms} = \text{ProteinAtomsWithinRadiusOfLigandAtom}(Protein, atom_i, Radius)$ ;
    foreach  $atom_j$  in  $\phi_{atoms}$  do
      if  $atom_i - atom_j$  is in  $\phi_{AcceptedAtomPair}$  then
        InsertInMotifSet( $atom_j, \phi_{motif}$ );
        if ( $\phi_{motif} == n$ ) then
          last ;
        end
      end
    end
    /* increment radius by 0.1 Å */
    Radius = Radius + 0.1;
  end
  return  $\phi_{motif}$ ;
end

```

The DOCLASP package is written in Perl on Ubuntu. Hardware requirements are modest - all results here are from a simple workstation (2GB ram) and runtimes were a few minutes at the most. Adaptive Poisson-Boltzmann Solver (APBS) and PDB2PQR packages were used to calculate the potential difference between the reactive atoms of the corresponding proteins^{19,20}. The APBS parameters and electrostatic potential units were set as described previously in¹². All protein structures were rendered by PyMol (<http://www.pymol.org/>).

Results and discussion

Previous CLASP analysis of the spatial and electrostatic properties of active site residues in PI-PLC from *B. cereus* indicated that it is a prolyl peptidase, which was also validated by *in vitro* experiments¹³. Subsequently, it was shown that PI-PLC is

inhibited by two dipeptidyl peptidase-IV (DPP4) inhibitors - vildagliptin (LAF-237) at micromolar concentrations, and K-579 at nanomolar concentrations. Since there are no DPP4 structures solved which ligand K-579, a DPP4 protein structure in complex with vildagliptin (PDBid:3W2TA)²¹ provided the five closest atoms in the protein (E205, E206, S630, Y662 and Y547) (see Methods) that make non-hydrophobic interactions with the ligand (Table 1).

A subset of these atoms might be sufficient to ligand vildagliptin in the target protein. Thus, $\binom{5}{4} = 5$ motifs, each with four atoms, were created using the five closest atoms in the protein. The binding of ligands is known to induce electrostatic and spatial perturbations in the binding site. The spatial and electrostatic perturbations induced by the vildagliptin binding is shown by comparing the apo (PDBid:2OQIA) and the holoenzyme (PDBid:3W2TA) in Table 2.

Table 1. Residues in dipeptidyl peptidase-IV (DPP4) holoenzyme (PDBid:3W2TA) that have non-hydrophobic interactions with the bound DPP4 inhibitor vildagliptin. Interactions are sorted based on the distance. R/A/LA/D: Residue number/Atom of the residue/Atom of ligand/distance between the interacting atoms (in Å). For example, 'S630/OG/N2/2.4' means that the atom OG from Ser630 is at 2.4 Å from the N2 atom of vildagliptin in PDBid:3W2TA.

R/A/LA/D	R/A/LA/D	R/A/LA/D	R/A/LA/D	R/A/LA/D
S630/OG/N2/2.4	E205/OE1/N12/2.8	Y662/OH/O20/3	E206/OE2/N12/3	Y547/OH/N2/3.1

Hence, the electrostatic and spatial profile of the motif were obtained from the apo DPP4 enzyme (PDBid:2OQIA), and then used for querying the PI-PLC apo structure (PDBid:1PTDA).

These motifs were used to query the PI-PLC structure using an enhanced algorithm (PREMONITION) that precompiles all motifs in a database¹⁶. Table 3 shows the best matches obtained in the PI-PLC structure for the five partial motifs. All these matches have significant electrostatic congruence. The root mean square deviation (RMSD) have low values - however, this is a deceptive metric since these deviations are averaged out. The maximum pairwise distance

is another metric to discriminate the spatial congruence, and should be used in combination with the RMSD value. All of these above mentioned matches have significant maximum pairwise distance deviation. Also, three matches do not comprise of active site residues (motifs 2, 3 and 4). However, it can be seen that the first and fifth matches comprises of active site residues (involved in the binding of myo-inositol in PDBid:1PTGA), and have three residues (Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178) in common.

Thus, these three residues from PI-PLC (Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178) and corresponding three residues from DPP4 (Glu205,

Table 2. Changes in the conformation of the binding site due to vildagliptin (a DPP4 inhibitor) binding. We compare the pairwise distance and electrostatic potential difference (EPD) changes in the apo (PDBid:2OQIA) and holo (PDBid:3W2TA) enzymes. Note that the pairwise distance between these atoms change in the ligand free PDB (2OQIA) as compared to the protein with bound inhibitor (2BUBA). For example, the distance between E205OE2 and E206OE2 (pair ab) changes from 3.9 Å to 5.6 Å. Also, there is a definite change in the EPD between E205OE2 and E206OE2 (pair ab). D = Pairwise distance in Å. PD = Pairwise potential difference. The electrostatic potential are in dimensionless units of kT/e where k is Boltzmann's constant, T is the temperature in K and e is the charge of an electron.

