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**Applications of isothermal titration calorimetry - the research and technical developments from 2011-15.**

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Review

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3 1 **Applications of isothermal titration calorimetry - the research and technical developments from**  
4 2 **2011-15.**

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19 10 **ABSTRACT**

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21 11 Isothermal titration calorimetry is a widely used biophysical technique for studying the formation or  
22 12 dissociation of molecular complexes. Over the last five years much work has been published on the  
23 13 interpretation of ITC data for single binding and multiple binding sites. As over 80% of ITC papers are  
24 14 on macromolecules of biological origin this interpretation is challenging. Some researchers have  
25 15 attempted to link the thermodynamics constants to events at the molecular level. This review  
26 16 highlights work done using binding sites characterised using x-ray crystallography techniques that  
27 17 allow speculation about individual bond formation and the displacement of individual water  
28 18 molecules during ligand binding and link these events to the thermodynamic constants for binding.  
29 19 The review also considers research conducted with synthetic binding partners where specific binding  
30 20 events like anion- $\pi$  and  $\pi$ - $\pi$  interactions were studied. The revival of assays that enable both  
31 21 thermodynamic and kinetic information to be collected from ITC data is highlighted. Lastly published  
32 22 criticism of ITC research from a physical chemistry perspective is appraised and practical advice  
33 23 provided for researchers unfamiliar with thermodynamics and its interpretation.

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40 25 **INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH BETWEEN 2011-2015**

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42 26 Research into isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC) started around 25 years ago as high-sensitivity  
43 27 calorimetry instruments were developed. The publication of Ernesto Freire and coworkers' article  
44 28 entitled "Isothermal Titration Calorimetry" in 1990 introduced this technique to researchers  
45 29 interested in studying binding interactions.<sup>1</sup> Since 1990 there has been steady rise in research  
46 30 publications on ITC (Figure 1) encouraged by the release of commercial instrumentation that made  
47 31 this method accessible to a wide population of scientists. There are now around 600 to 700 peer-  
48 32 reviewed papers containing research using ITC published annually and there are no signs of this  
49 33 growth stopping. The field of protein chemistry has benefited most from ITC dominating the  
50 34 published research though synthetic chemists have increasingly found ITC useful (Figure 2). Research  
51 35 into lipids has used ITC to study demicellation with success and binding studies using nucleic acids,  
52 36 carbohydrates and synthetic molecules are also represented.

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57 37 Despite the steady increase in research using ITC there have been no significant technical advances  
58 38 in ITC instrumentation since 2010. Robotic automated instruments were already on the market in

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3 39 2010 and ITC can be considered a mature technology. There have been improvements in software  
4 40 making the technology increasingly user friendly. The published ITC research is dominated by simple  
5 41 one-site binding interactions where the mathematics and interpretation of the results are relatively  
6 42 simple. ITC-based techniques like thermal analysis of enzyme kinetics,<sup>2,3</sup> continuous ITC<sup>4</sup> and protein  
7 43 folding<sup>5</sup> have received minimal uptake by the research community despite their apparent value.  
8 44 There have been some recent advances in ITC-based techniques that are worth noting including  
9 45 kinITC which collects kinetic and thermodynamic information for binding interactions,<sup>6</sup> and advances  
10 46 in ITC displacement assays for high-affinity binding reactions.<sup>7,8</sup>

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14 47 The increased use of ITC to study binding interactions with synthetic molecules is worthy of note as  
15 48 it provides highly defined molecules for binding studies. Protein binding studies have always been  
16 49 complicated by the fact that many binding sites are not well characterised and the inherent flexibility  
17 50 of protein molecules can make interpretation of binding site studies problematic. Progress has been  
18 51 made on the interpretation of ITC data since 2010. The strengths and weaknesses of ITC are also  
19 52 better understood. This knowledge however, has not uniformly trickled down to researchers  
20 53 undertaking ITC analysis where presentation of ITC data and the interpretation of thermodynamic  
21 54 parameters could be improved.

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24 55 A recent development has been the advent of the Journal of Visualized Experiments (JoVE). JoVE is a  
25 56 PubMed-indexed video journal and ITC methods have been demonstrated by this journal.<sup>9-11</sup> This is  
26 57 particularly useful for researchers unfamiliar with the practical applications of ITC and can form a  
27 58 useful component in student or technician training.

