Accurate identification of polyadenylation sites from 3’ end deep sequencing using a naïve Bayes classifier

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ABSTRACT

Motivation: 3’ end processing is important for transcription termination, mRNA stability and regulation of gene expression. To identify 3’ ends, most techniques use an oligo-dT primer to construct deep sequencing libraries. However, this approach can lead to identification of artifactual polyadenylation sites due to internal priming in homopolymeric stretches of adenines. Although heuristic filters have been applied in these cases, they typically result in a high proportion of both false-positive and -negative classifications. Therefore, there is a need to develop improved algorithms to better identify mis-priming events in oligo-dT primed sequences.

Results: By analyzing sequence features flanking 3’ ends derived from oligo-dT-based sequencing, we developed a naïve Bayes classifier to classify them as true or false/ internally primed. The resulting algorithm is highly accurate, outperforms previous heuristic filters and facilitates identification of novel polyadenylation sites.

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1 INTRODUCTION

3’ end processing of pre-mRNAs influences transcription termination, mRNA stability and localization and dynamic regulation of translation. In plants, yeast and metazoans, sequence elements in the 3’ untranslated region (3’UTR) direct cleavage and polyadenylation (reviewed in Millevoi and Vagner, 2010; Proudfoot, 2011). Among these elements is the polyadenylation signal (PAS), a defined hexameric sequence located 10–30 nucleotides (nt) upstream of the cleavage and polyadenylation site (pA site), which binds Cleavage and Polyadenylation Specificity Factor I (Millevoi and Vagner, 2010; Proudfoot, 2011). In combination, these sequence elements help define the site of cleavage and polyadenylation at the 3’ end of a pre-mRNA.

Most efforts to identify 3’ ends of mRNAs have relied on priming with an oligonucleotide of deoxystymines (oligo-dT). These efforts include early studies relying on expressed sequence tags (ESTs; Beaudoing et al., 2000; Tian et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2005), as well as more recent work using deep sequencing (reviewed in Mueller et al., 2013). These include Poly(A) Site sequencing (PAS-Seq; Shepard et al., 2011) and PolyA-Seq (Derti et al., 2012), which rely on oligo-dT containing primers for first strand cDNA synthesis. While these approaches are technically straightforward, oligo-dT binding can occur in internal homopolymeric stretches of adenines (Nam et al., 2002) leading to identification of false-positive pA sites. A more selective method is poly(A)-position profiling by sequencing (referred to as 3pseq), where a splint RNA:DNA oligonucleotide with overhanging thymines is hybridized and ligated to the polyadenylated tail of mRNAs to prevent internal priming (Jan et al., 2011). However, 3pseq is technically demanding and most laboratories are more likely to use oligo-dT-primed approaches. In these latter cases, internal priming events are generally filtered from datasets based on the number of adenines in the genomic sequence downstream of the cleavage site (Beaudoing et al., 2000; Brockman et al., 2005; Fu et al., 2011; Haenni et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2007; Shen et al., 2011; Shepard et al., 2011; Smibert et al., 2012; Tian et al., 2005; Wilkening et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2005). However, the strict definition of these heuristic filters inevitably misses some internal priming events (false positives) and also excludes true 3’ ends (false negatives; Sherstnev et al., 2012). Thus, additional methods are needed to easily analyze oligo-dT primed deep sequencing data to identify true pA sites.

A naïve Bayes classifier, based on Bayes theorem, is a supervised learning algorithm in which the features used to predict the class are considered conditionally independent (Alpaydın, 2010). Naïve Bayes classifiers are computationally efficient, require relatively small training datasets, handle both continuous and discrete features and ignore non-relevant features (Kotsiantis et al., 2006; Alpaydın, 2010). Here, we demonstrate the effectiveness of a naïve Bayes classifier to identify internal priming events in oligo-dT primed sequencing data. We find that our trained algorithm outperforms heuristic filters and enriches for 3’ ends in oligo-dT sequencing data that bear canonical motifs important for cleavage and polyadenylation. Biological validation shows that our method is highly accurate, facilitating identification of novel 3’UTRs and 3’ ends in multiple animal species.

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2 METHODS

2.1 Zebrafish care and staging

Zebrafish were maintained as described in (Westerfield, 1993) and staged as described in (Kimmel et al., 1995). Studies were performed under the approval of the University of Massachusetts Medical School Institutional Animal Care and Usage Committee.