PDB	Active site atoms (a,b,c,d)		ab	ac	ad	bc	bd	cd
2OQIA	GLU205OE2, GLU206OE2, SER630OG, TYR662OH,	D	3.9	7.9	4.0	10.1	3.5	7.3
apo		PD	75.7	-193.4	-94.5	-269.1	-170.2	98.9
3W2TA	GLU205OE2, GLU206OE2, SER630OG, TYR662OH,	D	5.6	9.1	6.1	9.4	5.1	5.6
holo		PD	-74.4	-307.9	-159.8	-233.5	-85.5	148.1

Table 3. Querying PI-PLC using partial motifs derived from the atoms in vildagliptin that make contact to the DPP4 enzyme (PDBid:3W2TA). The comparison is done using apo enzymes (PDBid:1PTDA for PI-PLC and PDBid:2OQIA for DPP4), since the binding of a ligand induces spatial and electrostatic changes in the active site. The fifth motif has the least rmsd deviation, and comprises of active site residues (involved in the binding of myo-inositol in PDBid:1PTGA). Out of the best matches in the other four motifs, three do not comprise of active site residues (motifs 2, 3 and 4). Motif 1 has a reasonably significant match, and has three residues (Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178) in common with the best match for Motif 5. These three residues from PI-PLC (Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178) and corresponding three residues from DPP4 (Glu205, Glu206 and Tyr662) were used to superimpose DPP4 and PI-PLC. N = Motif number. D = Pairwise distance in Å. PD = Pairwise potential difference. Rmsd = Root mean square deviation. Max = maximum pairwise distance deviation. APBS writes out the electrostatic potential in dimensionless units of kT/e where k is Boltzmann's constant, T is the temperature in K and e is the charge of an electron.

PDB	N	Active site atoms(a,b,c,d)		ab	ac	ad	bc	bd	cd	Rmsd/Max (Å)
2OQIA	1	S630OG, E205OE1, Y662CZ, E206OE1	D	9.5	7.8	11.2	7.2	6.6	5.8	0.9/5.1
			PD	237	-104	228	-341	-9	332	
1PTDA		S113OG, D67OD1, W178CZ2, D198OD1	D	4.3	6.7	10.1	6.7	7.7	4.9	
			PD	195	-79	277	-275	81	357	
2OQIA	2	S630OG, E205OE1, Y662CZ, Y547CZ	D	9.5	7.8	5.4	7.2	11.3	9.3	0.8/3.3
			PD	237	-104	-241	-341	-478	-137	
1PTDA		S244OG, D274OD1, Y275CZ, Y246CZ	D	11.3	7.2	8.1	7.0	11.6	5.9	
			PD	312	-104	-171	-417	-484	-67	
2OQIA	3	S630OG, E205OE1, E206OE1, Y547CZ	D	9.5	11.2	5.4	6.6	11.3	10.4	1.3/7.0
			PD	237	228	-241	-9	-478	-469	
1PTDA		S129OG, D126OD1, E125OE1, Y164CZ	D	7.3	12.5	6.7	5.5	12.9	17.4	
			PD	172	262	-232	90	-405	-495	
2OQIA	4	S630OG, Y662CZ, E206OE1, Y547CZ	D	7.8	11.2	5.4	5.8	9.3	10.4	0.8/3.3
			PD	-104	228	-241	332	-137	-469	
1PTDA		S244OG, Y275CZ, D274OD1, Y246CZ	D	7.2	11.3	8.1	7.0	5.9	11.6	
			PD	-104	312	-171	417	-67	-484	
2OQIA	5	E205OE1, Y662CZ, E206OE1, Y547CZ	D	7.2	6.6	11.3	5.8	9.3	10.4	0.7/4.0
			PD	-341	-9	-478	332	-137	-469	
1PTDA		D67OD1, W178CZ2, D198OD1, Y200CZ	D	6.7	7.7	11.6	4.9	9.6	6.3	
			PD	-275	81	-318	357	-42	-400	

Glu206 and Tyr662) were used to superimpose DPP4 and PI-PLC. Table 4 shows the congruence of these residues. The corresponding holo structures - PDBid:3W2TA for DPP4, and PDBid:1PTGA for PIPLC - were used for the superimposition. This superimposition applies geometric transformations such that Asp67OD1 and Glu205OE2 were at the center of the coordinate axis (coordinates = [0,0,0]), Asp198OD1 and Glu206OE2 lies on the X-Y axis (i.e. Y coordinate is 0) and Tyr662CZ and Trp178CZ2 were on the X-Y plane (i.e. Z coordinate is 0). Figure 1 shows the superimposed proteins. It is observed that (Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178) overlaps well with (Glu205, Glu206 and Tyr662).

