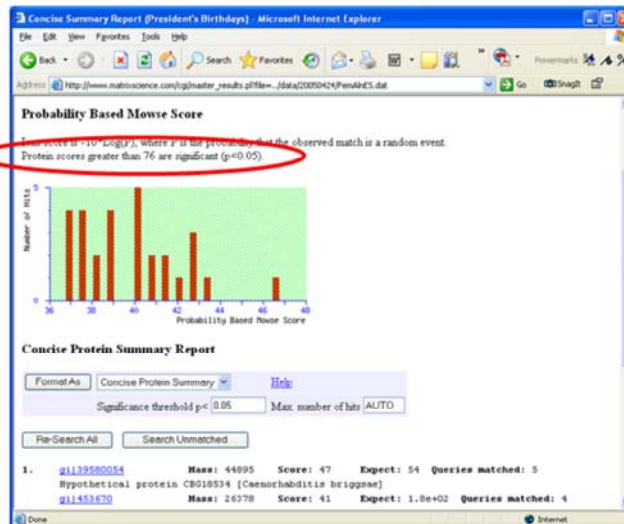


Scoring & Statistics

MASCOT

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Probability based scoring



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This is the Mascot result report for a peptide mass fingerprint search. There is a list of proteins, each of which matches some of the experimental peptide masses, but the report tells us that these matches are not statistically significant. The score threshold for this search is 76, and the top scoring match is 47. The graph is a histogram of the scores of the top ten matches and, as you see, all of them are in the area shaded green to indicate random, meaningless matches.

What is probability based scoring?

We compute the probability that the observed match between the experimental data and mass values calculated from a candidate protein or peptide sequence is a random event.

The 'correct' match, which is not a random event, has a very low probability.

Reject anything with a probability greater than a chosen threshold, e.g. 0.05 or 0.01

What exactly do I mean by probability based scoring?

We calculate, as accurately as possible, the probability that the observed match between the experimental data, and mass values calculated from a candidate peptide or protein sequence, is a random event.

The real match, which is not a random event, then has a very low probability.

We can then reject anything with a probability greater than a chosen threshold, e.g. 1%

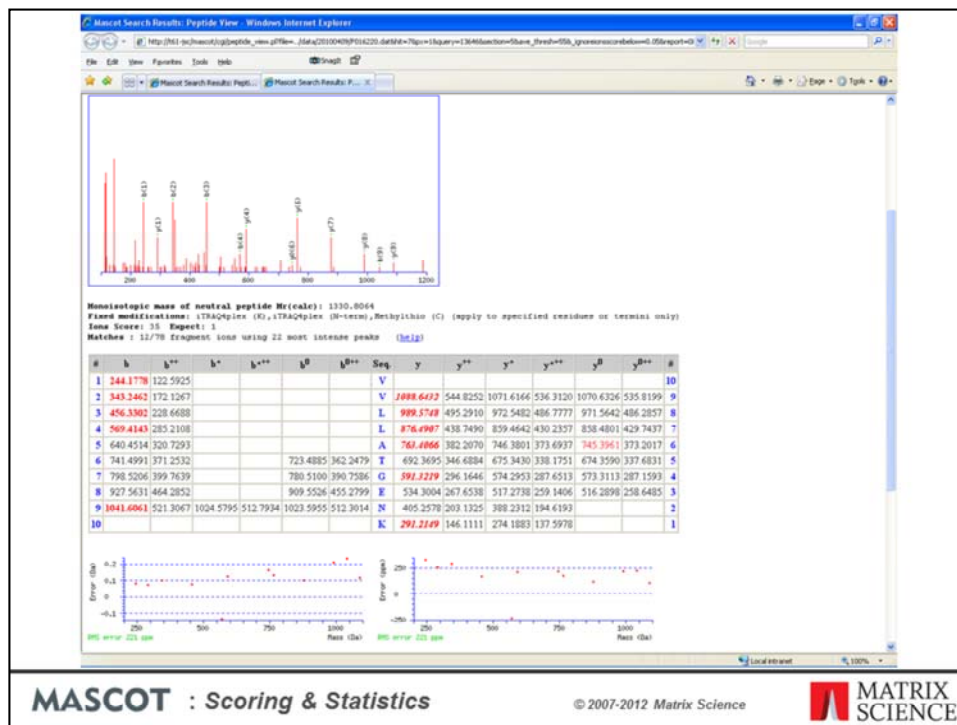
Why is probability based scoring important?

- How else would you judge whether a PMF result was meaningful?
- For MS/MS, human judgment is subjective and can be unreliable

Why is probability based scoring important?

Well, how else would you judge whether a protein hit in a peptide mass fingerprint search was meaningful?

In the case of MS/MS data, it is very difficult to judge whether a match is significant or not by looking at the spectrum. Let me illustrate this with an example



This match has a good number of matches to y and b ions, highlighted in red. All the major peaks above 200 Da seem to be labelled. Could such a good match have occurred by chance?

You cannot tell, because you can match anything to anything if you try hard enough.

If this sounds strange, here's a simple analogy. If I say that I was tossing a coin and got ten heads in a row, does that mean there was something strange about the coin, like it had two heads? You cannot tell, because you need to know how many times I tossed the coin in total. If I picked it up off the table, tossed it ten times, then put it down, yes, that would suggest this was not a fair coin. However, if I tossed it ten thousand times, I would expect to get ten heads in a row more than once.

So, it isn't just a matter of how good the match is, i.e. how many y or b ions you found, it's a case of how hard you tried to find the match. In the case of a database search, this means how large is the database, what is the mass tolerance, how many variable modifications, etc., etc. These are very difficult calculations to do in your head, but they are easy calculations for the search engine.

If we look at the expectation value for this match, it is 1. That is, we could expect to get this match purely by chance. It looks good, but it's a random match.

Why is probability based scoring important?

- How else would you judge whether a PMF result was meaningful?
- For MS/MS, human judgment is subjective and can be unreliable
- **Standard, statistical tests of significance can be applied to the results.**

If we use probability based scoring, we can apply standard, statistical tests of significance to the results.

If we don't do this, then the only way to know the level of false positives is a target decoy search, and this isn't always possible, e.g. when searching a small number of spectra

Can we calculate a probability that a match is correct?