2.2 RNA purification

Total RNA was purified from either 6 or 24 hpf wild-type CF zebrafish and treated with DNase I (Qiagen RNasey Mini Kit, Qiagen RNase-Free DNase Set). Polyadenylated RNA was selected using magnetic oligo-dT beads (Invitrogen mRNA Direct Kit).

2.3 RNA-seq libraries and data analysis

The 24 hpf zebrafish RNA-seq library was built using an Illumina mRNA-seq protocol (Part # 1004898 Rev. D) and paired-end sequenced on an Illumina Genome Analyzer II (76 nt reads) and an Illumina Hi-Seq (101 nt reads). Sanger 6 hpf RNA-seq data were downloaded from the European Bioinformatics Institute (run ERR022485). RNA-seq reads from both developmental stages starting with at least five thymines (the reverse complement of a polyadenylated mRNA) or ending with at least five adenosines were mapped to the zebrafish genome (Zv9) using Bowtie (Langmead et al., 2009; Supplementary Fig. S1A). Those that mapped to the genome were taken as sites for potential internal oligo-dT priming and included in the True Negative training set (Supplementary Fig. S1A). The site of internal priming was assigned to the single nucleotide immediately upstream of the last mapped 3' adenine in this set (referred to as RNA-seq internally primed sites). Sequence fragments that did not initially map were trimmed of terminal adenosines (or thymines) and re-mapped (Supplementary Fig. S1A). Mapped reads (referred to as RNA-seq putative pA sites) were combined with the PAS-Seq data for establishment of the True Positive training sets (Supplementary Fig. S1A; see Training Sets).

2.4 3' end deep sequencing datasets

We constructed PAS-Seq libraries as described in (Shepard et al., 2011), using barcoded adapters, and paired-end sequenced on an Illumina HiSeq (101 nt reads) with a custom sequencing primer described in (Shepard et al., 2011) designed to exclude the remainder of the poly(A) tail from sequencing. Libraries were de-convoluted using Perl scripts and mapped to the zebrafish genome (Zv9) using Tophat (Trapnell et al., 2009). Zebrafish 6 and 24 hpf 3pseq (Uliisky et al., 2011) and mammalian polyA-seq alignments (Derti et al., 2012) were downloaded from the Gene Expression Omnibus (accession numbers GSE32880, GSE30198).

cleanUpdTSeq (see below) was used to classify putative sites from filtered polyA-seq as true or false, using a probability assignment cutoff = 0.5. No additional filtering was performed on the 3pseq or the originally filtered polyA-seq datasets.

2.5 RNA-Seq Transcriptome Analysis

To assess the utility of our classifier on an annotated transcriptome, we used it on previously published RNA-seq models for zebrafish embryos described in Pauli et al. (2012). Unique 3' transcript ends were classified using cleanUpdTSeq as described below.

2.6 pA site builds

A custom Perl script clustered mapped sequencing reads into putative pA sites. Mapped reads were trimmed 3' terminal nt, which corresponds to the site of cleavage. Reads were clustered first for identically matching sites. An iterative process was used to cluster adjacent sites within ±5 nt, starting with the site with the highest number of reads. Within a cluster, the putative pA site was defined as the location with the most reads and the total reads were combined to give the height. Mann-Whitney test was performed to assess height differences between datasets (Hollander and Wolfe, 1999). Concordance between datasets was defined as being within ±10 nt using a Perl script. The distance from the putative PAS to the pA site was determined as the distance from the 3' end of the PAS to the pA site.

2.7 Training Sets

RNA-seq putative pA sites were combined with the PAS-Seq putative pA sites and clustered as described above (Supplementary Fig. S1A). Sites concordant between the PAS-Seq and the 3pseq data sets were assigned to the True Positive training set (Supplementary Fig. S1A). Sites and average distance of downstream adenines to the pA site (Supplementary Fig. S2B). The upstream features are modeled as binomial variables and the downstream features are modeled as normal variables. A naïve Bayes classifier was built using the training data and the function buildClassifier, which leverages the R package e1071 with laplace set to 1. To classify the test dataset, the predictClass function was applied. These functions along with sequence fetching utilities and training data are available on our website (lawsonlab.umassmed.edu/cleanupdtseq.html). The package cleanUpdTSeq is available at Bioconductor.org.

