Pharmacophore Constraints in GOLD

Constraints are used to include in a docking experiment any known \textit{(a priori)} information about the protein-ligand system. Constraint-driven docking has also been shown to improve the results of a docking calculation when docking a non-native ligand into a protein.

GOLD includes several types of constraints that can be applied to a protein, protein ensemble or to a protein-ligand system (see Setting Constraints in the \textbf{GOLD User Guide}). The latest constraint implemented in GOLD and developed with Astex Therapeutics Ltd. is the pharmacophore constraint. A pharmacophore constraint rewards docking poses when specific regions of the binding site are occupied by specific types of ligand atoms (for example, H-bond donor or acceptor, ring centre).

When using pharmacophore constraints GOLD will be biased towards finding solutions in which the specified constraint is satisfied. However, such a solution is not guaranteed, i.e. it is not possible to force a constraint to be satisfied in the final solution.

In this tutorial we will learn how to set and to use pharmacophore constraints to reproduce the binding mode of a ligand in a small secondary pocket in the protein binding site.

The files to perform this workshop are provided in this \textbf{folder}. 
Case Study

Introduction

Cyclin-dependent kinase 2 (CDK2) is an important protein kinase required for promoting the cell division cycle and for successful progression through S and G2 phases. This role in the cell cycle progression has led to an active search of small molecule compounds inhibiting this enzyme as potential anticancer drugs.

Many studies have been published that describe various CDK inhibitors which mimic the ATP by targeting the hinge region and the hydrophobic adenine region of the CDK2 binding site. They bind by hydrophobic interactions and by forming hydrogen bonds with the kinase, especially with the backbone of Glu81 and Leu83 in the structure of the apoenzyme (Figure 1).

Many structures of CDK2 in complex with different types of inhibitors have been deposited in the Protein Data Bank (PDB). Among them, of particular interest are the oxindole-based, imidazo[1,2-α]pyridines and imidazo[1,2-b]pyridazines derivates.

These compounds, in addition to the common features of a CDK2 inhibitor, exploit a particular non-conserved region in the active site that provides selectivity for CDK2 over the other kinases and other members of CDK family. The selectivity is provided by the presence of sulfonyl or sulphonamide group that positions to interact with Asp86 or Lys89 respectively on the top edge of the binding site adjacent to a phenyl ring (Phe82) that packs into a small secondary hydrophobic pocket above the hinge region.

In this workshop we are going to use GOLD to reproduce the binding site of one of these CDK2 selective ligand, LS3 (3-[(2,2-dioxido-1,3-dihydro-2-benzothien-5-YL)amino]methylene)-5-(1,3-oxazol-5-YL)-1,3-dihydro-2H-Indol-2-one) in the CDK2 binding site. We will make use of pharmacophore constraints to optimise the docking poses of LS3.
Provided input files:

- **1KE7_protein.mol2**, CDK2 protein coordinates derived from the crystallographic structure of CDK2 in complex with LS3 inhibitor. The protein structure has already been set up in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of protein input files (see Setting Up the Protein(s)). The original PDB file 1ke7.pdb has also been provided should you wish to set up the protein for yourself.

- **LS3_ideal.sdf**, LS3 inhibitor coordinates that will be used for the docking. LS3_ideal.sdf represents the idealised version of LS3, downloaded from the PDB, which bears no resemblance to the docked conformation. The ligand has been set up in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of input files (see Setting Up the Protein(s) and Setting Up Ligands).

- **reference_LS3.mol2**, this represents the coordinates of LS3 in complex with CDK2. We will use this structure as reference to calculate the RMSD of the docked solution compared to the reference binding mode.

The example used here mimics the situation where a researcher has a crystal structure of a protein and want to explore the binding site and/or secondary pockets of the binding site by rewording ligand structures that interact with such pockets.
Docking with GOLD without constraints

1. Open Hermes and click on File and select Open... from the pull-down menu to load 1KE7_protein.mol2. The loaded structure will be displayed in Hermes 3D view and listed in Molecule Explorer window in the left-hand panel.