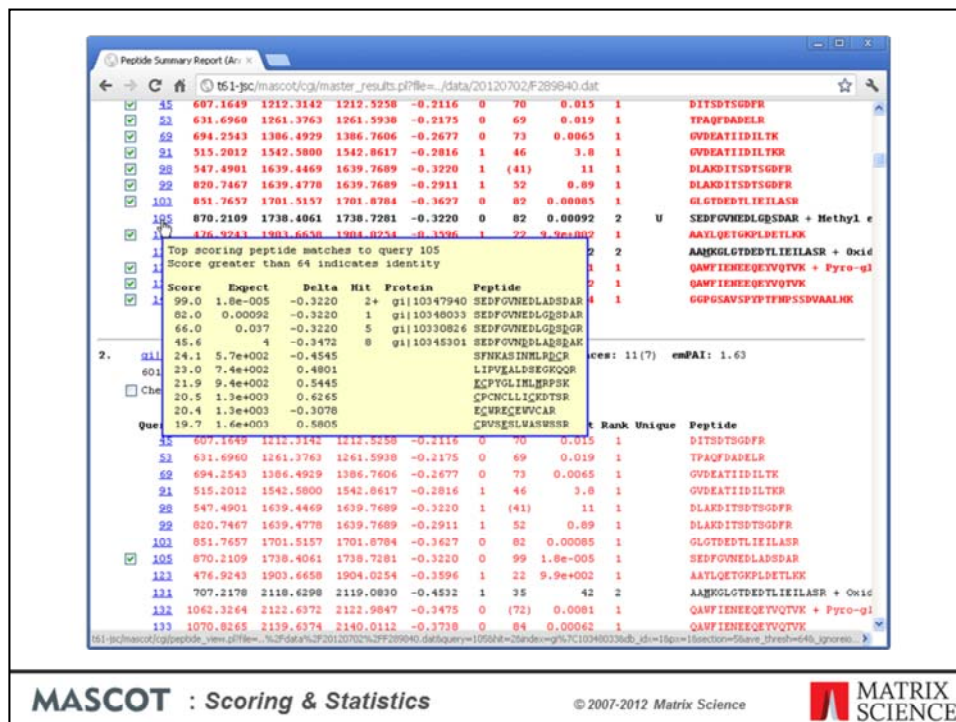
Yes, if it is a test sample and you know what the answer should be

- Matches to the expected protein sequences are defined to be correct
- Matches to other sequences are defined to be wrong

If the sample is an unknown, then you have to define “correct” very carefully

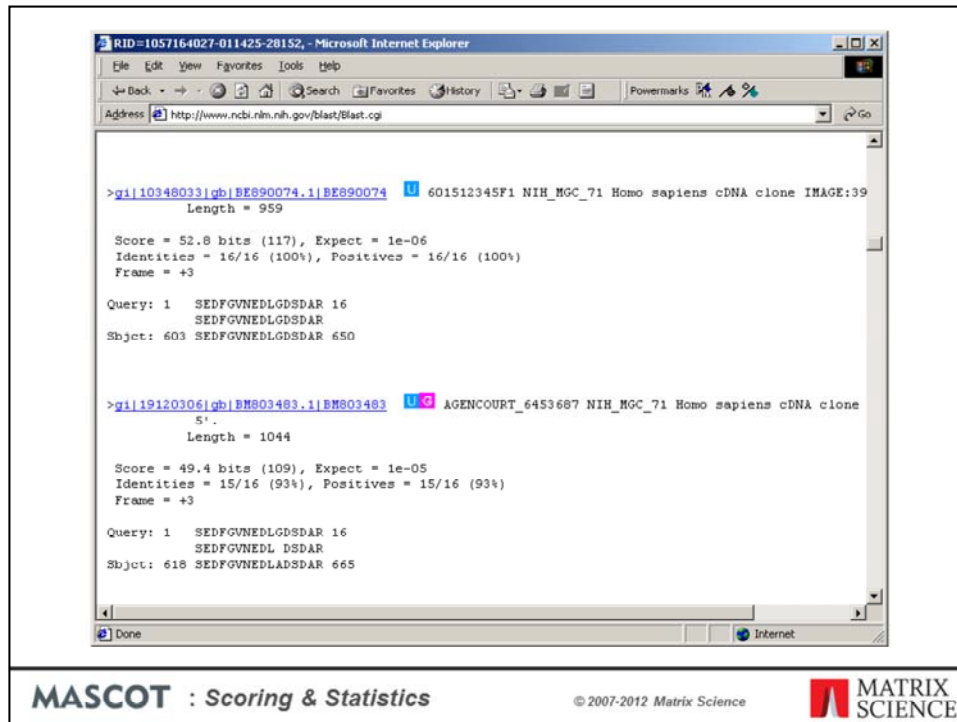
Probability based scoring calculates the probability that the match is random. This is, the probability that the match is meaningless. Many people ask whether we can report the probability that the match is correct. Is this possible?

It is certainly possible if you are analysing a known protein or standard mixture of proteins. If you know what the sequences are, or think you know, then the matches to the known sequences are defined to be correct and those to any other sequence are defined to be wrong. If the sample is an unknown, then it is difficult even to define what is meant by a correct match.

