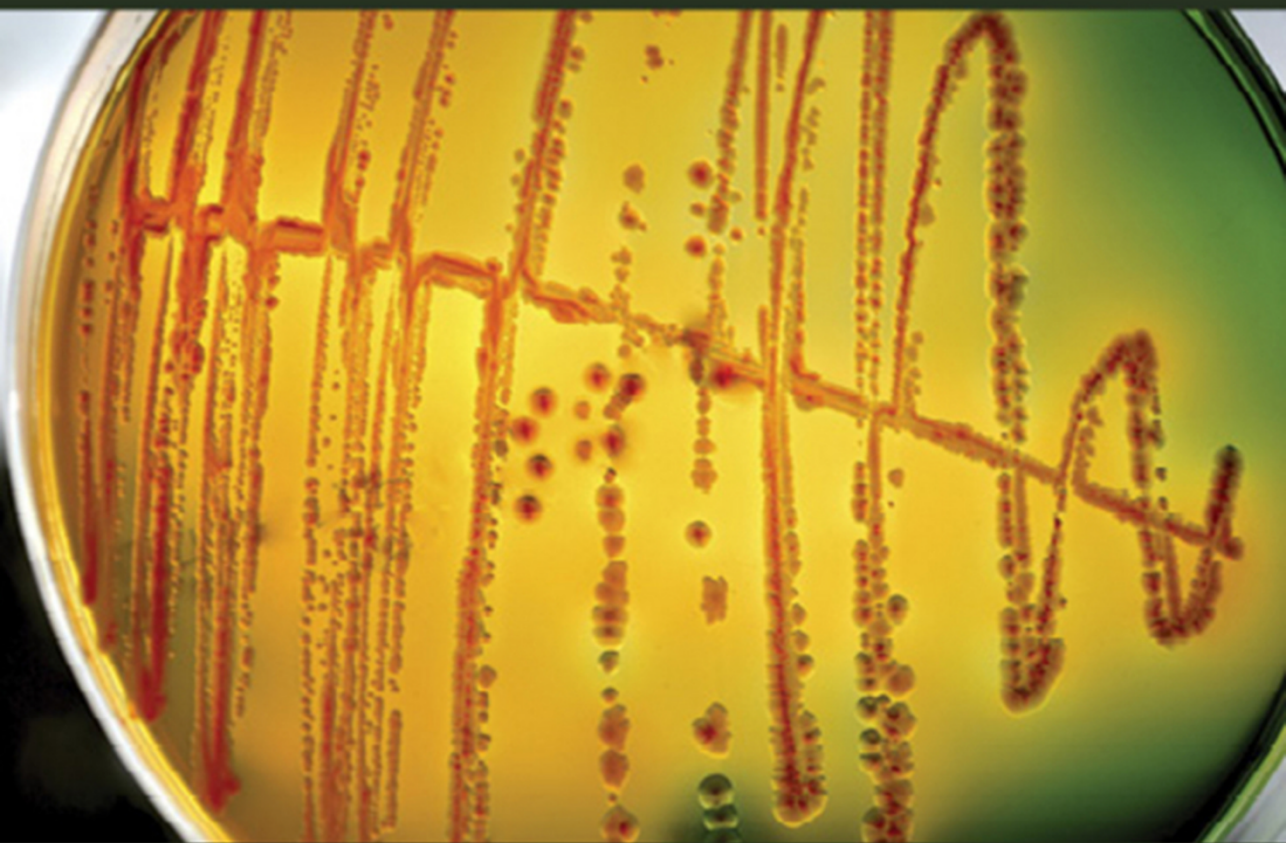


Marcy A. Kelly with contributions from Pryce L. Haddix



The Fundamentals of SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

An Introductory Laboratory Manual



WILEY Blackwell

The Fundamentals of Scientific Research

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By Marcy A. Kelly, PhD

With contributions from
Pryce L. Haddix, PhD

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The journey to develop this manual was linked to my personal journey from the time of its inception to its completion. There is one single person that has been my inspirational rock and source of enduring support during this endeavor. I dedicate this work to my husband, Thomas Kelly.

