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Large scale purification of linear plasmid DNA for efficient high throughput cloning

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1	Technical Report
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3	Large scale purification of linear plasmid DNA for
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In this report we describe a rapid, simple, and efficient method for large
scale purification of linear plasmid DNA to answer demand from high throughput
gene cloning. The process is based on the separation of the linear vector from
small DNA fragments by anion exchange chromatography. Gene cloning
experiments by restriction/ligation or the In-Fusion TM technique confirmed the
high quality of the linearized vector as 100% of the genes were successfully
cloned.

1 Introduction

Investigation of large numbers of proteins requires high throughput (HTP)
gene cloning approaches to prepare constructs that can be used for comprehensive
structural and functional analysis of proteins. Most methods do not require a
ligation step and these include Gateway cloning [1], Ligation Independent
Cloning (LIC) [2, 3] or In-Fusion™ [4], even though classical ligation-dependent
cloning has also been adapted to HTP [5].
Restriction/ligation and In-Fusion™ techniques are popular as they do not
require additional base pairs that convert into additional amino acids at the protein
extremities. The former method may be limited by the availability of unique
restriction sites. The latter one is more flexible as it allows in vitro assembly
through homologous recombination of fragments, providing that they include
extremities matching the sequences of the cloning site [4]. In that way, PCR
products can be cloned into any vector at any site of linearization. The success
rate of these techniques is strongly dependent on the quality of the linear vector.
For HTP approaches, the production of large batches of high quality linear vector
is of paramount importance. Small-scale purification is often based on gel
electrophoresis and spin column [6, 7], two steps that are incompatible with the
production of large amount of DNA.
Plasmid DNA purification [8] has been the subject of many studies,
allowing large scale and high grade plasmid preparation [9-13], including the use
of anion exchange chromatography [14-17]. The separation of multiple small
restriction fragments by anion exchange chromatography on FPLC columns was

1	previously described [18-20], showing a correlation between the size of linear
2	DNA fragments and the salt concentration needed for elution. For a given size,
3	substantial retardation of the d(A+T) rich fragments has been reported [19]. Anion
4	exchange chromatography has also been used for plasmid adsorption, purification
5	and quantification [9, 15, 21]. We report here the use of anion exchange
6	chromatography for the large-scale purification of linear cloning vector and
7	separation from small restriction fragments. This application was first suggested
8	by Westman et al. [18], but to our knowledge, has never been described in the
9	literature.
10	Our protocol has been developed using two expression vectors specifically
11	constructed for an automated HTP approach to test the influence of purification
12	tags on the protein behavior: That is the presence or absence of His-tag for
13	soluble proteins, and of the His-Mistic-tag for membrane proteins. Membrane
14	proteins constitute up to 30% of all proteins [22, 23] and are involved in
15	numerous cellular processes. There are two bottlenecks in membrane protein
16	structural analysis: high-yield protein production and crystallization. Recently, a
17	novel membrane-associated protein discovered in Bacillus subtilis, Mistic, has
18	been shown to enhance the expression of recombinant membrane proteins in E .
19	coli, when fused to their N-terminus [24-26].
20	This article describes the purification of linearized expression vectors in
21	sufficient quantity and quality to efficiently perform hundreds of gene cloning in
22	parallel. This method offers a rapid and simple way to standard molecular

biology laboratories to prepare linear plasmid DNA on a large scale, and is a good

- 1 alternative to multiple small scale preparations or expensive preparation from
- 2 commercial suppliers.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 pLIM13 and	pLIM14	plasmids for	r high t	throughput o	cloning
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- 4 derived from the commercial pET41c (Novagen) (Complete plasmid sequences
- 5 are available upon request). For pLIM13, the toxic *ccdB* expression cassette [27]
- 6 was PCR amplified from pDEST17 (Invitrogen) and inserted into pET41c as an
- 7 NdeI-BamHI fragment (Figure 1). For pLIM14, a synthetic gene mistic-ccdB
- 8 (Geneart) was first inserted as an *NdeI-BamHI* fragment into pET41c. The
- 9 exchange of the *XbaI-NdeI* fragment of pET41c vector for one encoding a His6-
- tag resulted in pLIM14 (Figure 1).
- These pLIM plasmids are designed so that the linearization with two
- restriction enzymes releases the toxic *ccdB* expression cassette (Figure 1).
- pLIM13 was designed to express proteins without tag, whereas pLIM14 was
- designed to express His6- or His6-Mistic-tagged proteins, depending on the
- restriction sites used to clone the corresponding genes (Figure 1).