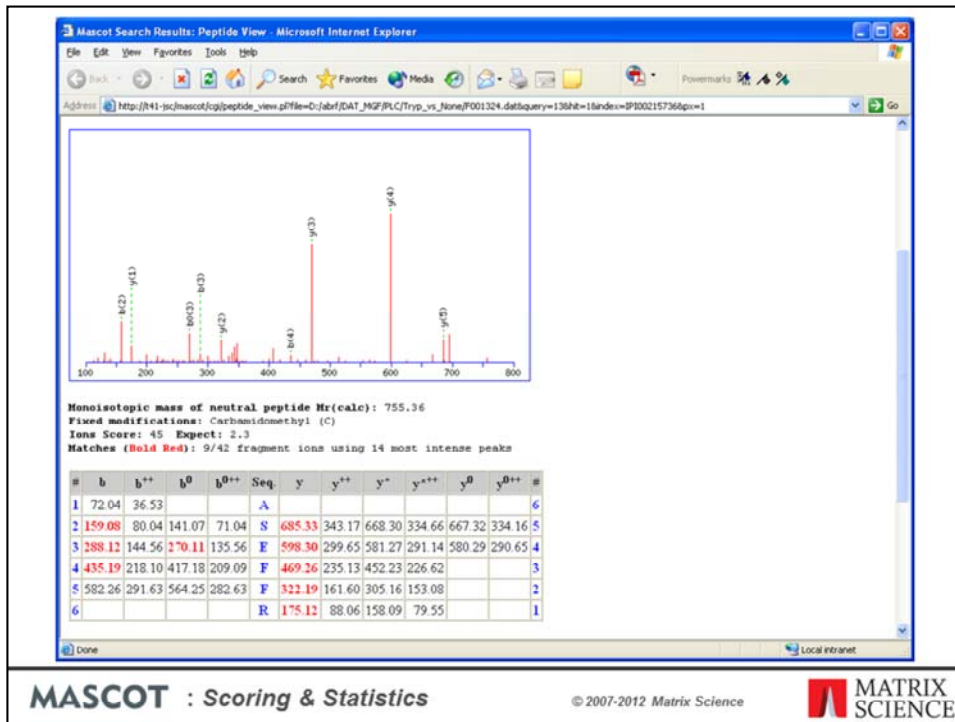


This is a typical MS/MS search result, where we see a series of high scoring homologous peptides. The sequences of the top four matches are very similar, and their expectation values vary from random through to very unlikely to be random. The best match has an expectation value of $2E-5$. However, we cannot be sure that this is an identity match to the analyte peptide. It is simply the best match we could find in the database. There is always the possibility that a better match exists, that is not in the database, so to call it the correct match would be misleading.

The important thing is that we have a mechanism to discard matches that are nothing more than random matches.



It is a similar situation in Blast, except that you have the luxury of seeing when you have a perfect identity match. Here, the identity match has an expectation value of $1E-6$, which reminds us that it would be a random match if the database was a million times larger. The match with one different residue is not worthless, it has an expectation value of $1E-5$ and is a very good match. It just isn't as good a match as the one above.



If we are doing probability based matching, we are not scoring the quality of the spectrum, we are scoring whether the match is random or not.

Even when the mass spectrum is of very high quality, if the peptide is so short that it could occur in the database by chance, then you will not get a very good score.

RID-1083143501-21680-27987318596.BLASTQ3 - Microsoft Internet Explorer
 Address: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/blast/blast.cgi

```

>gi1126792|sp|P22712|MPB1_HUMAN C-myc promoter-binding protein (MPB-1) (MBP-1)
Length = 335
Score = 22.7 bits (46), Expect = 48
Identities = 6/6 (100%), Positives = 6/6 (100%)
Query: 1 ASEFFR 6
      ASEFFR
Sbjct: 150 ASEFFR 155

>gi119329|sp|P06733|ENOA_HUMAN Alpha enolase (2-phospho-D-glycerate hydro-lyase) (Non-neural
enolase) (NNE) (Enolase 1) (Phosphopyruvate hydratase)
Length = 434
Score = 22.7 bits (46), Expect = 48
Identities = 6/6 (100%), Positives = 6/6 (100%)
Query: 1 ASEFFR 6
      ASEFFR
Sbjct: 240 ASEFFR 253

>gi112878924|sp|P34147|RACA_DICD1 RAS-related protein racA
Length = 598
Score = 22.7 bits (46), Expect = 48
Identities = 6/6 (100%), Positives = 6/6 (100%)
Query: 1 ASEFFR 6
      ASEFFR
Sbjct: 261 ASEFFR 266
  
```

Done Internet

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The situation in a Blast search is identical. Even though this is a perfect identity match, the expectation value is 48. This is just a random match. Hence, the earlier tip to discard spectra from low mass precursors.

The Mascot Score

The Mascot score is $-10\log_{10}(P)$, where P is the absolute probability that observed match is random event

- For a PMF, P is the probability that the set of experimental peptide molecular masses came from the enzyme digest of the protein sequence.
- For an MS/MS search, P is the probability that the masses in the MS/MS spectrum came from the gas phase fragmentation of the peptide sequence.

For an MS/MS search, the protein score is *not* statistically rigorous. It is just a way of ranking the protein hits

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For a peptide mass fingerprint, there is just one score that matters: the protein score. This tells us whether the match is significant or not, and is determined by calculating the probability of getting the observed number of peptide mass matches if the protein sequence was random.

For an MS/MS search, we have two scores. The important one is the peptide match score or ions score. This is the probability of getting the observed number of fragment ion mass matches if the peptide sequence was random.

However, most people are interested in which proteins are present, rather than which peptides have been found. So, we assign peptide matches to protein hits and provide protein scores for MS/MS searches, so that the proteins with lots of strong peptide matches come at the top of the report.

However, it is very important to understand that the protein score in an MS/MS search is not statistically rigorous. It is just a way of ranking the protein hits.

Probability Based Mowse Score

Ions score is $-10 \cdot \text{Log}(P)$, where P is the probability that the observed match is a random event. Individual ions scores > 46 indicate identity or extensive homology ($p < 0.05$). Protein scores are derived from ions scores as a non-probabilistic basis for ranking protein hits.

Peptide Summary Report

Format As: Peptide Summary | Help

Significance threshold $p < 0.05$ | Max. number of hits: AUTO

Standard scoring | ModEIT scoring | Ions score cut-off: 0 | Show sub-sets

Show pop-ups | Suppress pop-ups | Sort unassigned: Decreasing Score | Requery

Select All | Select None | Search Selected | Error tolerant

1. [A12800](#) | Mass: 61016 | Score: 1195 | Queries matched: 31
 chaperonin GroEL precursor - human
 Check to include this hit in error tolerant search

No expect value

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This is why there is no expect value for the protein score in an MS/MS search, and why there is a short explanation at the top of every report.

Significance Thresholds

The identity threshold is calculated from the number of trials

If there are 500,000 entries in the database, a 1 in a 20 chance of getting a false positive match for a peptide mass fingerprint is a probability of
 $P = 1 / (20 \times 500,000)$
which is a score of
 $S = -10\text{Log}P = 70$

Because a Mascot score is a log probability, assigning a significance threshold is very simple. It is just a function of the number of trials - the number of times we test for a match. For a peptide mass fingerprint, this is the number of entries in the database. For an MS/MS search, it is the number of peptides in the database that fit to the precursor mass tolerance. For an enzyme like trypsin, and a reasonable mass tolerance, this number will be less than the number of entries in the database. For a no-enzyme search, the number of trials will often be more than the number of entries in the database.