2. Click on GOLD from the top-menu bar and select Wizard....

3. In the GOLD Setup window, select 1KE7 as protein to use by activating the tick-box adjacent to 1KE7. This will add a tab corresponding to this protein to the right of the Global Options tab, labelled with the name taken from the protein file. Click Next.

4. The protein is already set-up for docking (e.g. hydrogen atoms were added, water molecules removed, the ligand removed from the binding site and the protonation of key residues in the binding site checked); click Next to move to the next step of the Wizard to define the binding site.
Defining the Binding Site

5. In the GOLD Setup window, in the Define the binding site step, select the Point - select atoms to define a centroid or edit XYZ radio button. We will use a set of coordinates to define the binding site. Enter -8.79212, 50.4067 and 13.7064 in the corresponding X,Y,Z text-boxes, then click on the View button to visualise those atoms included in the binding site definition. Carbon atoms outside of the binding site will turn purple. Switch off the display of H-atoms using the Show hydrogens tick box in the Hermes toolbar.

6. Leave the default binding site radius of 10 Å around this point. This radius should be large enough to contain all possible binding modes of the LS3 ligand.

7. A cavity detection algorithm, LIGSITE, is used to restrict the region of interest to concave, solvent-accessible surfaces. Ensure that cavity detection is enabled by activating the Detect cavity - restrict atom selection to solvent-accessible surface tick-box. Click Next to continue setting up the calculation.

8. At this point you are given the option to load a configuration file template. These templates can be used to load recommended settings for a number of different types of docking protocols (see GOLD User Guide). In this example, we will specify all docking settings manually.

9. Click Next to proceed to the Select ligands step in the GOLD wizard.
Selecting Ligand for Docking

To proceed with the GOLD setup, we need to specify the ligand that we want to dock into the protein.

The idealised version of the ligand LS3 (with no resemblance to the binding conformation) is available in the tutorial folder (LS3_ideal.sdf). As with the protein file, the ligand has been set up in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of input file.

10. Specify the LS3_ideal.sdf ligand by clicking Add at the bottom of the GOLD Setup window. The LS3_ideal.sdf is now listed under Ligand File.

You also have the option to supply the file containing the reference ligand (i.e. the ligand in the conformation it adopts in its native binding site), which will be used to perform an automated RMSD calculation with respect to the reference ligand conformation. For each GOLD solution, the resultant RMSD value will be written out to the files containing the fitness function ranking, i.e. the ligand rank file (.rnk) and bestranking.lst file.

11. To specify the ligand reference file either enter the path and the filename of the file in the Reference ligand box, or click on the … button and use the file selection window to choose the reference_LS3.mol2 file provided in the tutorial folder. This is the native conformation of LS3 in complex with the CDK2 protein. Click Next to proceed to Choose a fitness function.

12. In the Choose a fitness function, click on More >> button. Ensure that the default CHEMPLP scoring function is set. In addition, untick the Allow early termination tick-box, so that the 10 GA runs will lead to 10 docking poses. Click Next to proceed to GA search options.
13. In GA search options, the user has access to a number of parameters that control the precise operation of the genetic algorithm. Click on the More button. Ensure that automatic GA settings are enabled (i.e. the Automatic radio button is selected) and that Search efficiency is set to 100%. This will make GOLD automatically calculate an optimal number of operations for a given ligand, thereby making the most efficient use of the search time.

The criteria used by GOLD to determine the optimal GA parameter settings for a given ligand include: the number of rotatable bonds in the ligand, ligand flexibility (i.e. number of flexible ring corners, flippable nitrogens, etc.), the volume of the protein binding site, and the number of water molecules considered during docking. Details of the exact settings used will be given in the ligand log file gold_ligand_m1.log.

14. Click Next to proceed to the Finish window.

15. Before proceeding to run GOLD, in the Wizard step 8: Finish basic GOLD configuration, click on Advanced. This will give the access to more advanced options for docking available outside the main Wizard.
16. Select **Output Options** under **Global Options**. In the tab labelled **File Format Options**, activate the **Mol2** radio button adjacent to **Output file format**. This means the docking solutions will be written out in **MOL2** format.