2.2 Large scale plasmid purification

- The pLIM13 and pLIM14 plasmids were prepared as previously described
- 19 [10, 16] with some modifications. A 5 ml 2xTY + kanamycin (50 mg/L)
- overnight culture of E. coli DB3.1 strain (Invitrogen) containing pLIM13 or
- 21 pLIM14 was used to inoculate 1 L of 2xTY + kanamycin (50 mg/L) into a 3 L
- flask. The culture was grown to saturation at 25°C for 36 hours, with 200 rpm
- 23 shaking.

1	To improve yield, the culture was separated in 4 fractions (250 ml each)
2	treated in parallel. Cells were harvested by centrifugation (6200 g, 15 min, 4°C)
3	and each pellet was resuspended in 40 ml of GTE buffer (50 mM glucose, 25 mM
4	Tris/HCl pH 8, 10 mM EDTA) and 4 ml of lysozyme (25 mg/ml). After 10 min at
5	room temperature, 20 ml of a freshly prepared solution of 0.3M NaOH and 2%
6	SDS were added. The mixture was gently mixed by inverting the tubes 5 times,
7	and DNA denaturation was allowed to proceed 10 min on ice. Thirty ml of 3 M
8	potassium acetate pH 5.5 were then added and mixed thoroughly by inverting the
9	tubes 5 times, to allow the renaturation of plasmid DNA and the precipitation of
10	chromosomal DNA, SDS-protein complexes and other cellular debris. This
11	mixture was incubated 10 min on ice before centrifugation (19,000 g , 10 min).
12	Supernatants containing plasmid DNA were pooled and passed through a funnel
13	filter before the addition of RNase A to a final concentration of 50 mg/L and
14	incubation at 37°C for 20 min. Plasmid DNA was precipitated with the addition
15	of 0.6 volume of isopropanol and recovered after 20 min at room temperature by
16	centrifugation (15,000 g, 10 min). DNA pellet was washed once with 2 ml of
17	70% ethanol, dried in a vertical laminar air-flow hood, and dissolved in 5 ml of 5
18	mM Tris/HCl pH 8.5.

2.3 Large scale plasmid digestion

One hundred micrograms of plasmid DNA were digested in a 5 ml final volume in the presence of 500 µL of buffer 4 (NEB), 50 µL of BamHI HF (1000 U, NEB) and 100 μ L of NdeI (2000 U, NEB) or 100 μ L of NcoI (1000 U, NEB), at

1	37°C for 5 hours.	Prior the addition of	NaCl to a fina	l concentration of	600 mM,
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2 five µL of digestion product were analyzed by agarose gel electrophoresis.

2.4 Linear vector isolation by Mono QTM anion exchange chromatography

5 Chromatography was performed with an Äktabasic UPC apparatus (GE

6 Helthcare) and monitored at 254 nm. The DNA sample was loaded at 1ml/min

onto a Mono QTM 5/50 GL, (GE Healthcare) column equilibrated with buffer A

8 (10 mM Tris/HCl pH 8, 1 mM EDTA, 700 mM NaCl). After a wash at 0.5

9 ml/min with 10 ml of buffer A, a 64 ml linear gradient of 0 to 10% buffer B (10

mM Tris/HCl pH 8, 1 mM EDTA, 2 M NaCl) was applied at 0.15 ml/min. Peak

fractions of 0.5 ml were precipitated individually with the addition of 0.6 volume

of isopropanol. After 20 min room temperature, DNA pellets were recovered by

centrifugation (21,000 g, 10 min, 4°c), washed with 70% ethanol and redissolved

in 50 µL of 5 mM Tris/HCl pH 8.5. Two µL of these fractions were analyzed on

1% agarose gel. Fractions containing pure linear vector were pooled and assayed

in gene cloning experiments. Homogeneity and the sequence extremities of the

purified linear vector were checked by sequencing using the T7prom and T7term

18 primers.