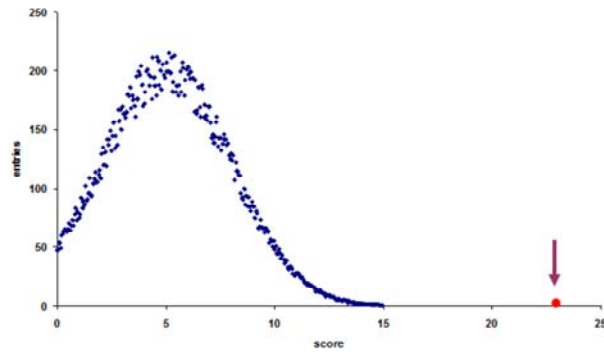
So, for example, if we are comfortable with a 1 in a 20 chance of getting a false positive match, and we are doing a PMF search of a database that contains 500,000 entries, we are looking for a probability of less than $1 / (20 \times 500,000)$ which is a Mascot score of 70

If we could only tolerate a false positive rate of 1 in 200 then the threshold would be 80, 1 in 2000 90, etc.

For MS/MS searches with trypsin, and a reasonable mass tolerance, the numbers tend to be lower. The default identity threshold is typically a score of around 40

Significance Thresholds

The homology threshold is an empirical measure of whether the match is an outlier



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Unfortunately, MS/MS spectra are often far from ideal, with poor signal to noise or gaps in the fragmentation. In such cases, it may not be possible to reach the identity threshold score, even though the best match in the database is a clear outlier from the distribution of random scores. To assist in identifying these outliers, we also report a second, lower threshold for MS/MS searches; the 'homology' threshold. This simply says the match is an outlier.

In practice, from measuring the actual false positive rate by searching large data sets against reversed or randomised databases, we find that the identity threshold is usually conservative, and the homology threshold can provide a useful number of additional true positive matches without exceeding the specified false positive rate.

Expectation values

Peptide Summary Report (Ameslin.msi) - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Address: http://[...]\ghpater_results\ghpater...%2Fdata\2720024\%2F444232.dat

Mass: 10490 Score: 50 Queryes matched: 20

Protein 1 - Name

Check to include this hit in your tolerant search or active report

Query	Observed	M(sgn1)	M(sgn2)	Delta Mass	Score	Expect	Rank	Peptide
11	815.1896	828.3636	828.8956	-0.1321	0	34	1.4	1
11	815.1896	828.3636	828.8956	-0.1329	0	30	6.50	1
11	540.4531	1079.2905	1079.4805	-0.1800	0	23	20	1
55	697.1649	1712.3142	1712.5238	-0.2114	0	60	0.00056	1
11	431.4040	1261.2763	1261.3930	-0.2175	0	75	0.00017	1
55	437.8532	1370.3262	1370.7656	-0.2295	0	45	0.12	1
52	694.2543	1306.4929	1306.7606	-0.2677	0	73	0.00019	1
11	515.2032	1542.5000	1542.6417	-0.2981	0	45	0.12	1
26	792.2966	1542.5020	1542.6417	-0.2797	0	141	9.9e-002	1
21	725.2555	1542.6520	1542.8100	-0.2146	0	60	0.00033	1
90	547.4901	1639.4469	1639.7609	-0.3220	0	142	0.25	1
20	820.7467	1639.4720	1639.7609	-0.2911	0	59	0.0031	1
101	840.2468	1670.4740	1677.3640	-0.3609	0	27	7.1	1
101	851.7657	1701.5157	1701.6784	-0.3627	0	103	1.9e-007	1
101	870.2109	1730.4061	1730.7201	-0.3220	0	103	1.7e-007	1
111	592.8735	1775.2965	1775.3205	-0.2335	0	10	57	1
111	476.3033	1803.6070	1804.0234	-0.2506	0	32	2.7	1
111	707.2120	2118.4298	2118.0030	-0.4522	1	41	0.34	1
111	1070.8265	2139.4374	2140.0112	-0.3730	0	80	6.1e-006	1
151	785.9143	2354.2194	2355.1494	-0.4300	0	70	0.00043	1

Peptides matching the same set of peptides:

Mass: 10550 Score: 50 Queryes matched: 20

Ameslin I (Liponectin II) (Chimpanzee II) (Chromobindin 9) (P21) (Transglutinin A2 inhibitory protein)

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In Mascot 2.0, we also started displaying an expect or expectation value in addition to the score

Expectation values

The number of times you could expect to get this score or better by chance

$$E = P_{\text{threshold}} * (10 ** ((S_{\text{threshold}} - \text{score}) / 10))$$

If $P_{\text{threshold}} = 0.05$ and $S_{\text{threshold}} = 50$

score = 40 corresponds to $E = 0.5$

score = 50 corresponds to $E = 0.05$

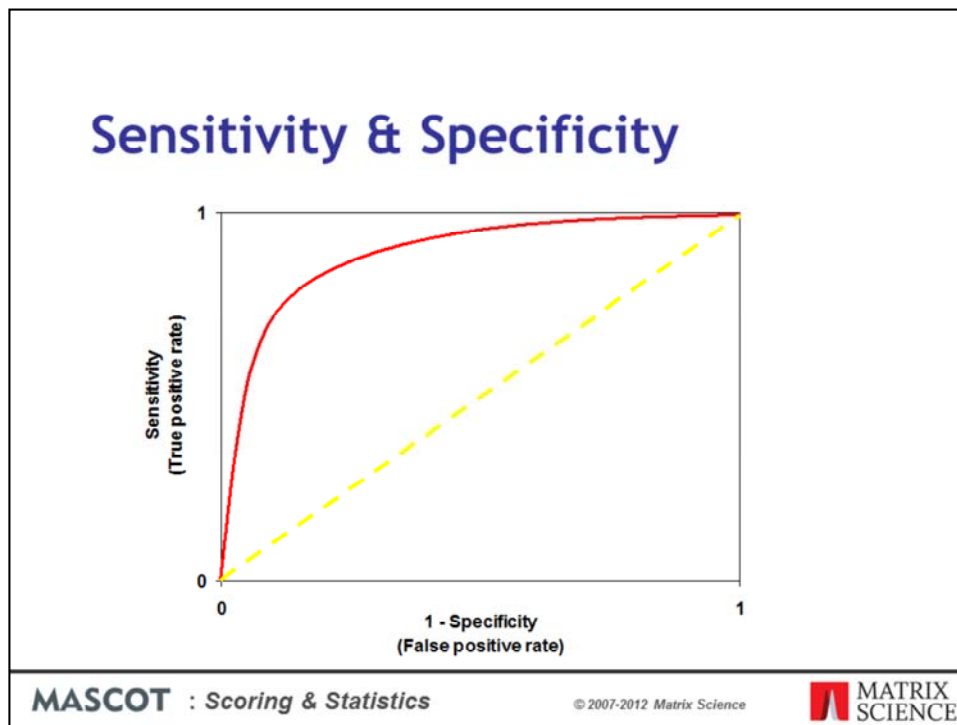
score = 60 corresponds to $E = 0.005$

The expectation value does not contain new information. It can be derived directly from the score and the threshold. The advantage is that it tells you everything you need to know in a single number.