17. Click the ... button next to **Output directory** and either browse to or create a directory (e.g. `no_constraints`) where you have write permissions; this is where the GOLD output files will be written.

18. Click on **Ligand Flexibility** under **Global Options** and activate:
   - **Flip pyramidal N** check-box to allow pyramidal (i.e. non-planar sp³) nitrogen atoms of the ligand to invert during docking;
   - **Flip amide bonds** check-box to allow amides, thioamides, ureas, and thioureas in the ligand to flip between cis and trans conformations during docking;
   - **flip ring corners** check-box to allow GOLD to perform a limited conformational search of cyclic systems by allowing free corners of the rings in the ligand to flip above and below the plane of their neighbouring atoms.

19. We have now finished setting up our docking, so click on the **Run GOLD** button at the bottom of the GOLD interface. You will be presented with a **Finish GOLD Configuration** window containing **Save Files** options.
20. Ensure the **GOLD conf file** box is ticked in the **Save Files** section of the *Finish GOLD Configuration* window, and type in the filename box to rename the conf file as `no_constraints.conf`.

21. No edits were made to the protein therefore you can leave the **Protein(s)** check-box unticked. Click **Save** to start the docking run.

22. As the job progresses output will be displayed in several tabs in the *Run GOLD* window. Note that the docking calculation will take a few minutes to complete.

23. Once the job is complete, load the docking results into Hermes by clicking on the **View Solutions** button in the *Run GOLD* window.

### Analysing Docking Results

1. Return to the Hermes 3D view and look at the **Docking Solutions** tab in the *Molecule Explorer*. Use the Up and Down arrows on your keyboard to change between docking solutions.

2. Click on **File > Open…** to load the structure of LS3 in its native conformation within its native CDK2 protein (*reference_LS3.mol2*). We will use it to evaluate if GOLD was able to reproduce the binding mode of LS3 in complex with CDK2.

3. In the **Docking Solutions** tab, you will notice that the docking solutions are given in their docked order with their corresponding fitness score listed under the column headed **PLP.Fitness**. Order the solutions based on the fitness score by clicking on this **PLP.Fitness** header to list the highest scoring pose at the top of the list.

*Please note:* Due to the non-deterministic nature of GOLD, your results may vary from those described in this tutorial. In addition, the precise values of scoring functions terms in your docking will differ from the ones illustrated here.
4. We have obtained 10 docking solutions, as expected because we deactivated the Allow early termination mode.

5. You will see that none of the solutions found by GOLD perfectly reproduces the binding mode of LS3. Comparing the reference crystallographic structure of LS3 (with pink carbon atoms) and the best ranked docking pose (with green carbon atoms) you will see that GOLD fails to reproduce the orientation of the thiophene portion of the benzothiophene 2,2-dioxide moiety.

6. Use the scroll-bar in the Docking Solutions tab to have access to “Reference.RMSD” column. The best ranked docking solution shows an RMSD of 2.48 Å to the crystallographic pose of LS3.

GOLD tries to place the sulfonyl group toward the surface of the CDK2 binding site, whereas in the crystallographic binding pose of LS3, the sulfonyl moiety of the benzothiophene ring is positioned such that it interacts with Asp86 on the top edge of the binding site adjacent to a phenyl ring (Phe82) that packs into a small secondary hydrophobic pocket above the hinge region (See Figure 3).

In the next part of this tutorial we will make use of a pharmacophore constraint to try and reproduce the binding mode of LS3 in complex with CDK2. The pharmacophore constraint will bias GOLD towards rewarding docking solutions with the benzothiophene ring of LS3 located in the secondary hydrophobic pocket.