2.5 Target genes amplification

Target genes were amplified by PCR using specific primers, designed with

22 the Vector NTI software (Invitrogen), containing 5' extensions related to the

vectors used for cloning. For pLIM13_NdeI_BamHI, the forward and the reverse

1	primer extensions	were respectively 5'-	-AAGGAGATATA <u>CATATG</u> -3'	and 5'-
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- 2 TACAGAATTCGGATCCTTA-3', for pLIM14_NdeI_BamHI, 5'-
- 3 ACCATCACCATCATATG-3' and 5'-TACAGAATTCGGATCCTTA-3' and for
- 4 pLIM14_NcoI_BamHI, 5'-
- 5 CGGGCGGTAGCCATGGGGAAAATCTGTATTTTCAGGGC-3'(containing
- 6 protease TEV site) and 5'-TACAGAATTCGGATCCTTA-3'. These extensions
- 7 allow both restriction/ligation (using the underlined restriction sites) and InFusion
- 8 methods (relying on the extended sequence complementary to the vector).
- 9 Primers were ordered at 20 µM in a 96-wells microplate (MWG). Preparation of
- 10 the 0.5 μM primers mix and of the PCR reaction was fully automated on a
- 11 Microlab Star robot (Hamilton). Reactions were performed with 100 ng of
- 12 chromosomal DNA template, 10 μL of primer mix 0.5 μM, 4 μL of dNTPs 2.5
- 13 mM, 10 μL of HF buffer 5X (Finnzyme), 0.5 μL Phusion enzyme (2U/μL,
- 14 Finnzyme) in a 50 µL volume, using a Trobot PCR machine (Biometra) with the
- following parameters: 98°C, 1 min; 30 cycles of [98°C, 30 sec; 50°C, 30 sec;
- 16 72°C, 1 min]; 72°C, 8 min.
- 17 Five μL of each PCR product were analyzed on 1% agarose gel. Satisfying
- PCR products (single or few multiple bands) were purified on a Nucleofast plate
- 19 (Macherey-Nagel) and eluted with 40 µL of water, using a Microlab Star
- automaton (Hamilton).

2.6 Cloning with the In-FusionTM Advantage System

1	Five µLof the PCR products were treated with Cloning Enhancer reagent
2	(In-Fusion TM , Clontech) according to the supplier's recommendations. The In-
3	Fusion TM reactions were performed by mixing 100 ng of linear vector with 2 μL
4	of each treated insert (3 μ L for the 3501 bp-long insert) in 10 μ L final volume.
5	After the addition of 40 μL of TE, 2.5 μL of each reaction were used to transform
6	$50 \mu\text{L}$ of NEB5α competent <i>E. coli</i> cells (Biolabs). The transformed cells were
7	pelleted by centrifugation (5200 g, 5 min) and spread onto LB (kanamycin 50
8	mg/L, glucose 10 mM) agar plates and incubated overnight at 37°C.
9	
10	2.7 Cloning by restriction/ligation
11	Forty μL of PCR products were mixed with 5 μL buffer 4 10X (NEB), 0.5
12	μL NdeI (10 U) or NcoI (5 U) and BamHI (5U) enzyme (NEB). After 2 h at
13	37°C, fragments were purified on a Nucleofast plate (Macherey-Nagel) and eluted
14	with 40 μ L of water. Two μ L of each insert were mixed with 100 ng of linear
15	vector in the presence of 1 μ L of 10X T4 DNA ligation buffer, 1 μ L of T4 DNA
16	ligase (3 U/ μ L, Promega), in a final volume of 10 μ L. After 3 hours at room
17	temperature, ligation reactions were stopped at 65°C (10 min). Five µL were used

2.8 Plasmid screening by restriction analysis

plate and incubated overnight at 37°C.

to transform 50 μ L of DH5 α competent *E. coli* cells. The transformed cells were

then pelleted before spreading on LB (kanamycin 50 mg/L, glucose 10 mM) agar

1	Isolated transformants were used to inoculate 2 ml of 2xTY (50 mg/L
2	kanamycin) medium in a 24-wells plates sealed with a porous film. Cultures were
3	grown for 20 h at 37°C with agitation (200 rpm). Cells were pelleted and
4	plasmids were prepared on a Qiagen BioRobot 8000 using the Nucleospin robot
5	96 kit (Macherey-Nagel) and eluted with 125 μL of EB buffer. Eight μL were
6	used for restriction analysis with 2.5 U of each enzyme in a final volume of 10
7	μL; profiles were analyzed on 1% agarose gel. Two positive clones for each gene
8	were sent for full length sequencing with the universal T7 prom and T7 term
9	primers (Beckman Cogenics). Sequencing with internal primers was necessary
10	for genes longer than 2 Kb.
11	for genes longer than 2 Kb.

