# Improved T Cell Activation Bioassays for Development of Bispecific Antibodies and Engineered T Cell Immunotherapies

**Pete Stecha, Denise Garvin, Jim Hartnett, Frank Fan, Mei Cong and Zhi-jie Jey Cheng**

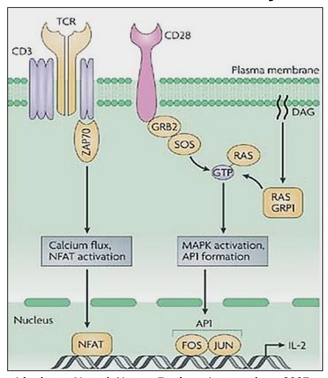
**Promega Corporation, 2800 Woods Hollow Rd, Madison, WI 53711**

## 1. Introduction

Immunotherapy aims to boost a patient's own immune system to fight disease. The strategy is aimed at inducing, strengthening or engineering T cell responses have emerged as promising approaches for the treatment of cancer and autoimmune disease.

Here we describe a platform of T cell activation bioassays for the development of CD3 bispecific antibodies and engineered T cell immunotherapies. Specifically, we developed two bioluminescent reporter-based bioassays to measure T cell activation via TCR/CD3 or TCR/CD3 plus CD28 co-stimulation.

**T Cell Activation Pathways**




Lineberry-N et al. Nature Reviews Immunology 2007

**TCR/CD3 (NFAT) effector cells:** Jurkat cells engineered with an NFAT-RE driving luciferase expression. Responds to TCR/CD3, but not CD28 stimulation.

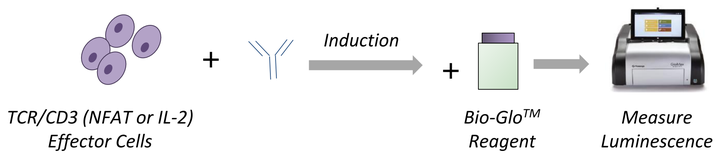
NFAT-RE — *luciferase*

**TCR/CD3 (IL-2) effector cells:** Jurkat cells engineered with an IL-2 promoter driving luciferase expression. Responds to TCR/CD3 and CD28 stimulation.

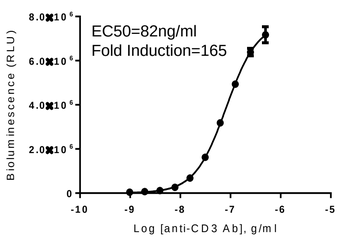
IL-2 promoter — *luciferase*

## 2. TCR/CD3 (NFAT or IL-2) Effector Cells Respond to TCR/CD3 Stimulation

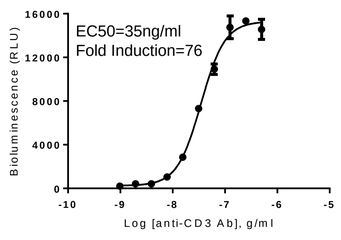
**T Cell Activation Protocol**




**TCR/CD3 (NFAT)**

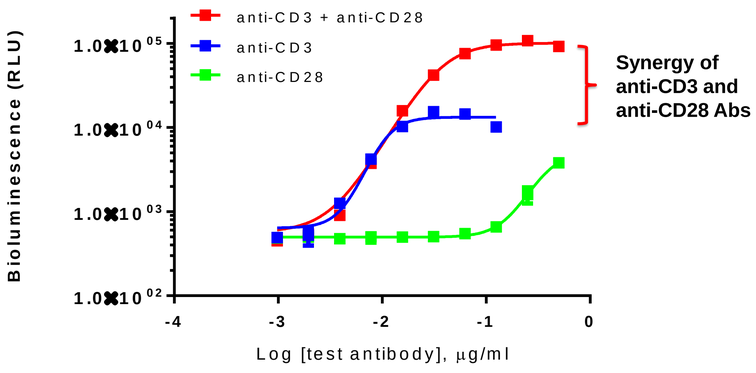



**TCR/CD3 (IL-2)**




TCR/CD3 (NFAT) (**Left**) or TCR/CD3 (IL-2) (**Right**) effector cells were stimulated with increasing concentrations of an anti-CD3 antibody and secondary crosslinking antibody.

## 3. TCR/CD3 and/or CD28 Co-stimulation Measured using TCR/CD3 (IL-2) Effector Cells



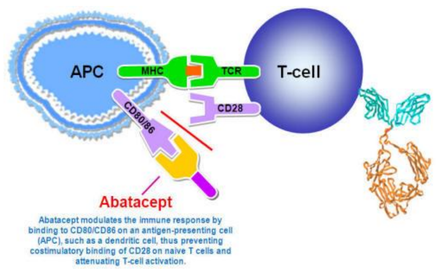

**anti-CD3 + anti-CD28 Abs**
- EC50=36ng/ml
- Fold Induction=230

**anti-CD3 Ab:**
- EC50=11ng/ml
- Fold Induction=31

**anti-CD28 Ab:**
- EC50=>368ng/ml
- Fold Induction=8

TCR/CD3 (IL-2) effector cells were stimulated with increasing concentrations of anti-CD28, anti-CD3 or a combination of anti-CD3+anti-CD28 Abs, as indicated.