Figure 3. LS3 ligand in its binding pose. Hydrogen bond interactions are shown in green. The residues involved in the secondary hydrophobic pocket (Asp86, Lys89 and Phe82) are displayed as capped sticks.
Docking with Pharmacophore Constraints

Pharmacophore constraints in GOLD reward occupation of specific regions of the binding site by specific types of ligand atoms. A contribution (determined according to a user-specified weight) is added to the score for each specified pharmacophore constraint if the distance between the pharmacophore point and an atom of the same type in the ligand is less than the specified radius of the sphere. If a pharmacophore constraint point is not matched in the ligand, it will not be used during scoring.

Setting Pharmacophore Constraints

1. If you still have your docking results loaded, click on File > Close All Files to clear the Hermes 3D view.
2. From Hermes top-level menu click on GOLD > Setup and Run a Docking > Load Existing to load the previous no_constrains.conf configuration file.
3. Click on the “>” symbol next to Constraints in the list of Global Options to open a list of available constraints.
4. Select Pharmacophore from the Constraints list to set the requirement for the pharmacophore constraints.
   Five types of pharmacophore points can be defined: H-bond acceptor, H-bond donor, H-bond donor or acceptor, Aromatic ring centre and Ring centre. For each pharmacophore point specified, a sphere is placed at an explicitly-defined position within the binding site. For this tutorial, we are going to define an H-bond acceptor pharmacophore constraint.
5. Select H-bond acceptor from the list of available pharmacophore type. Then Click on Define Pharmacophore Point. An Edit Sphere pop-up window will allow to generate the pharmacophore sphere based on:
   - Centroid of protein subset
   - Centroid of atoms selected in 3D viewer
   - x,y,z coordinates
6. Click on **Add Subset** to position the pharmacophore sphere based on a **Centroid of protein subset**. This will open a Select atoms in 1KE7 pop-up window.

7. From the **Molecule Explorer** window click on “>” adjacent to 1KE7, then on the “>” adjacent to **Chains** and then “>” adjacent to A to access all residues in the protein. Using **CTRL+left** click of the mouse select ASP86 and LYS89 in the list of residues. Right-click in the **Molecule Explorer** window and click **Select** from the right-click menu.

8. The atoms of the selected residues will be loaded in the Select atoms in 1KET pop-up window. Change the **Protein subset name** from the default Selection 1 to e.g. ASP86_LYS89 then click **Save** and then **Close**.

9. The H-bond acceptor pharmacophore sphere will be placed based on the ASP86_LYS89 protein subset. Write **Acceptor** in the **Name** text-box and increase the radius of the pharmacophore sphere to 3 Å in the **Radius** text-box of the **Edit Sphere** window. This means that a contribution for the fulfilment of this pharmacophore constraint is added to the score if the distance between the pharmacophore point and an H-bond acceptor atom in the ligand is less than the specified 3 Å radius of the sphere. Then click **Done**.

10. This will update the **Pharmacophore** window with the coordinates of the H-bond acceptor pharmacophore point just defined.

11. The pharmacophore weight must also be specified. This is the value that will be added to the fitness score for matched ligand atoms satisfying the constraint. Leave the **Pharmacophore Weight** to the default value of 10.

12. Ensure the **Function Shape** is set to **Block**.

13. From here, click **Add** to create the pharmacophore constraint. An acceptor pharmacophore constraint will then be added to the list of constraints.
14. Now we are going to set a Ring centre pharmacophore constraint. To do so, first click **Reset**, then select **Ring centre** from the list of available pharmacophore types. Then click on **Define Pharmacophore Point**.

15. This time select the **coordinates** check-box and type -10.5647, 45.3358 and 7.6280 in the xyz text-boxes to define the coordinates of the pharmacophore ring centre. Name the pharmacophore point **Ring_centre** and define the pharmacophore radius to 1.5 Å. Then click **Done**.

16. Leave the pharmacophore weight and function shape as the defaults and click **Add** to create the **Ring centre** pharmacophore constraint.

17. Select **Output Options** from the GOLD Setup window. Click the … button next to **Output directory** and either browse to or create an appropriate directory, e.g. **pharmacophore_constraints** to which you have write permissions; this is where the GOLD output files will be written.