It is the number of times you could expect to get this score or better by chance.

A completely random match has an expectation value of 1 or more

The better the match, the smaller the expectation value.

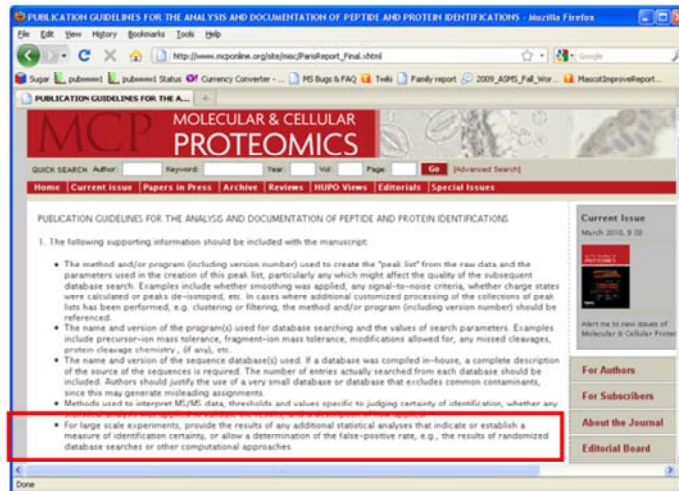


The most important attributes of a scoring scheme are sensitivity and specificity. That is, you want as many correct matches as possible, and as few incorrect matches as possible.

This is often illustrated in the form of a Receiver Operating Characteristic or ROC plot. This plots the relationship between the true positive and false positive rates as the threshold is varied. The origin is a very high threshold, which lets nothing through. At the top right, we have a very low threshold, that allows everything through. Neither extreme is a useful place to be. The diagonal represents a useless scoring algorithm, that is equally likely to let through a false match as a true one. The red curve shows a useful scoring algorithm, and the more it pushes the curve up towards the top left corner, the better. Setting a threshold towards this top left corner gives a high ratio of correct matches to false matches.

A few years ago, there was a little too much focus on sensitivity and not enough consideration given to specificity, so that some of the published lists of proteins were not as accurate as the authors might have hoped.

Validation



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A growing awareness of this problem led to initiatives from various quarters. Most notably, the Editors of Molecular and Cellular Proteomics, who held a workshop in 2005 to define a set of guidelines, which has just recently been revised.

For large scale studies, there is a requirement to estimate your false discovery rate. One of the most reliable ways to do this is with a so-called decoy database

Validation

Search a “decoy” database

- Decoy entries can be reversed or shuffled or randomised versions of target entries
- Decoy entries can be separate database or concatenated to target entries

Gives a clear estimate of false discovery rate

- Elias, J. E. and Gygi, S. P., Target-decoy search strategy for increased confidence in large-scale protein identifications by mass spectrometry, *Nature Methods* 4 207-214 (2007)

This is very simple but very powerful. You repeat the search, using identical search parameters, against a database in which the sequences have been reversed or randomised. You do not expect to get any real matches from the decoy database. So, the number of matches that are found in the decoy database is an excellent estimate of the number of false positives in the results from the target database.

You'll read a lot of discussion in the literature about whether the decoy sequences should be reversed or randomised; whether to search a single database containing both target and decoy sequences or separate databases. I suggest the most important thing is to do a decoy search; any decoy search. What you need to know is whether your level of false positives is 1% or 10% or 100%. Its less of a concern whether its 1% or 1.1%.

Although this is an excellent validation method for large data sets. It isn't useful when you only have a small number of spectra, because the numbers are too small to give an accurate estimate. Hence, this is not a substitute for a stable scoring scheme, but it is an excellent way of validating important results.

Validation

The screenshot shows the Mascot MS/MS Ions Search web interface. The browser address bar shows the URL: 54.243.190.62/mascot/cgi/search_form.pl?FORMVER=2&SEARCH=MS. The page title is "MASCOT MS/MS Ions Search". The form includes fields for "Your name" (ml_user) and "Email" (ms@localhost). The "Search title" field contains "Yeast example". The "Database(s)" dropdown is set to "EST_human", and the "Enzyme" dropdown is set to "TrypsinP". The "Allow up to" dropdown is set to "1 missed cleavages", and the "Quantitation" dropdown is set to "None". The "Taxonomy" dropdown is set to "Saccharomyces Cerevisiae (Baker's yeast)". The "Fixed modifications" dropdown is set to "Carbamidomethyl (C)", and the "Variable modifications" dropdown is set to "Oxidation (M)". The "Peptide tol. s" field is set to "10 ppm", and the "MS/MS tol. s" field is set to "0.1 Da". The "Peptide charge" dropdown is set to "2+ and 3+", and the "Homotopic" checkbox is checked. The "Data input" section has "Data file" selected, with "sample1-A.mgf" entered. The "Data format" dropdown is set to "Mascot generic", and the "Precursor" field is set to "m/z". The "Instrument" dropdown is set to "ESI-TRAP", and the "Error tolerant" checkbox is checked. The "Decoy" checkbox is checked, and the "Report top" dropdown is set to "AUTO". The "Start Search" and "Reset Form" buttons are visible at the bottom of the form.

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On our public web site there is a help page devoted to decoy database searches. It includes a download link to a utility program that allows you to create a randomised or reversed database. If you have an early version of Mascot, or if you want to verify the results from another search engine, you can use this utility to create a decoy database for searching.

Because more and more people wish to perform decoy searches routinely, we've added this into Mascot as a built-in part of the search. If you choose the Decoy checkbox on the search form, then every time a protein or peptide sequence from the target database is tested, a reversed or randomised sequence of the same length is automatically generated and tested. The average amino acid composition of the random sequences is the same as the average composition of the target database. The matches and scores for the decoy sequences are recorded separately in the result file. The result is identical to searching a separate database rather than a concatenated database.

