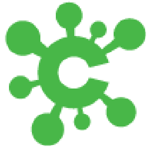

CELLECTA

USER MANUAL

CRISPRaTest™ Functional dCas9-Activator Assay Kit

v1 — Last update: 2019/01/10

Cellecta, Inc.

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1. CRISPRaTest™ Functional dCas9-Activator Assay Kit

The CRISPRaTest™ Functional dCas9-Activator Assay Kit (Cat.# CRATEST) measures functional dCas9 transactivator (e.g., dCas-VPH) in any mammalian cell system. The CRISPR gene activation system (CRISPRa), a modification of the original CRISPR knockout system, uses an sgRNA molecule to direct an inactive Cas9 (dCas9) fused with a gene activator, for example VP64 (i.e., dCas9-VP64), to a target location on genomic DNA near a gene promoter. The sgRNA-dCas9-Activator complex then increases expression levels of the gene regulated by the promoter.

The CRISPRaTest Kit provides reagents to measure the activator strength of any *Streptococcus pyogenes* dCas9 transactivator (dCas9-TA) hybrid protein in cells designed to be used for CRISPRa experiments using a FACS-based assay. The kit contains pseudoviral packaged lentiviral constructs with a green fluorescent protein (GFP) gene that increases in expression when expressed in cells with active dCas9-TA. The kit provides enough reagents to measure this activity in 5-15 cell lines.

References and Product Citations for all Cellecta products can be found on the Cellecta website: https://www.cellecta.com/resources/publications/.

Please read the entire user manual before proceeding with your experiment. Also, please note that, when working with pseudoviral particles, you should follow the recommended guidelines for working with Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2) materials.

Click the ? Download as PDF link located at the bottom of the left menu to download the PDF version of this user manual.

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Last modified: 2019/01/10

2. Kit Components

Component	Volume
CaT-Active (CaT-A) Viral Mix	500 µl
CaT-Background (CaT-B) Viral Mix	500 µl
Transduction Reagent (1000X)	50 µl

The CRISPRaTest Kit should be stored at -80°C until ready for use.

Last modified: 2017/05/26

3. Additional Required Materials

Use of the CRISPRaTest assay requires access to a flow cytometer with the following excitation and emission requirements:

> **Excitation:** 488nm and 561nm
> **Emission:** 530/20nm and 590/20nm

Cellecta also offers the following products that may be useful when running this assay:

dCas9-Only Plasmids

Cat.#	Description	Quantity	Price
SVVPHC9B-PS	CRISPRa dCas9-VPH pRDVCCB-CMV-dCas9-VPH-2A-Blast (plasmid)	25 µg	$300
SVVPHC9B-VS	CRISPRa dCas9-VPH pRDVCCB-CMV-dCas9-VPH-2A-Blast (virus)	1×10^6 TU	$500

Cell Line

dCas9-VPH+ MDA-MB-231 Cells (Cat.# ZMDAMB231-CVPH, 10^6 cells) may be run in parallel with the user's dCas9-transactivator (dCas9-TA) cells as a positive control for the assay.

Transduction Control Virus

Non-Targeting CRISPR Control pRSG16-U6-(sg)-UbiC-TagRFP-2A-Puro (virus) may be used to assess transduction efficiency of the target cells.

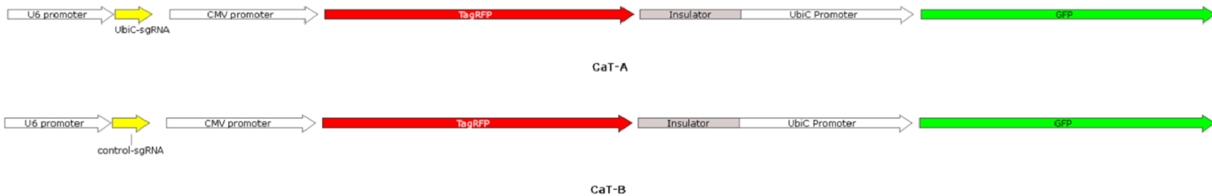
Cat.#	Description	Quantity	Price
SGCTL-NT-pRSG16-V	Non-Targeting CRISPR control pRSG16-U6-(sg)-UbiC-TagRFP-Puro Vector (virus)	1×10^7 TU	$500