18. We have now finished setting up our docking, so click on the **Run GOLD** button at the bottom of the GOLD interface. You will be presented with a **Finish GOLD Configuration** window containing **Save Files** options.

19. Ensure the **GOLD conf file** box is ticked in the **Save Files** section of **Finish GOLD Configuration** window and type in the filename box to rename the conf file as **pharmacophore_constraints.conf**. No edits were made to the protein therefore you can leave the **Protein(s)** check-box unticked. Click **Save** to run GOLD.

20. Once the GOLD job is complete, load the results into Hermes using the **View Solutions** button.
Analysing Docking Results with Pharmacophore Constraints

1. Return to the Hermes 3D view and look at the Docking Solutions tab in Molecule Explorer. Use the Up and Down arrows on your keyboard to change between the 10 docking solutions.

2. Click on File > Open... to load the structure of LS3 in its native conformation within its native CDK2 protein (reference_LS3.mol2). We will use it to evaluate if GOLD was able to reproduce the binding mode of LS3 in complex with CDK2.

3. In the Docking Solutions tab, order the solutions based on the fitness score by clicking on this PLP.Fitness header to list the highest scoring pose at the top of the list.

   Please note: Due to the non-deterministic nature of GOLD your results may vary from those described in this tutorial. In addition, the precise values of scoring functions terms in your docking will differ from the ones illustrated here.

4. You will notice that the fitness score of the best ranked docking pose (i.e. 73.86 in our results) is higher than the fitness score of the best ranked docking pose without pharmacophore constraints (e.g. 62.09 in the previous run).

5. Click on the best ranked docking pose to load it in the Hermes 3D view. This time, GOLD is able to reproduce the binding mode of LS3 by placing the benzothiophene 2,2-dioxide moiety within the pharmacophore spheres used to define the secondary hydrophobic pocket of CDK2.

6. Use the scroll-bar in the Docking Solutions tab to display the “Reference.RMSD” column. The best ranked docking solution shows an RMSD of 0.85 Å against the crystallographic pose of LS3. This RMSD is considerably lower than the previous docking run performed without pharmacophore constraints (2.48 Å).
7. Go in your specified output folder (e.g. `pharmacophore_constraints`) and inspect the `gold_LS3_ideal_m1.log` file (using any text editor) to see if GOLD has rewarded the best ranked docking pose.

This file gives the total fitness score and a breakdown of the fitness into its constituent energy terms for each docking run performed on the ligand. A constraint scoring term $DE(\text{con})$ is listed for each docking. If a solution predicted by GOLD satisfies the two pharmacophore constraints, then the user-defined pharmacophore weight (here, value of 10) for each pharmacophore constraint (see step 11 of Setting Pharmacophore Constraints) is added to the fitness score.

8. The `gold_soln_LS3_ideal_m1_1.mol2`, corresponding to the best ranked docking pose in our case (you may have different results), satisfies only one pharmacophore constraint. Therefore, a $DE(\text{con})$ contribution of 10 is added to reward this solution.

9. An alternative way to access the contribution of these constraints to the fitness score of each docking solution is to navigate through the Docking Solutions tab in the Molecule Explorer window. You can use the scroll-bar to access the `PLP.Constraint` column that shows the contribution of the constraint(s) to the fitness score. The best ranked docking pose satisfies both pharmacophore constraints (with a constraint contribution of 20) whilst most of the lower ranked docking poses do not satisfy both constraints (with a constraint contribution of 10, in our case).
Conclusions

- A docking calculation with GOLD can be guided by the inclusion of pharmacophore type constraints in an active site. This is particularly useful if information about how a ligand binds to a protein is already available and in other special cases where docking should be biased around an important area of the binding site.
- The inclusion of pharmacophore constraints in the docking calculation of LS3 in CDK2 significantly improved the docking results, with the RMSD obtained between the best ranking docking pose and the crystallographic pose of the ligand being much lower when implementing these pharmacophore constraints.