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30 59 Between 2003 and 2012 the Journal of Molecular Recognition published annual reviews of ITC  
31 60 research covering the years 2002 to 2010.<sup>12-20</sup> The authors John Ladbury, Ilian Jelesarov, Brett  
32 61 Collins, Robert Falconer and their co-authors not only reviewed the literature but provided expert  
33 62 advice on ITC use for the scientific community. The purpose of this current review is to appraise the  
34 63 developments from the last five years since the last annual ITC review and provide advice on the  
35 64 interpretation of ITC data. The author identified more than 2,500 articles reporting the use of ITC  
36 65 between January 2011 and December 2015, after searching the Web of Science and Scopus  
37 66 databases. This number of papers is impractical to cite in full so the author has selected  
38 67 approximately 200 that he feels best represents the field and apologises for any resulting omissions.  
39 68 These references have been classified into the following broad categories:

- 40  
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43 69 (i) References cited in the introduction.<sup>1-20</sup>  
44 70 (ii) Review and perspective articles.<sup>21-29</sup>  
45 71 (iii) Methods papers.<sup>30-52</sup>  
46 72 (iv) Protein : protein interactions.<sup>53-70</sup>  
47 73 (v) Protein interactions with other ligands.<sup>71-143</sup>  
48 74 (vi) Lipids, micelles and membranes.<sup>144-151</sup>  
49 75 (vii) Polysaccharides.<sup>152-155</sup>  
50 76 (viii) Nucleic acids.<sup>156-169</sup>  
51 77 (ix) Synthetic chemicals, polymers and nanoparticles.<sup>170-207</sup>  
52 78 (x) Enzyme kinetics.<sup>208-217</sup>  
53 79 (xi) Pre-2011 and non-ITC references.<sup>218-234</sup>  
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82 **INTERPRETATION OF SINGLE BINDING SITE ITC DATA**

83 Single binding site interactions are the simplest to study using ITC. If the c-value is between 1 and  
84 1000 enough of the sigmoidal titration curve can be captured from which the stoichiometry,  
85 disassociation constant ( $K_D$ ), change in free energy ( $\Delta G$ ) and change in enthalpy ( $\Delta H$ ) can be directly  
86 measured. From this the change in entropy ( $\Delta S$ ), can be calculated.<sup>218</sup> Note  $c = M_0 / K_D$  where  $M_0$  is  
87 the initial concentration of the binding partner in the cell. Where the c-value is below 1 the  
88 stoichiometry and change in enthalpy ( $\Delta H$ ) values are problematic and where the c-value is greater  
89 than 1000 the disassociation constant ( $K_D$ ) and change in free energy ( $\Delta G$ ) values are inaccurate. It is  
90 also worth noting that the change in entropy value ( $\Delta S$ ) is calculated from the equation  $\Delta G = \Delta H - T\Delta S$   
91 and will contain any errors from both the  $\Delta G$  and  $\Delta H$  measurements. An excellent paper by Joel  
92 Tellinghuisen written in 2012 provides further guidance for researchers designing ITC protocols to  
93 generate precise thermodynamic data.<sup>48</sup>

94 The first hurdle many researchers face is understanding the thermodynamic terms. While the  
95 definitions for change in enthalpy and change in free energy definitions are fairly obvious and there  
96 are some excellent text books on the subject.<sup>219-220</sup> The concept of entropy can be difficult to  
97 comprehend. Entropy can be described as a measure of disorder within a system as well as the  
98 energy state of a system.<sup>221</sup> For the interpretation of aqueous systems many authors rely on the  
99 concept of entropy being the movement from ordered to disordered states (and vice versa) whereas  
100 the idea of moving from a high energy state to a lower energy state is probably more accurate and  
101 avoids the need to attribute structures to water that are questionable. The water around methyl  
102 groups is an example where structural attributes have been used to describe water at the interface.  
103 In the past these structures were described as being ice-like<sup>222</sup> and more recently they have been  
104 described as clathrate-like cages<sup>223</sup> or networks.<sup>24</sup> A simpler way of describing the water at the  
105 interface with a methyl group is water that cannot hydrogen bond with the methyl group; this water  
106 has a higher energy state than water surrounded by water where it can exchange protons freely. The  
107 calculated entropy from ITC data is the sum of the entropies within the sample being studied and  
108 will involve the ligand, its target, the water and any co-solutes (buffer, salts, etc.) within the sample.  
109 This complexity makes it difficult to ascribe individual changes during binding (like displacement of  
110 individual water molecules) to changes in entropy.<sup>24</sup> For further reading on the interpretation of  
111 entropy that is written in a highly accessible manner try Frank Lambert's paper "A modern view of  
112 entropy".<sup>224</sup>

113 The work using ITC to study drug candidates' interaction with drug targets has made researchers in  
114 this field increasingly aware of the complexity that is occurring at drug binding sites. This has been  
115 helped by the known crystal structure of some of the drug targets that were studied.<sup>24</sup> This enabled  
116 speculation about the specific bond formation occurring and the displacement of specific water  
117 molecules during binding.