## 4. Abatacept Inhibits CD28 Co-stimulation in TCR/CD3 (IL-2) Effector Cells



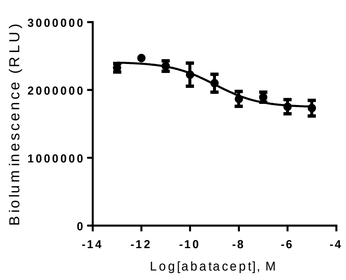

**Experimental Design**

(1) TCR/CD3 (NFAT or IL-2) effector cells are incubated with Raji (CD80/86$^+$) target cells.

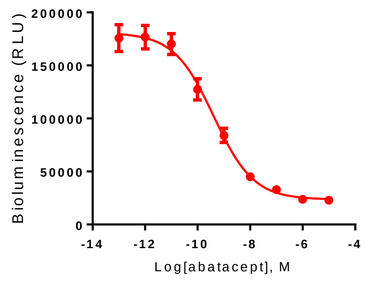
(2) T cell activation is induced via crosslinked anti-CD3 Ab and CD28 engagement by its ligand CD80/86 expressed on the Raji target cells.

(3) Addition of a CTLA-4/IgG fusion protein (Abatacept) binds CD80/86 and inhibits CD28-mediated T cell activation.

**TCR/CD3 (NFAT)**



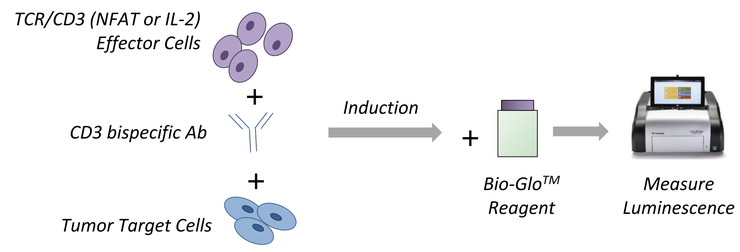

**TCR/CD3 (IL-2)**




Increasing concentrations of Abatacept were added to either TCR/CD3 (NFAT) or TCR/CD3 (IL-2) effector cells, as indicated. Abatacept induced a significant decrease in TCR-mediated luciferase activity in TCR/CD3 (IL-2) effector cells compared to TCR/CD3 (NFAT) effector cells. This is expected because CD28 functions independently of the NFAT response element (see Introduction).

## 5. Analysis of CD3xCD19 Bispecific Antibody Blinatumomab Activity

**Assay Protocol for Measuring CD3 Bispecific Antibody Activity**

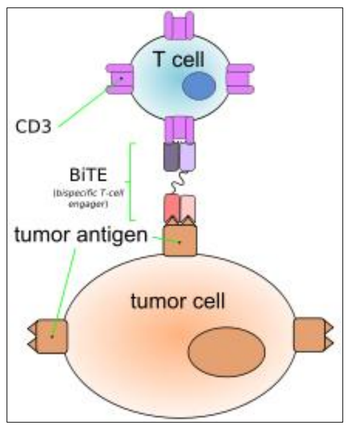



**Experimental Design**

(1) TCR/CD3 (NFAT or IL-2) effector cells are incubated with increasing concentrations of a CD3 bispecific Ab

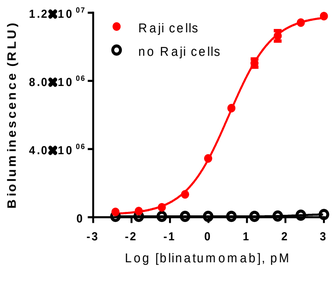
(2) The bispecific Ab simultaneously binds to TCR/CD3 on the effector cells and tumor antigen on the target cells

(3) Bispecific Ab binding stimulates IL-2 or NFAT luciferase activity

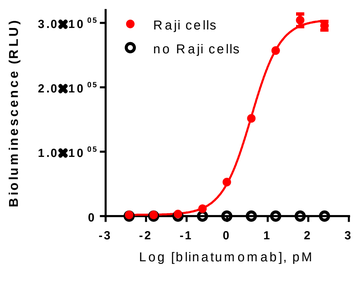



Blinatumomab induced a dose-dependent increase in luciferase activities in both TCR/CD3 (IL-2) and TCR/CD3 (NFAT) effector cells in the presence of Raji (CD19+) target cells. No response was detected in the absence of Raji (CD19+) target cells.