Contents

	Page
Preface	xi
Acknowledgments	xv
About the Companion Website	xvii
Introduction	xix
Module 1 Working with and Learning About Common Laboratory Techniques and Equipment	1
Exercise 1A Using Common Laboratory Tools to Evaluate Measurements Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	3
Exercise 1B Using Common Laboratory Tools to Evaluate Measurements	4
Exercise 1C Using Common Laboratory Tools to Evaluate Measurements Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	18
Exercise 2A Using Microscopy to Evaluate Cell Size and Complexity Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	19
Exercise 2B Using Microscopy to Evaluate Cell Size and Complexity	20
Exercise 2C Using Microscopy to Evaluate Cell Size and Complexity Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	32
Exercise 3A The Bacterial Growth Curve Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	35
Exercise 3B The Bacterial Growth Curve	36

CONTENTS

Exercise 3C	The Bacterial Growth Curve Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	55
Module 2 Working with and Learning About <i>Serratia marcescens</i> in the Laboratory		57
Exercise 4A	Protein Concentration Versus Growth Stage Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	59
Exercise 4B	Protein Concentration Versus Growth Stage	60
Exercise 4C	Protein Concentration Versus Growth Stage Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	69
Exercise 5A	Measuring Prodigiosin Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	71
Exercise 5B	Measuring Prodigiosin	72
Exercise 5C	Measuring Prodigiosin Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	84
Exercise 6A	Conditions Affecting the Growth of and Prodigiosin Production by <i>Serratia marcescens</i> Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	87
Exercise 6B	Conditions Affecting the Growth of and Prodigiosin Production by <i>S. marcescens</i>	91
Exercise 6C	Formal Laboratory Report Describing the Conditions Affecting the Growth of and Prodigiosin Production by <i>S. marcescens</i>	95

CONTENTS

Exercise 7A	Biochemistry of Prodigiosin Production Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	101
Exercise 7B	Biochemistry of Prodigiosin Production	102
Exercise 7C	Biochemistry of Prodigiosin Production Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	112
Exercise 8A	The Probability Basis for Mutation Rate Calculation: A Dice-Roll Exercise Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	113
Exercise 8B	The Probability Basis for Mutation Rate Calculation: A Dice-Roll Exercise	114
Exercise 8C	The Probability Basis for Mutation Rate Calculation: A Dice-Roll Exercise Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	120
Exercise 9A	Understanding Evolution by the Generation of UV Light-Induced Prodigiosin Mutants Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	121
Exercise 9B	Understanding Evolution by the Generation of UV Light-Induced Prodigiosin Mutants	122
Exercise 9C	Understanding Evolution by the Generation of UV Light-Induced Prodigiosin Mutants Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	131

CONTENTS

Exercise 10A	Understanding the Energy Spilling Properties of Prodigiosin Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	137
Exercise 10B	Understanding the Energy Spilling Properties of Prodigiosin	139
Exercise 10C	Understanding the Energy Spilling Properties of Prodigiosin Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	146
Module 3 Initial Characterization of Novel <i>Serratia marcescens</i> Prodigiosin Mutants		147
Exercise 11A	Prodigiosin Mutant Study Part 1 Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	149
Exercise 11B	Prodigiosin Mutant Study Part 1	150
Exercise 11C	Prodigiosin Mutant Study Part 1 Post-laboratory Thinking Questions	153
Exercise 12A	Prodigiosin Mutant Study Part 2 Pre-laboratory Thinking Questions	155
Exercise 12B	Prodigiosin Mutant Study Part 2	156
Exercise 12C	Formal Laboratory Report 2: Prodigiosin Mutant Study	158
Appendix A	CSE Citation and Reference List Format Guidelines	163
Appendix B	Prodigiosin Biosynthesis	165
References		167
Index		169

Preface

In 2011, major stakeholders in the life sciences published a document entitled “Vision and Change in Undergraduate Education: A Call to Action” (AAAS, 2011). This document proposes a new way to teach undergraduate life sciences majors. The report suggests that undergraduate educators directly engage their students in the process of science by providing them with authentic experiences that mimic what we do as professional scientists. They postulated that biological content and the skills commonly associated with successful scientists can be introduced to students through meaningful evaluations of real biological phenomena.

The goal of the experiments in this laboratory manual is to introduce undergraduate students to the process of science through a guided introductory laboratory experience. Highlights of this manual include a semester-long experience working with one organism using experiments directed toward a single unifying goal, pre- and postlaboratory assignments and laboratory reports aimed to enhance the students’ analytical, critical thinking and scientific writing skills, and experience using common laboratory equipment and techniques similar to what are used in the professional setting.