118 During a binding interaction between a protein and a ligand the following occurs:

- 119 1. The ligand has to penetrate the protein's hydration layer (which may present an energetic barrier)
- 120 2. There is displacement of water from the part of the protein's and the ligand's surface where the  
121 binding occurs (desolvation).

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3 122 3. There is also displacement of any co-solutes present at the protein surface. This is particularly  
4 123 important where electrostatic interaction plays a role as charged co-solutes are often present at the  
5 124 binding site and may need displacing.  
6  
7 125 4. Short-range bond formation (hydrogen bonding, van der Waal's interaction, pi-cation interactions,  
8 126 etc.) between the protein and the ligand will occur.  
9 127 5. There is the possibility of proton exchange between both binding partners and the buffer.  
10 128 6. There is the possibility of conformational change of the protein; this is particularly important  
11 129 where allostery plays a role in the protein's function.  
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13 130 7. Finally there will be a rearrangement of the water adjacent to the ligand-protein interface.  
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15 131 Each of these events during binding will have an effect on net  $\Delta H$  and  $\Delta S$  values.

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17 132 The role of the protein's hydration layer on binding interactions is contentious as the methods for  
18 133 measuring this phenomenon like terahertz spectroscopy are still specialist techniques and not  
19 134 familiar to most ITC users. There is evidence that a protein's hydration layer is more extensive and  
20 135 complex than previously believed.<sup>225-227</sup> It has also been shown that cosolutes can modify the  
21 136 hydration layer.<sup>228-229</sup> There is scope for future work using ITC in conjunction with low frequency  
22 137 analysis of water.  
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25  
26 139 Gerhard Klebe's group used inhibitor binding to thermolysin<sup>24,76-77,108</sup> to study the important  
27 140 contribution of water displacement and rearrangement on the thermodynamics of inhibitor binding.  
28 141 This was not a trivial undertaking. Firstly the structure was defined by x-ray crystallography at the  
29 142 BESSY beamline in Berlin. This enabled the binding site to be well characterised and the possible  
30 143 location of bound water molecules determined. In one study the ligands only differed in the  
31 144 replacement of a methyl with a carboxyl group.<sup>76</sup> The difference in thermodynamics of binding was  
32 145 attributed to the carboxyl group disrupting the water network around the filled binding site. A  
33 146 second set of ligands were used with substitutions altering the ligands hydrophobicity. As the  
34 147 thermolysin binding site is a hydrophobic pocket, the interaction would usually be considered as an  
35 148 example hydrophobic interaction and would be entropy driven.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, the addition of a  
36 149 methyl group to the ligand resulted in an enthalpy-driven improvement in binding whereas addition  
37 150 of further hydrophobicity to the ligand gave a predicted entropy-driven improvement. This was  
38 151 ascribed to changes to the water at the surface of the protein ligand complex.<sup>77,108</sup> The conclusion  
39 152 from this research was that water played a minor role in the change in free energy but had a major  
40 153 effect on change in enthalpy and entropy. The work did demonstrate our current inability to  
41 154 consistently predict the thermodynamic profiles associated with relatively simple changes in ligand  
42 155 structure even when the binding site was well characterised.<sup>24</sup>  
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48 157 The classical approach to the thermodynamics of binding would be to consider solvation as implicit  
49 158 within the activity coefficients of the binding partners. Brian Castellano and Daryl Eggers argued that  
50 159 for binding reactions in aqueous environments, the water should be treated as a coreactant. So the  
51 160 binding equation was proposed that took water into account,  $\Delta G^0 = -RT \ln K_i - [Q]_i \Delta G_i^{H_2O}$  where  $\Delta G^0$  is  
52 161 the standard free energy constant,  $[Q]_i$  is the concentration of the complex,  $K_i$  is the association  
53 162 constant and  $\Delta G_i^{H_2O}$  is the desolvation energy, all in a specific solution (i).<sup>175</sup> The example used was  
54 163 calcium ion binding to EDTA conducted at different reactant concentrations and temperatures.  
55 164 When  $-RT \ln K_i$  was plotted against  $[Q]_i$ , the y-intercept gave the  $\Delta G^0$  and the slope the  $\Delta G_i^{H_2O}$  values.  
56 165 An observation was that  $K_i$  changes with concentration and that the  $\Delta G_i^{H_2O} / RT$  had a near linear

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3 166 relationship to  $1/T$ . This research provides a method to determine values for the desolvation energy  
4 167 associated with binding interactions.