**TCR/CD3 (NFAT)**




**TCR/CD3 (IL-2)**




## 6. Assay Qualification with Blinatumomab: Assay Precision, Accuracy, and Linearity

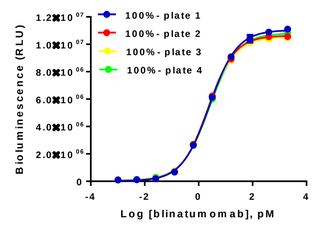
**Accuracy and Intermediate Precision (N = 6)**

**Assay Qualification Design:**
Two analysts
Three days
Four plates per day
- 100% vs 50%
- 100% vs 75%
- 100% vs 150%
- 100% vs 200%

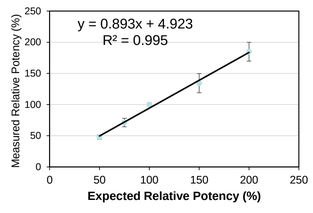
Data shown are generated using TCR/CD3 (NFAT) effector cells, binatumomab, and Raji (CD19+) target cells.

| Expected Relative Potency | Assay | Analyst | Measured Relative Potency % | Mean % | SD% | Accuracy Recovery % | Precision RSD % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 50% | 1 | 1 | 45.3 | 47.8 | 3.6 | 95.7 | 7.6 |
| | 2 | 1 | 45.0 | | | | |
| | 3 | 1 | 45.5 | | | | |
| | 4 | 2 | 46.2 | | | | |
| | 5 | 2 | 52.2 | | | | |
| | 6 | 2 | 52.8 | | | | |
| 75% | 1 | 1 | 62.2 | 71.2 | 6.8 | 95.0 | 9.5 |
| | 2 | 1 | 73.9 | | | | |
| | 3 | 1 | 63.3 | | | | |
| | 4 | 2 | 78.4 | | | | |
| | 5 | 2 | 75.9 | | | | |
| | 6 | 2 | 73.6 | | | | |
| 150% | 1 | 1 | 144.5 | 134.4 | 15.5 | 89.6 | 11.5 |
| | 2 | 1 | 143.5 | | | | |
| | 3 | 1 | 121.4 | | | | |
| | 4 | 2 | 108.8 | | | | |
| | 5 | 2 | 143.4 | | | | |
| | 6 | 2 | 144.7 | | | | |
| 200% | 1 | 1 | 174.9 | 184.8 | 15.0 | 92.4 | 8.1 |
| | 2 | 1 | 195.5 | | | | |
| | 3 | 1 | 179.8 | | | | |
| | 4 | 2 | 162.0 | | | | |
| | 5 | 2 | 198.9 | | | | |
| | 6 | 2 | 198.0 | | | | |
| | | | | | Overall | 93.2 | 9.2 |

**Repeatability (%CV) = 3.01%**

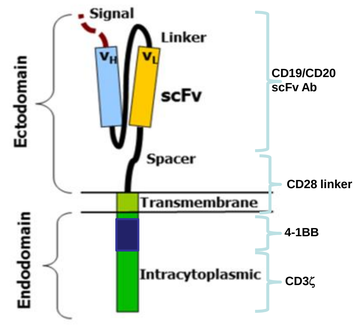



**Linearity and Range ($R^2$=0.995)**

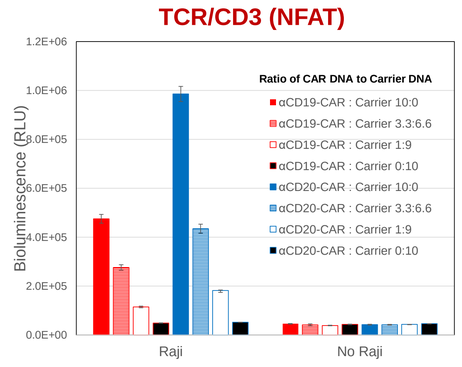



## 7. Measurement of CAR-T Cell Activity

**CAR-T Design**




**TCR/CD3 (NFAT)**




TCR/CD3 (NFAT) effector cells were transiently transfected with increasing amounts of DNA for anti-CD19- or anti-CD20-chimeric antigen receptors (CD19/CARs or CD20/CARs). The resulted CAR-T effector cells were incubated in the presence or absence of Raji (CD19/CD20+) target cells. Luciferase activity was detected from CAR-T effector cells in the presence of Raji cells, but not from CAR-T effector cells alone.

***Similar data were generated using TCR/CD3 (IL-2) effector cells (data not shown)***

## 8. Conclusions

We have developed a platform of T cell activation bioassays that incorporate a bioluminescent reporter-based readout of T cell activation via **NFAT** or **IL-2 promoter**.

These assays reflect the **Mechanism of Action (MoA)** of biologics designed to engage and stimulate T cell activation to attack target disease cells, and provide **consistent and reliable** measurement of **potency** of pathway activation for **anti-CD3 bispecific Ab** and **CAR-T cell** activity.

**Easy-to-implement** with a rapid and convenient workflow that is amenable to standard 96-well and 384-well plate formats. All assays can be used in **"thaw-and-use"** cell format, no cell culture required and are suitable for development into potency, stability, and **NAb assays**.





Corresponding author: Jey.Cheng@promega.com