3 Results and discussion

2	HTP cloning requires large quantities of high quality linearized vector. The
3	commonly used method of purification is preparative gel electrophoresis followed
4	by spin column extraction [6]. Both steps are poorly suited to large amounts of
5	DNA. To overcome this limitation, we have scaled up the separation of
6	restriction fragments by anion exchange chromatography [18].

3.1 Construction of expression vectors for soluble or membrane proteins

9 expression

Two expression plasmids were designed to express soluble or membrane proteins, with the same backbone vector. The pLIM13 vector allows expression of proteins without tag, whereas pLIM14 is for His6- or His6-Mistic-fusion for soluble or membrane proteins respectively. The Mistic protein from *B. subtillis* was shown to increase the yield by targeting fused proteins more efficiently to the membrane in *E. coli* [24], (F. Bernaudat, personal observations). The toxic *ccdB* gene was inserted between the restrictions sites used for linearization (Figure 1). The CcdB protein is a poison of the DNA-topoisomerase II complexes killing bacterial strains not expressing the antidote CcdA [28], or not containing the gyrA462 mutation [28, 29]. The interest of *ccdB* is to select against the parental vector in *E. coli* sensitive strains.

Digestion of pLIM13 with *NdeI* and *Bam*HI produces two fragments of 5082 bp and 311 bp. Digestion of pLIM14 with the same enzymes gives 5103 bp

and 683 bp fragments, whereas digestion with NcoI and BamHI releases 5455 bp

1	and 331 bp fragments. The larger fragments are the linearized vectors, the small
2	fragments contain the $ccdB$ gene. These digestions allow the in frame insertion of
3	any gene amplified with specific primers (see Materials and Methods and Figure
4	1).

3.2 Large scale plasmid purification

The protocol for purification of large amount of pLIM13 and pLIM14 was derived from known procedures [10, 16], and yielded 1.8 mg of each low copy vector from 1 L of the CcdB resistant DB3.1 *E. coli* strain grown in 2xTY. The purified plasmid was mostly supercoiled, with the presence of a minor nicked DNA form and no detectable RNA or protein contamination. The yield was sufficient for the preparation of 18 batches of linear vector as described below.

3.3 Large-scale linear plasmid purification by Mono \mathbf{Q}^{TM} anion exchange

15 chromatography

This procedure succeeded with the three linearized pLIM vectors. The purification of pLIM13 digested with *NdeI* and *BamHI* is presented in details below as an example.

One hundred micrograms of pLIM13 were digested and the NaCl concentration was brought to 600 mM prior to the chromatography to avoid adsorption of low charge density impurities on the Mono QTM column [15]. The advantage of a Mono QTM resin is the fast and strong binding of the DNA (Figure 2) [21].

23 2) [21]

A salt gradient was employed to displace the different nucleic acids that
should elute in order of increasing charge density [15]. The charge density of
DNA is function of its length and conformation. Long fragments, being more
folded, have higher charge densities and are eluted later. The separation was
visualized by the detection of two peaks and confirmed by the agarose gel
analysis (Figure 2). Fractions containing the linearized expression vector were
pooled. A third early peak corresponded to the elution of restriction enzymes

3.4 Quality control of linear plasmid

One hundred nanograms of each vector (pET41c, pLIM13, and pLIM14) were transformed into NEB5 α and DH5 α . In both strains, approximately one thousand transformants were obtained with pET41c and none with pLIM13 as expected due to the presence of the ccdB gene in the latter plasmid. To our surprise, thousand transformants were also obtained with the pLIM14. As ccdB is still present, we hypothesize that the normally cytosolic CcdB protein is not functional when fused to Mistic and targeted to the membrane. However, this finding allowed us to evaluate the homogeneity of the purified linear vector, as we could compare the number of transformants obtained with the native and the linearized plasmid. Linearized pLIM14 yielded no transformant showing the absence of undigested parental vector.

The quality and quantity of the linear vectors isolated by Mono QTM chromatography are suitable for high throughput cloning, even if yields vary with the vectors and the digestions. Yields after digestions and purification were 26%

- 1 (25μg), 43% (38μg) or 73% (69μg) for pLIM13_*Nde*I_*Bam*HI,
- 2 pLIM14_NdeI_BamHI and pLIM14_NcoI_BamHI, respectively. Individual
- 3 fraction precipitations and pooling are probably responsible for the loss of
- 4 material.