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7 169 Displacement of co-solutes during binding is often overlooked during ITC studies. An example where  
8 170 co-solute displacement was studied used metal cation binding to the synthetic p-  
9 171 sulfonatocalix[4]arene (a ring structured molecule with four acidic sulpho groups where a metal ion  
10 172 can bind).<sup>181</sup> The presence of a counter ion such as sodium had a considerable effect on the  
11 173 thermodynamics of binding. While p-sulfonatocalix[4]arene is a synthetic molecule the principle is  
12 174 the same for proteins and other macromolecules where ions commonly interact with oppositely  
13 175 charged constituent parts. Most ITC binding studies are in buffered solutions where the co-solutes  
14 176 often comprise sodium chloride and a buffer that will interact with charged amino acid side chains  
15 177 and affect the thermodynamics of any binding that involve electrostatic interaction. George  
16 178 Whiteside's group used the pocket in human carbonic anhydrase II to examine the role of anions on  
17 179 binding.<sup>95</sup> This work which combined ITC with x-ray crystallography and molecular dynamic  
18 180 simulation suggested low charge density anions can associate with hydrophobic regions within the  
19 181 binding pocket, altering the charge and water structure in and round the pocket.

20 182

21 183 Proton exchange between either binding partner with the buffer received much attention before  
22 184 2011.<sup>20</sup> A recent study of ligand binding to a t-RNA binding protein provided a good example of  
23 185 proton transfer during ITC experimentation having a marked effect on change in enthalpy.<sup>119</sup>  
24 186 Further analysis was able to identify which components of the binding partners were responsible for  
25 187 the proton exchange with the buffer.

26 188

27 189 The take home message is that interpretation of ITC data for binding interactions in aqueous  
28 190 systems has to take displacement of water, co-solutes and protons into consideration. Commonly  
29 191 used solutions like phosphate buffered saline contain the high-charge density phosphate anion  
30 192 which binds relatively strongly to positive charged side chains and can interfere with ligand binding  
31 193 to proteins (personal observation). Anyone considering selection of low charge density ions like  
32 194 guanidinium hydrogen chloride or iodine to improve protein solubility would be advised to read  
33 195 George Whiteside's paper before proceeding.<sup>95</sup> Chemicals like DMSO are commonly used to help  
34 196 solubilise ligands that have low-solubility in water but the effect of DMSO on the binding partners  
35 197 and their respective hydration layers has to be taken into consideration. The choice of the buffer and  
36 198 other cosolutes to be used during ITC experiments is very important and needs careful  
37 199 consideration.

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#### 39 201 **INTERPRETATION OF MULTIPLE BINDING SITE ITC DATA**

40 202 The study of proteins and protein complexes with multiple binding sites is of particular interest to  
41 203 scientists interested in allosteric regulation where the binding of one molecule to a site affects the  
42 204 binding of a second molecule to a separate site on the same protein or protein complex. Where the  
43 205 two molecules are different (heterotropic allostery) this phenomenon is easily studied using ITC as  
44 206 the  $\Delta G$ ,  $\Delta H$  and  $\Delta S$  values for the second binding event will be different for the protein with and  
45 207 without the first molecule present. An example of heterotropic allostery is the formation of the  
46 208 complex between mRNA containing poly(A) sequences with the translation factors polyadenylate-

209 binding protein-1 (PABP) and scaffolding protein eIF4G.<sup>130</sup> The ITC data gave clear evidence of  
210 cooperative binding of eIF4G and Poly(A) to PABP.

211 Allostery can also occur where the multiple bind sites on the protein or protein complex bind the  
212 same ligand (homotropic allostery). An example of this was the binding of acetyl coenzyme A to the  
213 dimeric protein aminoglycoside N-(6')-acetyltransferase-li.<sup>96</sup> This study used a combination of ITC,  
214 circular dichroism, and nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy to quantify the structural, dynamic  
215 and thermodynamic aspects of allostery. The ITC binding isotherms are often non-sigmoidal due to  
216 the different  $\Delta G$  and  $\Delta H$  values of the different binding events. Homotropic allostery presents the  
217 challenge of calculating meaningful thermodynamic constants for the multiple binding sites<sup>31</sup> and  
218 for detecting positive and negative cooperativity.<sup>34</sup> While the mathematics for calculating  $\Delta G$ ,  $\Delta H$   
219 and  $\Delta S$  values for multiple binding sites has been determined and informative simulations have been  
220 undertaken<sup>31,34</sup> it is worth remembering that relatively small errors in the raw ITC data (especially  
221 where few titrations are present for critical parts of the thermogram) can generate plausible but  
222 misleading  $\Delta G$ ,  $\Delta H$  and  $\Delta S$  values for the binding sites.