The screenshot displays the Mascot web interface for a yeast example. The browser address bar shows the URL: 54.243.190.62/mascot/cgi/master_results_2.pl?file=.%2Fdata%2F20140916%2FF001295.dat.

Protein Family Summary

Filter: Significance threshold p-c: 0.05, Max. number of families: AUTO, Ions score or expect cut-off: 0, Dendrograms cut at: 0, Show Percolator scores: [], Preferred taxonomy: All entries.

Decoy search summary (reversed protein sequences)

Peptide matches	In target	In Decoy	FDR
= above identity threshold	19070	534	2.80%
= above identity or homology threshold	19096	537	2.81%

Decoy results are available in the decoy report.

Proteins (2710) | Report Builder | Unsigned (21128) | Permalink

Protein families 1-10 (out of 2710)

10 per page | 1 2 3 4 5 6 - 221 Next | Expand all | Collapse all

Accession	contains	Find
1 2::FAS2_YEAST	3819 Fatty acid synthase subunit alpha OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=FAS2 PE=1 SV=2	
1 2::ENO2_YEAST	3526 Enolase 2 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=ENO2 PE=1 SV=2	
2 2::ENO1_YEAST	2106 Enolase 1 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=ENO1 PE=1 SV=3	
1 2::HSP72_YEAST	3450 Heat shock protein SSA2 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=SSA2 PE=1 SV=3	
4 2::HSP74_YEAST	1281 Heat shock protein SSA4 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=SSA4 PE=1 SV=3	
2 2::HSP71_YEAST	3371 Heat shock protein SSA1 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=SSA1 PE=1 SV=4	
3 2::GRP78_YEAST	1301 78 kDa glucose-regulated protein homolog OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=KAR2 P...	
1 2::KPYK1_YEAST	3448 Pyruvate kinase 1 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=CKC19 PE=1 SV=1	
2 2::KPYK2_YEAST	333 Pyruvate kinase 2 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204908 / S288c) GN=PK2 PE=1 SV=1	

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When the search is complete, the statistics for matches to the decoy sequences are reported in the result header. If you change the significance threshold, the numbers are recalculated. In Mascot 2.4 and later, there is a button to adjust the significance threshold so as to achieve a chosen FDR value. For example, if we choose 1% FDR using the homology threshold

Protein Family Summary

Filter: Significance threshold p-c: 0.010851 Max. number of families: AUTO [help]
 Ions score or expect cut-off: 0 Dendrograms cut at: 0
 Show Percolator scores:
 Preferred taxonomy: All entries

Decoy search summary (reversed protein sequences)

Peptide matches: in target in Decoy FDR
 - above identity threshold: 17362 170 0.98%
 - above identity or homology threshold: 17374 173 1.00% Adjust to: 1%
 Decoy results are available in the decoy report.

Proteins (2604) Report Builder Unassigned (21377) [permalink]

Protein families 1-10 (out of 2604)

10 per page 1 2 3 4 5 6 - 261 [test] Expand all Collapse all
 Accession contains Find

Family	Accession	Description
2::FAS2_YEAST	3170	Fatty acid synthase subunit alpha OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=FAS2 PE=1 SV=2
1 2::ENO2_YEAST	3033	Enolase 2 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=ENO2 PE=1 SV=2
2 2::ENO1_YEAST	1804	Enolase 1 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=ENO1 PE=1 SV=3
1 2::KPYKL_YEAST	2882	Pyruvate kinase 1 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=KPY1 PE=1 SV=2
2 2::KPYK2_YEAST	264	Pyruvate kinase 2 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=KPY2 PE=1 SV=1
1 2::HSP72_YEAST	2874	Heat shock protein SSA2 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=SSA2 PE=1 SV=3
4 2::HSP74_YEAST	1062	Heat shock protein SSA4 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=SSA4 PE=1 SV=3
2 2::HSP71_YEAST	2804	Heat shock protein SSA1 OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=SSA1 PE=1 SV=4
3 2::GRP78_YEAST	1065	78 kDa glucose-regulated protein homolog OS=Saccharomyces cerevisiae (strain ATCC 204508 / S288c) GN=KAR2 P.

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The significance threshold has been automatically adjusted from 0.05 to 0.01.
 Why do we get these false positives? Do they reflect some defect in the search engine? Let's have a closer look. If you click the link here, then you will see the results from searching the randomised database.

Protein Family Decoy Summary

Filter: Significance threshold p-c: 0.010851 | Max. number of families: AUTO | ([help])
 Ions score or expect cut-off: 0 | Dendrograms cut at: 0
 Show Percolator scores:

Return to the original report

Proteins (172) | Report Builder | Unassigned (43564) | [permalink]

Decoy protein families 1-10 (out of 172)

10 per page | 1 2 3 4 5 6 -- 18 Next | Expand all | Collapse all

Accession | contains | Find

▼ 1 2::HSPB2_YEAST 68 Random sequence.

1.1	2::HSPB2_YEAST	Score	Mass	Matches	Sequences
	▼ 1 same set of 2::HSPB2_YEAST	68	81356	16 (3)	11 (3) Random sequence.

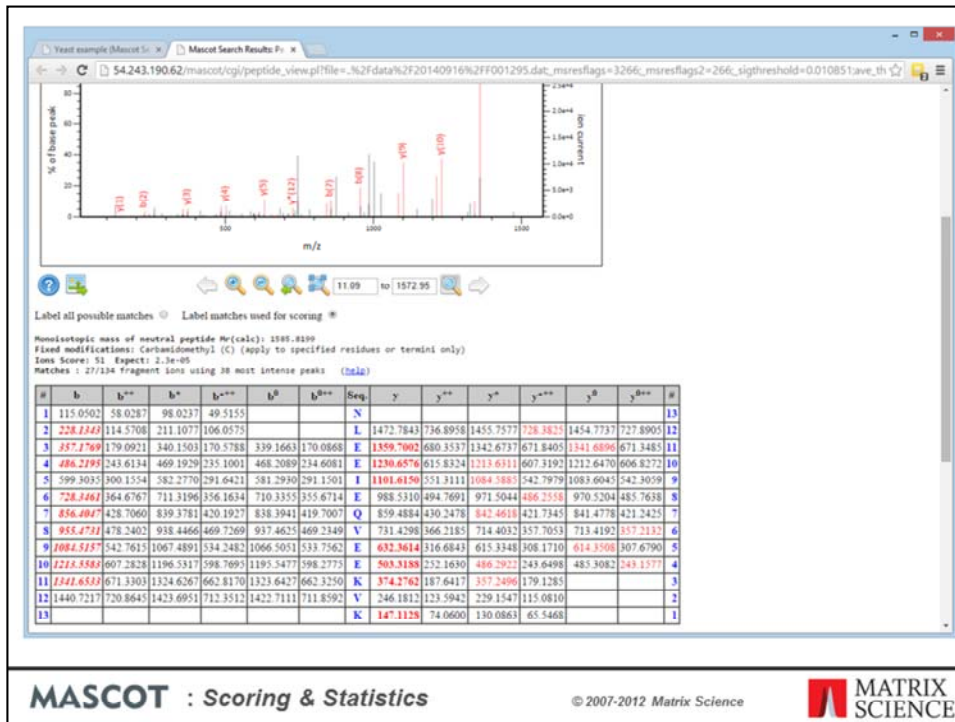
▼ 16 peptide matches (12 non-duplicate, 4 duplicate)