Other than the specific reagents and instruments above, the protocol assumes the user has access to standard materials (e.g., polypropylene tubes, pipette tips), equipment (table top centrifuges, pipettes, scales), and common reagents (e.g., TE buffer, ethanol) and buffers used in a typical life science laboratory.

Last modified: 2017/05/26

4. Protocol Overview

Both the CaT-Active (CaT-A) and CaT-Background (CaT-B) reagents contain lentiviruses that express RFP and GFP from separate transcripts, each driven by its own promoter. The RFP transcript is driven by the strong CMV promoter while the GFP gene is driven by the weak UbiC promoter (see Figure below).



The CaT-A lentivirus expresses an sgRNA targeting the UbiC promoter of the GFP gene. When transduced into cells, also expressing a functional dCas9-TA fusion protein (such as Cellecta's dCas9-VPH), GFP expression increases in response to the sgRNA mediated dCas9-transactivation.

The CaT-B lentivirus also expresses an sgRNA but it is non-targeting so it cannot recruit the dCas9-transactivator and GFP expression is unaffected.

To assay cells for any dCas9-Activator activity, transduce two different populations of the same dCas9-TA expressing cells with the CaT-A and CaT-B viruses, respectively. GFP fluorescence in the cells transduced the CaT-A virus will be significantly increased, as compared with the CaT-B cells. RFP fluorescence in both populations is unaffected. The difference in the mean GFP fluorescence between the two populations (normalizing against mean RFP fluorescence) provides a quantitative measure of the activity of the dCas9-TA transactivator in the dCas9-TA cells.

Last modified: 2017/05/26

4.1. Assay Procedure

Two populations of dCas9-TA cells are transduced with the CaT-A and CaT-B viral mix reagents, respectively. After 4 days, each population is analyzed by flow cytometry. The mean GFP and RFP fluorescent values are then used to calculate dCas9-TA activity in the dCas9-TA cells.

The assay was optimized using MDA-MB-231 cells. These dCas9-TA MDA-MB-231 cells are available from Cellecta to use in the assay as a positive control (see Additional Required Materials). Some protocol optimization may be needed based on the growth characteristics of your cells. If a negative control is also desired, the assay should be run with the parental cell line for the dCas9-TA cells.

Day 0

1. Quickly thaw the CaT-A and CaT-B lentiviral particles in a water bath at 37°C. Transfer the thawed particles to a laminar flow hood, gently mix by rotation, inversion, or gentle vortexing, and keep on ice. Unused reagent can be aliquoted, refrozen at -80°C, and used again for subsequent experiments.

2. Suspend dCas9-TA cells in growth medium supplemented with 1X Transduction Reagent, at a density of ca. 100,000 cells/ml.

> **Note:** This cell density was calculated for MDA-MB-231 cells. Depending on cell size and growth, you may need to use a different concentration and correspondingly-sized plate. As a rule of thumb, cells should be transduced at a density such that they would become confluent in ~48 hours. For the assay, you should plate at least 100,000 cells.

3. Aliquot 1 ml of cell suspension (100,000 cells) into each of 2 wells of a 12-well plate.

4. Add 20 µl of CaT-A virus into one well and 20 µl of CaT-B virus into the other well, and then mix and return cells to incubator.

> **Note:** For most cell lines, 20 µl of CaT viral reagents will suffice to obtain at least 30% RFP+ cells (the recommended minimum percentage of transduced cells for optimal assay sensitivity). For hard-to-transduce cell lines, more virus might be needed. If in doubt, it is recommended to set up two sets of transductions with 20 µl of CaT-A and CaT-B as described above, and 60 µl of each in the second transductions. For the final calculation, use the cell population which has closest to 50% RFP+ cells on Day 4. A control lentiviral vector may be used before running the assay to test the transduction efficiency of your cells (see Additional Required Materials).