These transformations were also applied to the vildagliptin molecule, and this resulted in a docked structure for this molecule into the PI-PLC protein. Figure 2 shows the vildagliptin docked into the PI-PLC structure which is complexed with myo-inositol (PDBid:1PTGA). The distances of the atoms in vildagliptin and myo-inositol that interact (excluding hydrophobic interactions) to

the first ten residues in the PI-PLC structure are shown in Table 5. It is interesting to note that the residues shown in Table 5 are all part of side chain residues in close contact with the myo-inositol ring (shown in Figure 7¹³). Further validation was obtained by observing that both Arg69/NH1 and His32/NE2 interact with atom O4 in vildagliptin, and Arg69/NH2 and His32/NE2 interact with O2 in myo-inositol in the PI-PLC structure. The Pymol script for visualizing the docking (SupplementaryPymol.p1m) and a movie (SupplementaryMovie.avi) are also provided as Supplementary information.

It is important to comment on the previous hypothesis of a nucleophilic serine being responsible for the inhibition of PI-PLC using vildagliptin. The electrostatic and spatial profile of the motif 4 from DPP4 is compared to the electrostatic and spatial profile of matching active site residues in PI-PLC in Table 6, including serine in the comparison. It can be seen that Ser630 in DPP4 has a significant spatial difference as compared to Ser234 in PI-PLC (pair 'bc' has a difference of 5 Å), and also a reasonable electrostatic difference

Table 4. Spatial and electrostatic congruence of a three residue partial motif.
The match is significant and comprises active site residues (involved in the binding of myo-inositol in PDBid:1PTGA). Pair 'ab' is considered to be electrostatically congruent since the PD values are close to zero, and can be considered almost equipotential. This is expected for atoms of the same type from the same residue (GLU205OE1/GLU206OE1 and ASP67OD1/ASP198OD1). These three residues from PI-PLC (Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178) and corresponding three residues from DPP4 (Glu205, Glu206 and Tyr662) were used to superimpose DPP4 and PI-PLC. D = Pairwise distance in Å, PD = Pairwise potential difference. APBS writes out the electrostatic potential in dimensionless units of kT/e where k is Boltzmann's constant, T is the temperature in K and e is the charge of an electron.

PDB	Atoms(a,b,c)		ab	ac	bc
2OQIA	GLU205OE1, GLU206OE1, TYR662CZ,	D	6.6	7.2	5.8
		PD	-9.3	-341.5	-332.2
1PTDA	ASP67OD1, ASP198OD1, TRP178CZ2,	D	7.7	6.7	4.9
		PD	81.8	-275.7	-357.6

Figure 1. Superimposing PI-PLC (PDBid:3W2TA in green) and DPP4 (PDBid:2OQOA in cyan). Three residues from PI-PLC (Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178 in yellow) were superimposed to the corresponding three residues from DPP4 (Glu205, Glu206 and Tyr662 in red). Asp67OD1 and Glu205OE2 is at the center of the coordinate axis (coordinates = [0,0,0]) (in black), Asp198OD1 and Glu206OE2 lies on the X-Y axis (i.e. Y coordinate is 0) and Tyr662CZ and Trp178CZ2 are on the X-Y plane (i.e. Z coordinate is 0). Asp67, Asp198 and Trp178 in the PI-PLC protein overlaps well with Glu205, Glu206 and Tyr662 from DPP4, but the Ser234-Ser630 pair is not spatially congruent.

Figure 2. Docking vildagliptin to the PI-PLC structure in complex with myo-inositol (PDBid:1PTGA). It can be seen that vildagliptin fits into the binding site of PI-PLC. It also makes non-hydrophobic contacts to the residues in the protein similar to those made by myo-inositol (Table 5).

Table 5. Atoms of myo-inositol and vildagliptin that make contact to the residues of the PI-PLC structure (PDBid:1PTGA). These interactions exclude hydrophobic interactions, and the first closest ten atoms are chosen. Out of ten, seven residues obtained by docking vildagliptin using DOCLASP are seen to be equivalent to those that are known to bind myo-inositol to the PI-PLC structure¹³, while two more have the same amino acid type (marked by asterisks). Only one pair has a different amino acid type (Tyr200 for myo-inositol and Glu117 for vildagliptin). Further validation is obtained by observing that both Arg69/NH1 and His32/NE2 both interact with atom O4 in vildagliptin, and Arg69/NH2 and His32/NE2 interact with O2 in myo-inositol in the PI-PLC structure.

myo-inositol	vildagliptin	Same?