Specifically, the laboratory curriculum centers on studying *Serratia marcescens*. *S. marcescens* is a Gram-negative bacterium that is unique in that it produces a red pigment, prodigiosin, at high cell density. It has been demonstrated that prodigiosin has several interesting properties; it is antimicrobial, it has been shown to induce apoptosis in cancer cells, and it has been demonstrated that it has potential to act as an immunosuppressant (reviewed in Khanafari *et al.*, 2006). There are currently many research laboratories that are attempting to enhance the production of prodigiosin because of these unique properties. The overarching goal of the laboratory course described in this manual is to have the students learn about

PREFACE

the organism so that they can generate and initially characterize mutants of the organism that overproduce the pigment.

The laboratory manual breaks down the laboratory course into three separate modules. For the first module, the students familiarize themselves with common laboratory equipment and techniques. For the second module, the students begin to work with and appreciate *S. marcescens* by performing growth curves and Lowry protein assays, quantifying prodigiosin and ATP production, and performing complementation studies to understand the biochemical pathway responsible for prodigiosin production. They learn how to employ Microsoft Excel to prepare and present their data in graphic format and how to use specific calculations to convert their data into meaningful numbers that can be compared across experiments. The third module requires that the students employ UV mutagenesis to generate hyperpigmented mutants of *S. marcescens* for further characterization. They use experimental data and protocols they learned during the first and second modules of the course to help them develop their own hypotheses and experimental protocols and to help them analyze their data.

For each laboratory session, students are required to answer pre-laboratory questions that are designed to probe their understanding of the required prelaboratory reading materials (which includes the experimental background and protocol for that session and, in some cases, relevant primary scientific literature related to the experiments they will be performing in the laboratory). The questions also guide the students through the development of hypotheses and predictions. Following each laboratory, the students are required to answer a series of postlaboratory questions to guide them through the presentation of their data, analysis of their data, and placing of their data into the context of the primary literature. They are also asked to review their initial hypotheses and predictions to determine if their conclusions support their initial assertions. If their conclusions do not support their initial assertions, the students are asked to provide possible explanations as to why they think their conclusions did not agree with their hypotheses. The pre-laboratory and postlaboratory questions were designed to assist the students with

PREFACE

the preparation of two formal laboratory reports after the second and third modules. The format for the reports is similar to that of primary scientific literature.

This laboratory manual seeks to introduce introductory undergraduate life sciences majors to an environment that fosters the development of scientific curiosity, creativity, and the critical thinking and communication skills required for success in the scientific disciplines. The laboratory techniques and skills that they will master through the exercises presented herein will provide the students with a strong foundation in the practice and process of science. All of these, in turn, should enable the students to persist and succeed as life sciences majors.

Acknowledgments

This work would not be possible if it was not for the students, faculty, and staff in the Department of Biology and Health Sciences–NYC. The feedback and support provided during the development of this work have been immeasurable and greatly appreciated.

About the Companion Website

This book is accompanied by a companion website:

www.wiley.com/go/kelly/fundamentals

The website includes:

- Instructor's Companion to the Lab Manual

Introduction

As life scientists, we are uniquely positioned to use our inquisitive natures to ask questions about the world around us. We have developed a systematic method to address the questions we pose. This method, the scientific method, is the major tenet behind what we do. The scientific method is as follows:

- (1) Make an observation.
- (2) Ask a question based upon your observation.
- (3) Develop a hypothesis.
- (4) Develop experiments to test your hypothesis.
- (5) Collect and analyze experimental data.
- (6) Confirm hypothesis or develop and test a new hypothesis.

You have probably memorized these steps at some point during your academic career, but have you ever *really* put them to the test to answer a biological question that has not yet been addressed? If not, you will gain practical experience with scientific method in this laboratory. If you have practiced the scientific method in the past, this laboratory will help you hone your skills.

Throughout the semester, you are going to be studying a single organism, *Serratia marcescens*. *S. marcescens* is a bacterium. Bacteria are considered prokaryotic organisms and have features commonly associated with prokaryotic cells. *S. marcescens* is classified as a Gram-negative bacterium because of the structure of its cell wall. Gram-negative bacteria have thin cell walls with phospholipid bilayers on both sides of the cell wall.

S. marcescens is unique among bacteria because it produces a red pigment called prodigiosin. Although the exact biological role of the pigment with respect to the organism is unknown, several laboratories throughout the world are studying the pigment and its activities. We are going to perform our own experiments in this laboratory