Days 1-3

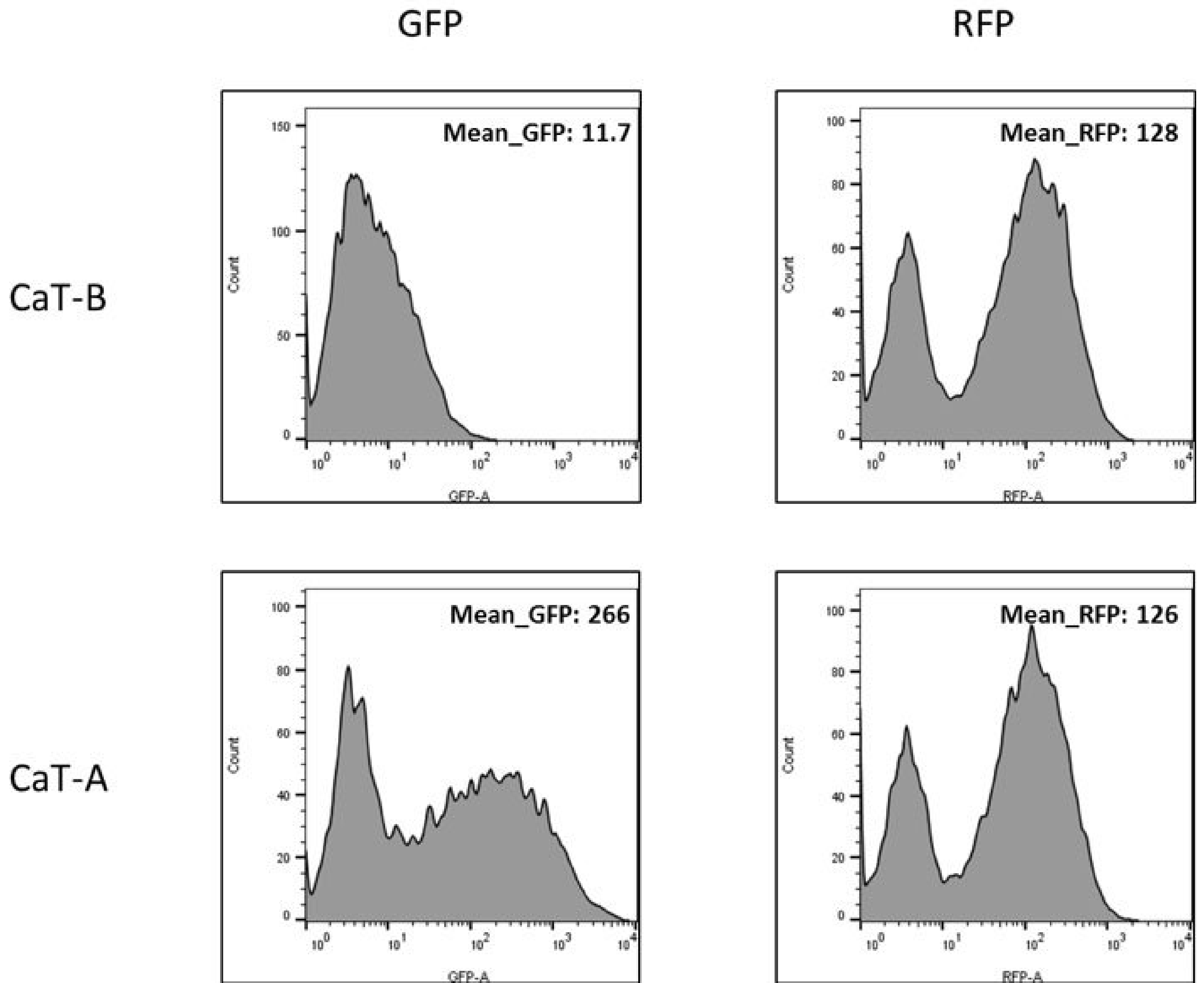
Exchange medium with fresh growth medium and grow cells under standard conditions for 3 days. Passage cells as needed. Cells should not become confluent.