3.5 Efficient cloning with linear plasmid

- 7 The suitability for high throughput cloning of the purified
- 8 pLIM13_NdeI_BamHI linearized vector was tested by the insertion 24
- 9 independent genes in parallel. The gene size varied between 387 bp and 3501 bp.
- 10 Eleven genes were cloned by restriction/ligation and 13 using the In-FusionTM
- technique. Genes containing restriction sites within their sequence were treated
- by the In-FusionTM method.
- The automated PCR amplification of the 24 genes was performed with the
- 14 Phusion enzyme on a Hamilton robot. PCR products were analyzed on agarose
- gel (Figure 2) and showed the successful amplification of all the genes using the
- same PCR parameters. Purification on a Nucleofast plate eliminated primer
- dimers and allowed buffer exchange.
- Genes to be treated by ligation were first digested with the two appropriate
- 19 restriction enzymes, and purified again on Nucleofast to eliminate the short
- fragments released by the digestion. Genes destined to In-FusionTM cloning were
- 21 directly incubated with the Cloning Enhancer according the manufacturer's
- 22 recommendations.

1	With both cloning methods, 100 ng of linear vector were mixed to 2-3 μL o
2	insert. We have deliberately chosen to standardize the volume of insert,
3	independently of their size, in order to develop an efficient high throughput
4	process for a wide range of gene sizes, as the amplification delivers PCR
5	fragments in amounts that are not limiting. After ligation or In-Fusion™
6	recombination, transformation suspensions were platted on agar containing
7	kanamycine, and glucose to repress the expression leakage.
8	Between 20 and 100 transformants were obtained, without relationship
9	between the size of the insert and the number of transformants. For the negative
10	control (linear pLIM13 plasmid without insert), around 10 and 70 transformants
11	were obtained. These transformants resulted from aberrant recombination events.
12	To evaluate the cloning success rate, 2 to 8 transformants were analyzed for each
13	of the 24 genes by plasmids miniprep followed by restriction mapping.
14	The 24 genes were successfully cloned in parallel into the expression vector
15	indicating the good quality of the linear vector preparation (Table 1). Cloning
16	efficiencies were not correlated to the size of the gene, although the most difficult
17	gene to clone was the longest (3501 bp). Except in the latter case, 50% to 100%
18	of positive clones were obtained for all other genes. The negative clones resulted
19	apparently from aberrant recombination events, such as the clones obtained from
20	the negative controls. The mean cloning efficiency by restriction/ligation was
21	63%, whereas that obtained by In-Fusion™ was 80% including the lower yield
22	obtained with the longest gene. The systematic full length gene sequencing

1	performed on two positive clones of each gene, showed the absence of mutation
2	with a single exception likely originating from a PCR error.

4 Concluding remarks

Large amount of linear expression vector is obtained by separating the vector from its insert by anion exchange chromatography. The cloning results indicate that the quality of the linear vector purified by Mono QTM is compatible with different high throughput cloning techniques. However, the In-FusionTM technique is, in our view, better adapted to high throughput as this system catalyzes the joining of DNA pieces in a manner that is independent of the sequence of the cloned gene.

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The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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Figure legends

- **Figure 1. pLIM vector maps.** Linearization of the vectors was performed using
- 3 the restriction sites mentioned. PCR-amplified genes were inserted either by
- 4 restriction ligation or by the In-FusionTM method. (A) pLIM13 for the
- 5 overexpression of untagged proteins; (B) pLIM14 for the overexpression of His-
- 6 tagged (cloned between the *Nde*I and *Bam*HI sites) or His-Mistic-tagged proteins
- 7 (cloned between *Nco*I and *Bam*HI). The T7 promoter induces expression in *E*.
- *coli* harbouring the λ (DE3) prophage.

- 10 Figure 2. Linear plasmid purification by Mono QTM anion exchange
- chromatography and PCR amplification of the 24 genes used in cloning
- experiments. (A) Chromatogram showing the purification of pLIM13 digested
- with *Nde*I and *Bam*HI monitored at 254 nm. Plasmids were loaded on a Mono
- 14 QTM 5/50 GL column. DNA was eluted with a 64 ml linear gradient of 700 mM
- 15 (0% B) to 900 mM (10 % B) of NaCl at 0.15 ml/min. Arrows indicate the
- fractions analyzed. (B) 1% Agarose gel analysis of the fractions corresponding to
- the elution peaks shown in (A): M, DNA ladder; 1, loaded sample; 2, flow
- 18 through (pooled fractions 2-4); 3 to 6, fractions corresponding to the *ccdB* insert;
- 7 to 15, fractions corresponding to the linear vector. (C) 1% Agarose gel analysis
- of the pooled elution fractions from the chromatographic separations of
- 21 pLIM14_NdeI_BamHI: 1, Mistic-ccdB insert; 2, linear vector; and
- pLIM14_NcoI_BamHI: 3, ccdB insert; 4, linear vector. (D) 1% Agarose gel
- analysis of the PCR amplification of 24 independent genes. M, DNA ladder; 1 to