223 Non-specific binding can be easily confused with multiple binding site interactions. There are many  
224 molecules that will bind to proteins, nucleic acids and synthetic molecules, while not targeting  
225 individual binding sites. Possibly the best studied family of molecules that bind "promiscuously" to  
226 proteins are the polyphenolics.<sup>79,107,117,143</sup> It is believed that polyphenolics hydrogen bond with the  
227 peptide backbone of a protein. The complicating factor in studying non-specific binding of  
228 polyphenolics to proteins is their propensity to cross-link proteins which can displace water around  
229 the proteins and contribute to the recorded  $\Delta G$  and  $\Delta H$  values (personal observation). The ITC  
230 binding isotherms are often non-sigmoidal and could be interpreted as evidence of allostery if cross-  
231 linking was not taken into consideration.<sup>107</sup>

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### 233 **METHODOLOGICAL ADVANCES**

234 **kinITC assay to capture both thermodynamic and kinetic information.** Burnouf et al 2012 proposed  
235 a method for collecting both kinetic and thermodynamic data from ITC experimentation that could  
236 be used for simple binding interactions and more complex processes.<sup>6</sup> The example they studied  
237 included the binding of the inhibitor Nevirapine to HIV-1 reverse transcriptase, and the binding of  
238 thiamine pyrophosphate (TPP) to the *Escherichia coli* riboswitch present in the 5'-UTR of the thiC  
239 mRNA which folded on binding of TPP. The paper's supplementary information provided details on  
240 instrument response time, injection times and mixing times for their Microcal ITC200 which had to  
241 be taken into account if this method was to be reliable. Work on the partial validation of kinITC used  
242 surface plasmon resonance as the gold standard method for determining the kinetic on and off  
243 constants. The collection of kinetic data using an ITC is obviously attractive as it does not require a  
244 tether to a solid support but the assay must be well validated and the instrument response time,  
245 injection times and mixing times for the instrument known.

246 The collection of both kinetic and thermodynamic data has also been applied to study RNA helical  
247 packing.<sup>166</sup> By running the assay at different temperatures they were able to calculate the Arrhenius  
248 activation energy and Eyring transition state entropy as well as the thermodynamic parameters for  
249 GAAA tetraloop-receptor interaction in magnesium and potassium solutions.

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3 250 **ITC assays for the quantification of high-affinity binding interactions.** The standard ITC  
4 251 displacement assay used to study high-affinity interactions has been around since 2000 and has  
5 252 been used to study a range of high-affinity interactions.<sup>230,231</sup> This technique uses the displacement  
6 253 of a moderate-affinity ligand to lower the apparent affinity of a high-affinity ligand. A displacement  
7 254 assay using weakly binding fragments to thrombin was run in parallel with direct (low-C) assay and  
8 255 showed both methods yielded valid disassociation constants.<sup>44</sup> The direct low-C titrations, however,  
9 256 have highly questionable stoichiometry. The displacement assay also had a drawback that different  
10 257 displaced ligands affected the enthalpic values indicating that the choice of the displaced ligand was  
11 258 important and that experimental conditions need to be standardised so comparison can be made  
12 259 between different fragments. This phenomenon was ascribed to the solvation structure and protein  
13 260 dynamics of the initial protein–ligand complexes before displacement occurred.<sup>44</sup> The displacement  
14 261 method has a serious drawback as the high-affinity ligand of interest has to be soluble at high  
15 262 concentrations (>100  $\mu\text{M}$ ). Many high-affinity drugs have low solubility in water making the  
16 263 traditional displacement assay impractical. The competition assay published in Krainer et al 2012 can  
17 264 be used to study low solubility high affinity ligands.<sup>7</sup> In this assay the receptor was titrated into a  
18 265 mixture of competing high- and moderate-affinity ligands which generated a biphasic isotherm that  
19 266 was be used to quantify disassociation constants ( $K_D$ ) and binding enthalpies ( $\Delta H$ ) for both ligands.  
20 267 Another alternative approach was a single-experiment displacement assay.<sup>8</sup> The assay involved the  
21 268 titration of the high-affinity ligand into a solution containing the moderate-affinity ligand bound to  
22 269 the receptor with excess moderate-affinity ligand. The isotherm was also biphasic and was used to  
23 270 quantify  $K_D$  and  $\Delta H$  values for both high-affinity and medium-affinity ligands competing for the same  
24 271 binding site. This provides three different strategies for analysing problematic high-affinity binding  
25 272 interactions.