Day 4

1. Analyze cells by flow cytometry, using settings below:

> **Channel 1:** excitation 488nM, emission 530/20nm (GFP)
> **Channel 2:** excitation 561nM, emission 590/20nm (RFP)

2. Use flow sorting software to calculate the mean GFP and mean RFP intensity for both CaT-A and CaT-B transduced cells, and then calculate the relative GFP/RFP intensity for each sample (normalized GFP intensity).



Last modified: 2017/05/26

4.2. dCas9-TA Activity Calculation

The fold increase in activation of the UbiC promoter by dCas9-TA is calculated as the ratio between the normalized GFP intensity of CaT-A cells and CaT-B cells.

Below is an example calculation based on positive control MDA-MB-231-dCas9-VPH cells (see Additional Required Materials to obtain this cell line):

	Mean_GFP	Mean_RFP	Normalized GFP (GFP/RFP)
CaT-A Cells	266	126	266 / 126 = 2.111

CaT-B Cells	11.7	128	11.7 / 128 = 0.091

> **dCas9-TA induced fold induction = 2.111 / 0.091 = 23.1 fold**

As an additional negative control (optional), the parental cell line of the dCas9-TA cells can be transduced with CaT-A and CaT-B viruses. For cells without dCas9-TA, the fold activation should be close to 1.

Last modified: 2019/01/10

5. Technical Support

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For the latest technical news and updates, visit Cellecta's blog at: https://www.cellecta.com/blog-news/

Last modified: 2017/05/08

6. Safety Guidelines

The HIV-based lentivector system is designed to maximize its biosafety features, which include:

- A deletion in the enhancer of the U3 region of 3'ΔLTR ensures self-inactivation of the lentiviral construct after transduction and integration into genomic DNA of the target cells.
- The RSV promoter upstream of 5'LTR in the lentivector allows efficient Tat-independent production of lentiviral RNA, reducing the number of genes from HIV-1 that are used in this system.
- Number of lentiviral genes necessary for packaging, replication and transduction is reduced to three (gag, pol, rev). The corresponding proteins are expressed from different plasmids lacking packaging signals and share no significant homology to any of the expression lentivectors, pVSV-G expression vector, or any other vector to prevent generation of recombinant replication-competent virus.
- None of the HIV-1 genes (gag, pol, rev) will be present in the packaged lentiviral genome, as they are expressed from packaging plasmids lacking packaging signal—therefore, the lentiviral particles generated are replication-incompetent.
- Lentiviral particles will carry only a copy of your expression construct.

Despite the above safety features, use of HIV-based vectors falls within NIH Biosafety Level 2 criteria. For a description of laboratory biosafety level criteria, consult the Centers for Disease Control Office of Health and Safety Web site at:

> https://www.cdc.gov/biosafety/publications/bmbl5/index.htm

It is also important to check with the health and safety guidelines at your institution regarding the use of lentiviruses and follow standard microbiological practices, which include:

- Wear gloves and lab coat at all times when conducting the procedure.
- Always work with lentiviral particles in a Class II laminar flow hood.
- All procedures are performed carefully to minimize the creation of splashes or aerosols.
- Work surfaces are decontaminated at least once a day and after any spill of viable material.
- All cultures, stocks, and other regulated wastes are decontaminated before disposal by an approved decontamination method such as autoclaving. Materials to be decontaminated outside of the immediate laboratory area are to be placed in a durable, leakproof, properly marked (biohazard, infectious waste) container and sealed for transportation from the laboratory.

Last modified: 2018/06/03

7. Contact Us

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Last modified: 2019/01/10