Auto-fit to window

Query Dupes	Observed	Mr (expt)	Mr (calc)	ppm	M Score	Expect	Rank	Peptide
af1661 ▶ 1	395.2383	788.4621	788.4644	-2.84	0	37	0.00033	▶ 1 Q K.TIDVLTG.G
af2671 ▶ 1	426.4932	851.3730	851.3807	-5.72	0	3	0.52	▶ 1 Q K.TIDTIDSN.T - Oxidation (M)
af4796	445.7517	889.4889	889.4909	-2.27	0	16	0.047	▶ 1 Q K.LADLFFSR.E
af6091	445.7837	829.5569	829.5480	8.32	1	8	0.47	▶ 4 Q K.LAQADHR.E
af6817 ▶ 1	819.7700	1629.8316	1629.8042	-2.78	0	11	0.16	▶ 1 Q K.FKQGLDTR.E
af4488	409.3524	1208.8142	1208.8180	-2.09	1	28	0.18	▶ 1 Q K.FKFLDPSR.E
af4484	409.8739	1208.8142	1208.8180	-2.24	1	1	1.8	▶ 1 Q K.FKFLDPSR.E
af19045	645.2946	1289.8748	1289.8772	-2.04	0	0	1.4	▶ 1 Q K.EELVLDQSR.L
af19047	645.2979	1289.6612	1289.6554	2.10	1	0	4.0	▶ 2 Q K.HKIQQLSR.S
af21697 ▶ 1	680.3340	1358.6535	1358.6565	-2.21	0	25	0.0048	▶ 1 Q K.NLESIQVSR.V
af27789	777.8940	1553.7778	1553.7824	-3.15	1	8	0.81	▶ 1 Q K.EKFLFVSR.V
af28597	793.9140	1585.8130	1585.8199	-4.00	1	51	2.3e+05	▶ 1 Q K.NLESIQVSR.V

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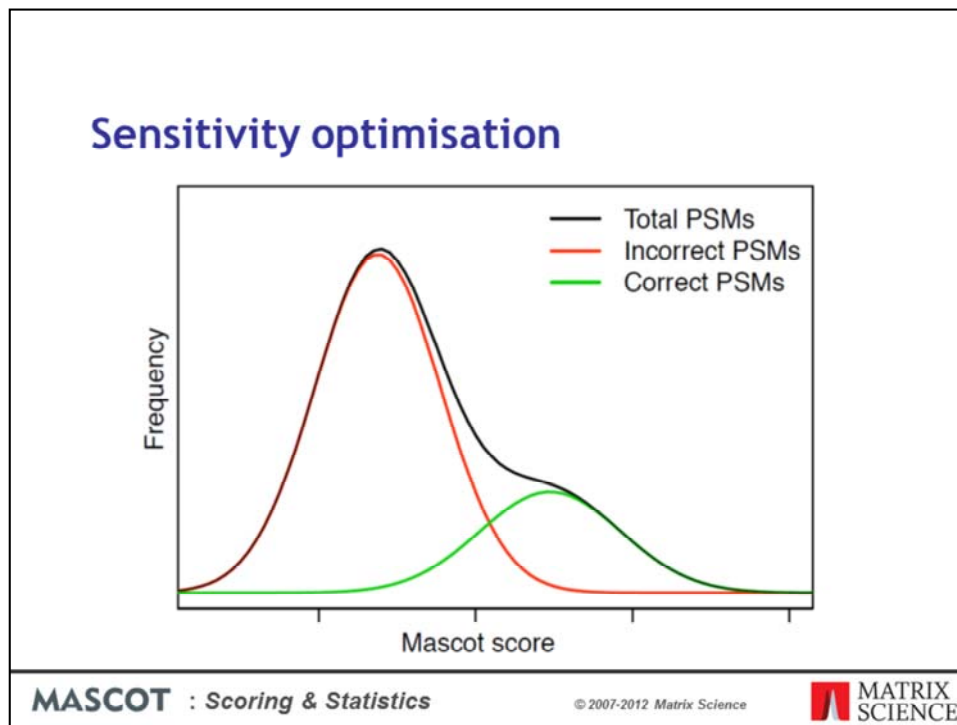
The results from the matches to the randomised sequences are saved in new sections of the results file on the Mascot server. This means that we can view these results in exactly the same way as if we had performed a separate search against a randomised database that we had created manually. We can see matches here with scores of 37 and 51, with expect values well below 1%. If we click on the query number link to display the Peptide View of one of these matches ...



This is what it looks like. A pretty decent match from a decoy sequence. Tryptic peptide, no variable modifications, good run of b and y ions, most of the larger peaks matched.

Asking whether it is correct or wrong becomes almost a philosophical question.

The fact is, when we search large numbers of spectra against large sequence databases, we can get such matches by chance. No amount of expert manual inspection will prevent this. Database matching is a statistical process and, for this search, the number and magnitude of the false positives are well within the predicted range, which is all we can ask for.



Sensitivity improvement is always a hot topic. A limitation of database matching is that even the best scoring scheme cannot fully separate the correct and incorrect matches, as shown here in a schematic way. The score distribution for the correct matches overlaps that of the incorrect matches. When we use a decoy search we are deciding where to place a threshold of some sort

But, what if we could find ways to pull these two distributions further apart? In other words, improve the specificity of the scoring.