26 273 **Software.** Researchers using ITC are recommended to appraise the software NITPIC (which claims to  
27 274 be superior to Origin) and SEDPHAT that have been developed to assist in analysis of ITC data.<sup>39,45,52</sup>  
28 275 The program NITPIC can be downloaded for free from  
29 276 <http://biophysics.swmed.edu/MBR/software.html>. SEDPHAT can be downloaded from  
30 277 <http://sedfitsedphat.nibib.nih.gov/software> free of charge. AFFINImeter produce commercial  
31 278 software that can be used for analysis of displacement assays, micellization experiments, kinITC, the  
32 279 application of complex models for complex interactions, and ligand induced conformational change.  
33 280 At the time of writing this software was only suitable for MicroCal data but they were intending to  
34 281 release the software compatible with other brands of ITC.

35 282

## 36 283 **SYNTHETIC MOLECULES**

37 284 Over 80% of research using ITC is with macromolecules of biological importance including proteins,  
38 285 nucleic acids, lipids and carbohydrates. Macromolecules are poorly suited to studying specific  
39 286 interactions. The use of ITC with synthetic molecules provides a range of opportunities to study  
40 287 binding interactions using receptors that are simpler and well defined. This has enabled hypotheses  
41 288 regarding interactions in aqueous solutions to be tested using well defined synthetic ligands. This  
42 289 information can then be transferred to help our understanding of the interactions that are occurring  
43 290 in proteins, nucleic acids, etc.

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3 291 There are several papers studying cation- $\pi$ ; anion- $\pi$ ; and  $\pi$ - $\pi$  interactions. In one study ciprofloxacin  
4 292 hydrochloride was used in an aqueous solution.<sup>197</sup> Ciprofloxacin hydrochloride has a quinolone ring  
5 293 and a protonated amine. ITC was used alongside  $H^1$  NMR spectroscopy to demonstrate one-  
6 294 dimensional aggregates formed by  $\pi$ - $\pi$  stacking and dimer formation brought together by cation- $\pi$   
7 295 interaction. Anion- $\pi$  were studied in aqueous solutions with a tren (tris(2-aminoethyl)amine)  
8 296 molecule attached to a nitroso-amino-pyrimidine.<sup>173</sup> A range of anions were shown to interact with  
9 297 the heteroaromatic ring. A large entropic contribution favoured association and was attributed to  
10 298 displacement of water around the hydrophobic pyrimidine surface during association suggesting in  
11 299 this case water displacement played an important contribution to this anion- $\pi$  interaction. Anion- $\pi$   
12 300 interactions were also studied using halides (Cl<sup>-</sup>, Br<sup>-</sup>, and I<sup>-</sup>) and “two-wall” calix[4]pyrrole  
13 301 receptors with two six-membered aromatic rings in organic solvents.<sup>170</sup> The number and electron  
14 302 drawing character of aromatic substitutions increased the positive electrostatic surface potential of  
15 303 the centre of the six member ring enabling the anion- $\pi$  interaction. The interaction of fullerenes to a  
16 304 buckycatcher (comprised of two corannulene subunits tethered together) in a range of organic  
17 305 solvents is an example of binding with a strong  $\pi$ - $\pi$  interaction component.<sup>189</sup> In a binding  
18 306 interaction where solvent displacement played a significant role, the change in entropy played a  
19 307 minor role in driving binding which surprised the authors.

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25 308 A synthetic octa-acid host with a hydrophobic pocket was used to study the effect of anions on  
26 309 binding of small molecule ligands.<sup>182</sup> In the case of low charge density anions like ClO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> the anion  
27 310 was found to enhance affinity at low concentrations and weaken it at high concentrations. At higher  
28 311 ClO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> concentrations, for the small molecule ligand to bind to the hydrophobic pocket required  
29 312 displacement of the anion. This supports the theory of Kim Collins that explains the behaviour of low  
30 313 charge density anions and protein solubility in terms of low charge density anion interaction with  
31 314 hydrophobic surfaces on the protein.<sup>232</sup> While the synthetic octa-acid host study is ongoing it does  
32 315 provide the opportunity to challenge or confirm the theories for low charge density anion  
33 316 interaction with hydrophobic pockets at a nanometer-scale and complements work undertaken with  
34 317 binding to proteins in the presence of low charge density anions that observe similar effects.<sup>95</sup> It also  
35 318 has the capacity to challenge theories about the activity of medium and high charge density anion  
36 319 indirect interaction through competition for solvent.<sup>233</sup>

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41 320 In an interesting study, allostery was mimicked using a dual-cavity basket which had six alanine  
42 321 residues at the entrance of two juxtaposed cavities that was designed to trap organophosphorus  
43 322 nerve agents.<sup>177</sup> Molecular dynamic simulation and  $H^1$  NMR spectroscopy suggested a negative  
44 323 homotropic cooperativity of binding in water. This is an attractive candidate for ITC studies as it  
45 324 could be used to validate computer simulations of negative cooperativity binding.