- 1 24, PCR amplification obtained in the conditions described in Materials and
- 2 Methods section and successfully cloned into pLIM13_NdeI_BamHI:

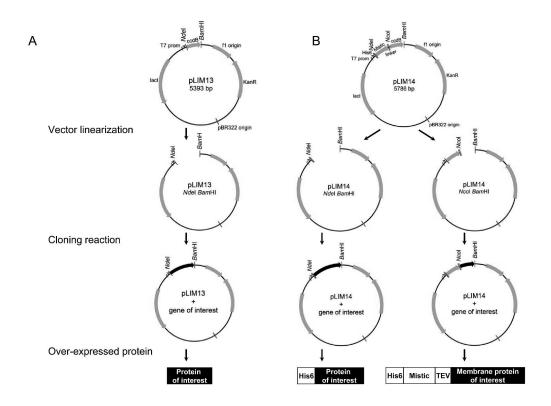


1 Table 1. Gene cloning using pLIM13_NdeI-BamHI linear vector by

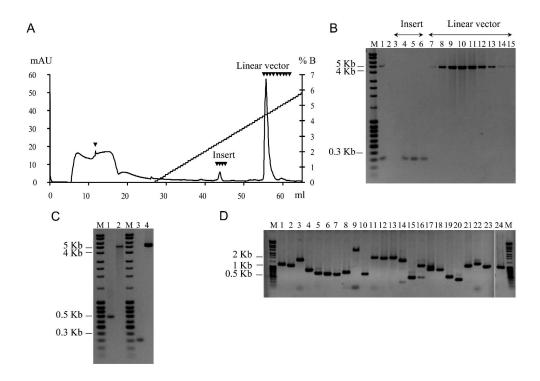
2 restriction/ligation or InFusion techniques

Plasmid	Technique	Insert size (bp)	% of positive clones
	used		(Nb clones tested)
pLIM13	Ligation	1233	50% (4)
pLIM13	Ligation	1131	50% (4)
pLIM13	Ligation	1683	75% (4)
pLIM13	Ligation	816	50% (4)
pLIM13	Ligation	657	50% (4)
pLIM13	InFusion	627	87% (8)
pLIM13	InFusion	600	100% (8)
pLIM13	Ligation	672	75% (4)
pLIM13	InFusion	3501	37% (8)
pLIM13	InFusion	603	100% (8)
pLIM13	InFusion	1950	50% (8)
pLIM13	InFusion	1887	75% (8)
pLIM13	Ligation	1962	100% (4)
pLIM13	InFusion	1557	75% (8)
pLIM13	Ligation	456	100% (4)
pLIM13	InFusion	1119	55% (9)
pLIM13	InFusion	843	100% (3)
pLIM13	InFusion	837	87% (8)
	pLIM13	pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 InFusion pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 InFusion pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 Ligation pLIM13 InFusion pLIM13 InFusion pLIM13 InFusion pLIM13 InFusion pLIM13 InFusion pLIM13 InFusion	pLIM13 Ligation 1233 pLIM13 Ligation 1131 pLIM13 Ligation 1683 pLIM13 Ligation 657 pLIM13 InFusion 627 pLIM13 InFusion 600 pLIM13 InFusion 672 pLIM13 InFusion 603 pLIM13 InFusion 1950 pLIM13 InFusion 1887 pLIM13 Ligation 1962 pLIM13 InFusion 1557 pLIM13 Ligation 456 pLIM13 InFusion 1119 pLIM13 InFusion 1119 pLIM13 InFusion 843

19	pLIM13	Ligation	489	50% (4)
20	pLIM13	Ligation	387	50% (2)
21	pLIM13	InFusion	1116	100% (3)
22	pLIM13	InFusion	1302	100% (8)
23	pLIM13	Ligation	1038	50% (2)
24	pLIM13	InFusion	1059	100% (8)



245x180mm (600 x 600 DPI)



250x179mm (600 x 600 DPI)