ASP198/OD1/O3/2.6	ASP198/OD2/N12/3.1	Y
ARG163/NH2/O5/2.7	ARG163/NE/O20/1.1	Y
HIS32/NE2/O2/2.9	HIS32/NE2/O4/4.5	Y
ARG69/NH2/O2/3.3	ARG69/NH1/O4/1.0	Y
LYS115/NZ/O5/3.4	LYS115/NZ/O4/4.9	Y
TRP178/NE1/O4/4.0	TRP178/NE1/N15/2.2	Y
ASP33/OD1/O2/4.1	ASP33/OD1/O4/2.8	Y
SER234/OG/O3/4.8	SER113/OG/O20/5.3	*
ASP180/OD1/O6/4.5	ASP67/OD2/O4/3.8	*
TYR200/OH/O6/4.4	GLU117/OE1/O4/4.1	N

(pair 'ac' has a difference of 144 PD units). The relatively large distance over which Ser234 in PI-PLC interacts with myo-inositol (4.8 Å) indicates that Ser234 is not directly involved in the binding of the ligand. However, it is responsible for creating the electrostatic milieu that is required for other interacting residues to attain their appropriate potential. Even for DPP4, many inhibitors do not interact with the nucleophilic Ser630²² - although the vildagliptin molecule does²¹. Thus, the previous conjecture of a nucleophilic serine being *directly* responsible for the binding of DPP4 inhibitors to PI-PLC, as implied by the catalytic triad congruence, is incorrect¹³. However, this serine is indirectly responsible for driving the neighboring residues to an appropriate state. Spatial constraints are an additional discriminator.

The number of docking methods available is such that even a detailed review could only provide a partial list of currently available docking methods⁹. The current work presents a template based, static method that leverages the spatial and electrostatic properties of the binding site. The definitive advantage of a static method can only be highlighted by emphasizing the known limitations of conformational sampling of the protein structure^{23,24}. The problem is indeed exacerbated by the plasticity of the drug itself²⁵⁻²⁷. While DOCLASP

Table 6. Potential and spatial congruence of the residues binding vildagliptin in DPP4 structure (PDBid:2OQIA) to the putative binding site in PI-PLC structure (PDBid:1PTDA). Both the structures are apo enzymes, since the binding of a ligand induces spatial and electrostatic changes in the active site. Ser630 in DPP4 has a significant spatial difference as compared to Ser234 in PI-PLC (pair 'bc' has a difference of 5 Å), and also a reasonable electrostatic difference (pair 'ac' has a difference of 144 PD units). D = Pairwise distance in Å. PD = Pairwise potential difference. APBS writes out the electrostatic potential in dimensionless units of kT/e where k is Boltzmann's constant, T is the temperature in K and e is the charge of an electron.

PDB	Active site atoms(a,b,c,d)		ab	ac	ad	bc	bd	cd
2OQIA	GLU205OE1, GLU206OE2, SER630OG, TYR662CZ,	D	5.2	9.5	7.2	10.1	4.2	7.8
		PD	31.7	-237.4	-341.5	-269.1	-373.2	-104.1
1PTDA	ASP67OD1, ASP198OD1, SER234OG, TRP178CZ2,	D	7.7	8.2	6.7	5.7	4.9	9.2
		PD	81.8	-93.7	-275.7	-175.6	-357.6	-182.0

is completely ineffectual in the absence of such a database, unlike *de novo* methods, it benefits from the burgeoning database of protein-ligand structures²⁸. The conservation of electrostatic properties, extracted using APBS/PDB2PQR, is the strongest argument in favor of DOCLASP.

There are several limitations in the method. Firstly, it can be applied to those compounds which are bound to proteins whose structures have been solved. Additionally, it requires the structure of the apoenzyme, as this is used to extract the query motif considering the structural and electrostatic changes induced by ligand binding. However, with an ever increasing number of protein structures being solved, this is not a severe limitation since most proteins with ligands also have their apo structures solved. Furthermore, the lack of congruent matches leads DOCLASP to return a null result. This can be overcome by relaxing constraints, for example by checking for spatial congruence only. Finally, it is required to develop an energy function which will be able to discriminate poorly docked

structures that have either significant steric clashes or are docked on the surface of the protein.

To summarize, this work presents an implicit method for docking ligands to proteins, in which the search and scoring are implicit in the CLASP algorithm. One significant limitation of this method is the requirement of template protein structures in complex with the given compound. As future work, I intend to incorporate the flexibility of the ligand and protein to add further discrimination.

Competing interests

No competing interests were disclosed.

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Supplementary materials

Pymol script for visualizing the docking and movie.

The file “SupplementaryPymol.plm” contains the Pymol file for viewing vildagliptin docked to PIPLC and the file “SupplementaryMOvie.avi” contains a movie showing a 360 rotation of the ligand docked to PIPLC.

[Click here to access the script.](#)

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