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#### 49 326 CAUTIONARY NOTE

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52 327 In 2015, Brian Pethica from Princeton University wrote a highly critical paper entitled “Misuse of  
53 328 thermodynamics in the interpretation of isothermal titration calorimetry data for ligand binding to  
54 329 proteins”<sup>26</sup> which should serve as a cautionary note for scientists who don’t have a strong  
55 330 background in thermodynamics. Pethica’s critique, however, should not dissuade researchers from  
56 331 using ITC to study binding as long as they are aware of the assumptions that predicate the  
57 332 calculation of the thermodynamic constants.

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3 333 The first key assumption behind the equation  $\Delta G = \Delta H - T\Delta S$  (where  $\Delta H$  is the change in enthalpy,  $\Delta G$  is  
4 334 the change in free energy and  $\Delta S$  is the change in entropy) is that the binding reaction is reversible  
5 335 and that equilibrium has been reached. This assumption is acceptable for most binding reactions but  
6 336 it should be remembered that allosteric change in a binding partner could prevent the ligand  
7 337 returning to the solution. The most common error in published ITC data was too shorter time  
8 338 between titrations which does not allow the peak to return to the baseline (i.e. equilibrium was not  
9 339 reached before the next injection) and this key assumption was not met.

12 340 The second assumption is that the ligand and the macromolecule (protein, nucleic acid or synthetic  
13 341 molecule) are totally soluble. In practice many ligands such as drug candidates have low solubility in  
14 342 water. In some cases ligand preparations may include insoluble along with the soluble ligand. When  
15 343 injected into the ITC cell some of the insoluble material will dissolve and there will be a  $\Delta H$   
16 344 associated with this event. The use of control titrations of ligand into buffer (without the  
17 345 macromolecule present) and titrations of buffer (without the ligand) into the macromolecule can be  
18 346 used to detect this type of event occurring. The use of these controls should be a normal part of ITC  
19 347 experimental design.

23 348 The third assumption is that macromolecule solutions are ideal (i.e. there are no macromolecule-  
24 349 macromolecule interactions, no macromolecule-cosolute interactions, and no interactions between  
25 350 macromolecule-ligand complexes). Macromolecule solutions are not ideal. Cosolutes interact with  
26 351 macromolecules both by direct binding and indirectly by modifying their hydration layers.<sup>233-235</sup>  
27 352 Macromolecules similarly interact with each other or compete with each other for water for their  
28 353 hydration layers.<sup>226,229</sup> The issue of cosolutes altering the thermodynamics of ligand binding is  
29 354 unavoidable and the researcher has to accept that the thermodynamic constants derived from their  
30 355 research are for the solution conditions used and will change if different buffer, pH or temperatures  
31 356 are used. The issue of macromolecule-macromolecule interactions is also unavoidable. Even a target  
32 357 like EDTA demonstrated concentration-dependant thermodynamics of binding to calcium ions.<sup>174</sup>  
33 358 This was attributed to the desolvation of the binding partners and demonstrated that undertaking  
34 359 ITC at several target concentrations will provide a better understanding of the non-ideality of  
35 360 macromolecule solutions.

36 361 To overcome the criticism from physical chemists like Brian Pethica, the author recommends that  
37 362 researchers should do the following:

- 38 363
- 39 364 • Outline the assumptions behind the thermodynamic calculations in their papers.
  - 40 365 • Make sure titration peaks do reach the baseline (achieving equilibrium).
  - 41 366 • Run the control titrations of ligand into buffer (without the macromolecule present) and  
42 367 buffer (without the ligand) into the macromolecule as a standard part of the ITC  
43 368 experimentation then present these thermograms in the paper or as supplementary  
44 369 information.
  - 45 370 • Specify the conditions used for the binding experiments including the composition of both  
46 371 titrant solution and the solution in the sample cell (include pH and temperature). Also include  
47 372 the specific titration strategy used. While this does not avoid non-ideality of macromolecule  
48 373 solutions it does define the experimentally derived thermodynamic constants for the precise  
49 374 conditions used.
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3 374 • For experimentation with low solubility ligands, be careful that the ligand is totally dissolved  
4 375 and if chemicals like DMSO are used to improve ligand solubility, consider their potential  
5 376 interaction with the binding partners.  
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9 378 **REQUEST FOR RAW DATA PUBLICATION**