Sensitivity optimisation

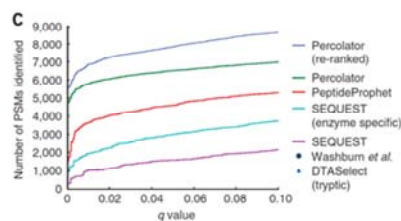


Anal. Chem. 2002, 74, 5383–5392

Empirical Statistical Model To Estimate the Accuracy of Peptide Identifications Made by MS/MS and Database Search

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Semi-supervised learning for peptide identification from shotgun proteomics datasets

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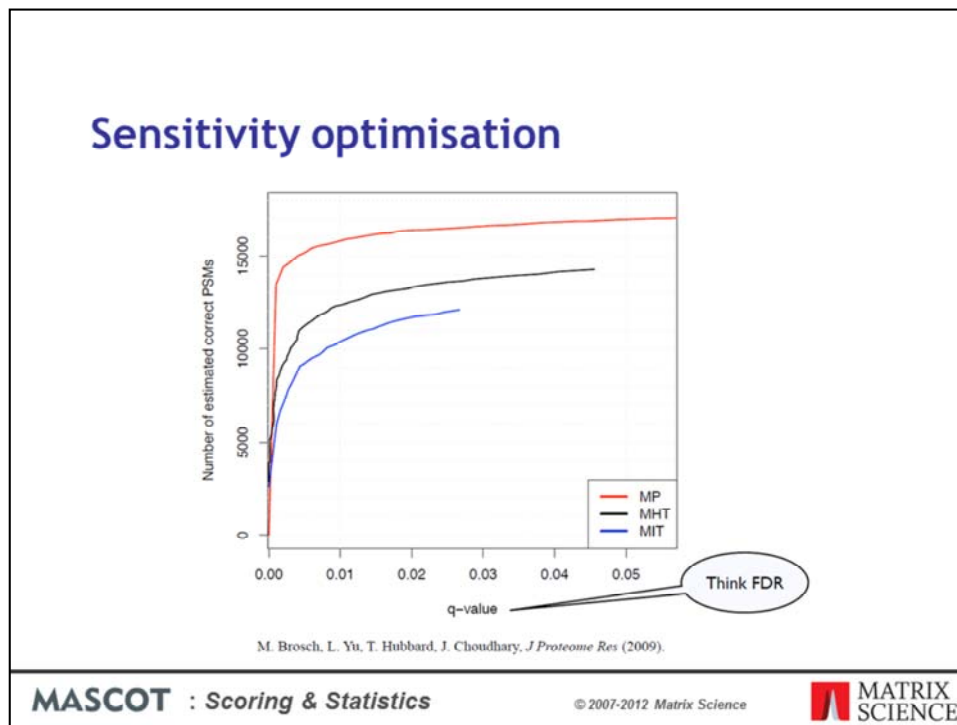
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One of the first attempts to do this was Peptide Prophet from the ISB. This was and is popular for transforming Sequest scores into probabilities.

It takes information about the matches in addition to the score, and uses an algorithm called expectation maximization to learn what distinguishes correct from incorrect matches. Examples of additional information would be precursor mass error, number of missed cleavages, or the number of tryptic termini.

A more recent development has been to use the matches from a decoy database as negative examples for the classifier. Percolator trains a machine learning algorithm called a support vector machine to discriminate between a sub-set of the high-scoring matches from the target database, assumed correct, and the matches from the decoy database, assumed incorrect.



This can give very substantial improvements in sensitivity. The original Percolator was implemented mainly with Sequest in mind, but Markus Brosch at the Sanger Centre wrote a wrapper that allowed it to be used with Mascot results and published results such as this. The black trace is the sensitivity using the Mascot homology threshold and the red trace is the sensitivity after processing through Percolator. It doesn't work for every single data set. But, when it does work, the improvements can be most impressive.

Sensitivity optimisation

The screenshot shows the 'Protein Family Summary' page in the Mascot web interface. At the top, there are several control elements: a 'Filter' button, a 'Significance threshold p:' dropdown set to '0.05', a 'Max. number of families' dropdown set to 'AUTO', and a 'Percolator scores' checkbox which is checked and circled in red. Below these controls, there is a 'Show Percolator scores' dropdown menu set to 'Selected families'. The main content area displays a 'Protein families 1-10 (out of 479)' section with a tree view and a list of protein families. The first family shown is '1::spTRYL_BOVIN' with 1606 sequences, and the second is '2::CP2CT_MOUSE' with 6 sequences. The interface also includes a 'Protein families 1-10 (out of 479)' section with a tree view and a list of protein families.

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The developers of Percolator have kindly agreed to allow us to distribute and install Percolator as part of Mascot 2.3 and later. This option will be available for any search that has at least 100 MS/MS spectra and auto-decoy results, but it works best if there are several thousand spectra. To switch to Percolator scores, just check the box and then choose Filter. This is the example search that is linked from the MS/MS Summary report help page

Sensitivity optimisation

▼Decoy search summary

Peptide matches	in target	in Decoy	FDR
- above identity threshold	1484	15	1.01%
- above identity or homology threshold	1837	20	1.09%

Decoy results are available in [the decoy report](#).

▼Decoy search summary

Peptide matches	in target	in Decoy	FDR
- above identity threshold	1985	19	0.96%
- above identity or homology threshold	1985	19	0.96%

Decoy results are available in [the decoy report](#).

Delta H	Score	Expect	Rank	U	1	2	3	Peptide
0.1363	0	33	0.00049	▶1	U	■	■	R.LIGDAAK.N
0.3090	0	14	0.039	▶1	U	■	■	K.VQVYTK.G
0.2841	0	17	0.018	▶1	U	■	■	K.VQVYTK.G
0.4581	0	18	0.015	▶1	U	■	■	K.VLEDSLK.K
0.0517	0	21	0.0087	▶1	U	■	■	K.VLEDSLK.K
0.2227	0	25	0.0031	▶1	U	■	■	K.ITITNDQHR.L

Score > 13 indicates Identity

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Using the Mascot homology threshold for a 1% false discovery rate, there are 1837 peptide matches. Re-scoring with Percolator gives a useful increase to 1985 matches. Note that, in general, the scores are lower after switching to Percolator. The Posterior error probability is tabulated in the expect column. A Mascot score is calculated from the expect value and the single score threshold, which we describe as the identity threshold, has a fixed value of 13 ($-10 \log 0.05$). By keeping the score, threshold, and expect value consistent, we hope to avoid breaking any third party software that expects to find these values.