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11 379 The author would like to suggest that editors and reviewers of articles containing ITC data should  
12 380 request that the raw ITC data (the experimentally derived thermograms) should be published in the  
13 381 paper or as supplementary material. There are many ITC papers where the calculated binding  
14 382 isotherms alone are published without the experimentally derived thermograms. To the experienced  
15 383 ITC operator the raw data contains a wealth of information and should be provided to verify that the  
16 384 analysis was done to a high standard. The raw data can confirm that the baseline was steady and  
17 385 equilibrium was reached before the next injection. The raw data can also be used to better  
18 386 understand the kinetics of the interaction and detect mixed interactions (e.g. rapid binding followed  
19 387 by slow aggregation). It is the author's opinion that much useful data is being lost and that  
20 388 confidence in published data is eroded due to the frequent failure to publish raw ITC data.  
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26 390 **Figure Titles**

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28 391 Figure 1 Articles written with isothermal titration calorimetry content since 1990 sourced from the  
29 392 Web of Science™.

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31 393 Figure 2 Subject material studied using isothermal titration calorimetry in 2014. Note protein related  
32 394 research accounted for 67% of the articles. Synthetic compounds were 17%, lipids and micelles were  
33 395 6%, nucleic acids were 4%, carbohydrates were 3% and the remainder were 3% of the articles.  
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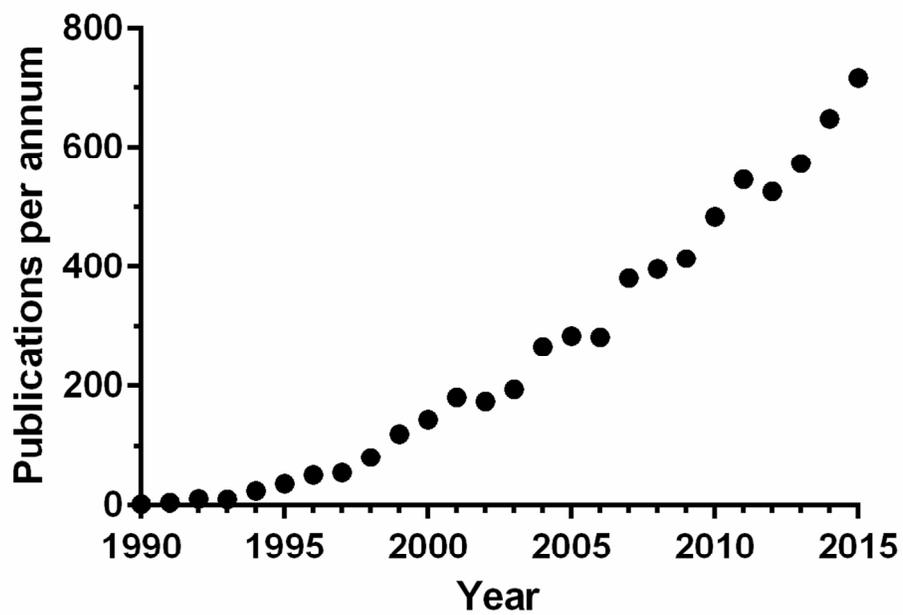
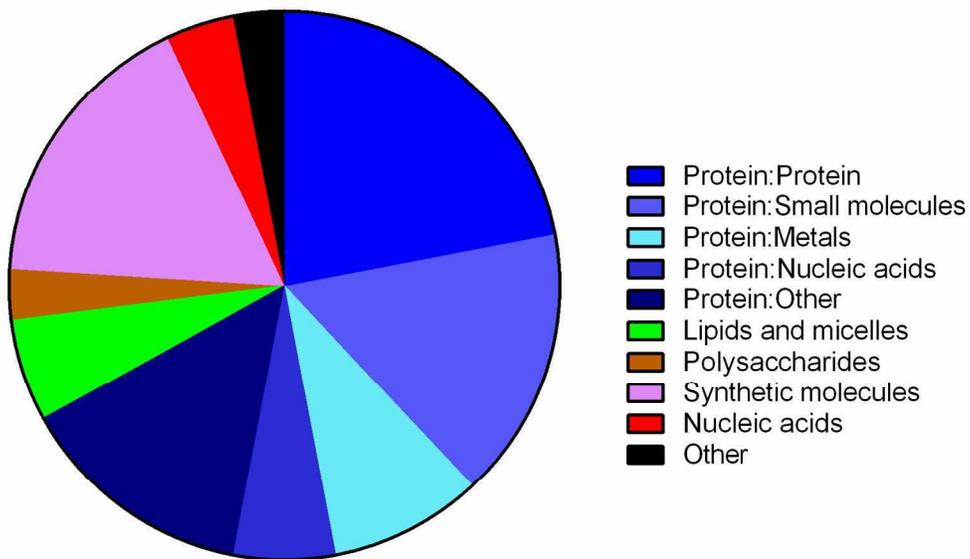


Figure 1  
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