2.8 Performance Metrics

Precision, recall, true negative rate (TNR), false discovery rate (FDR), false positive rate (FPR), accuracy, F-score and Matthew’s correlation coefficient (MCC) were calculated using the following equations.

\[
\text{Precision} = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \\
\text{Recall} = \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \\
\text{TNR} = \frac{TN}{TN + FP} \\
\text{FDR} = \frac{FP}{FP + TP} \\
\text{FPR} = \frac{FP}{TN + FP} \\
\text{Accuracy} = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN} \\
\text{F – Score} = \frac{2 \times \text{precision} \times \text{recall}}{\text{precision} + \text{recall}} \\
\text{MCC} = \frac{(TP + FN)(TP + FP)(TN + FN)(TN + FP)}{\sqrt{(TP + FP)(TP + FN)(TN + FP)(TN + FN)} \\
\text{Misclassification Error} = \frac{FP + FN}{TP + TN + FP + FN}
\]
2.10 Model selection, training set size and relative feature importance

For performance evaluation, the training datasets were randomly split (70% used for training and 30% used for cross-validation) in 10 trials, each with a range of probability cutoffs from 0 to 1 at an interval of 0.1 for each combination of upstream (20–50 nt in increments of 10 nt) and downstream (30–50 nt in increments of 10 nt) sequence. We calculated average precision, recall, F-score, accuracy, true negative rate, false discovery rate, false positive rate and MCC from 10 cross-validations of each model, using a probability of true cutoff of 0.5 (Supplementary Table S1). We chose 40 nt of upstream and 30 nt of downstream sequence for subsequent PAS identification.

To evaluate training set size, we classified the trainer with 15995 (50%), 19194 (60%), 22393 (70%), 25592 (80%) or 28791 (90%) peaks and used the remainder for cross-validation. Average precision, recall, F-score, accuracy, true negative rate, false discovery rate, false positive rate and MCC from 10 cross-validation trials were calculated as above.

To evaluate the relative importance of each feature, P-values using prop.test in R and odds ratio were calculated for the binary features (Mladenic and Grobelnik, 1999). For the continuous features, P-values were calculated using t-test. Features were ordered by P-values, with lowest values indicating greatest importance. Upstream features (binary) and downstream features (continuous) are listed separately in Supplementary Tables S2A and B, respectively. In addition, the top 200 positive upstream features are listed in Supplementary Table S2C, which only include top upstream features with odds ratio <0. The presence of positive features is associated with increased probability of being a true polyadenylation site.

2.11 PAS flanking sequence characterization

Commonly used zebrafish PASs were identified by applying Multiple Em for Motif Elicitation (MEME) (Bailey and Elkan, 1994) to 50 nt upstream of 3′ ends annotated in Ensembl (v61). These were used to build a Perl script to search for a canonical or variant PASs. For mammals, a Perl script was used to search for a canonical or variant PAS of True Negative training set. (Supplementary Fig. S1A). True Negatives were derived from oligo-dT primed RNA-Seq reads with at least five genomically templated terminal adénines or proximal thymines and were not present in 3pseq (Supplementary Fig. S1A). The training set consists of 22770 True Positives and 9219 True Negatives, primer and assay-specific reverse primer (G-Tail: Affymetrix Poly(A) Tail-Length Assay Kit Universal Primer, oligo-dT: GGGGATCCGGTTTTTTTTTTT; Murray and Schoenberg, 2008). Nested PCR was performed for 20 to 35 cycles using 1 µl of a 1:50 dilution of the primary PCR as template, a nested forward primer and the assay-specific reverse primer. PCR products were run on a 2% agarose gel. Gene-specific oligonucleotides were also used to help estimate the size of the 3′UTR without any poly(A) tail. The lower part of the smear or single band were excised from the gel, column purified (Qiagen MinElute Gel Extraction Kit), shotgun cloned (Promega pGEM-T Easy Vector System I) and sequence verified.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To distinguish between true and false PA sites in oligo-dT primed deep sequencing data, we trained a naïve Bayes classifier using defined True Positive and True Negative sites. Given the demonstrated technical rigor of 3pseq, True Positives were defined as the intersection of 3′ ends identified by both 3pseq and PAS-Seq datasets from the same stage of zebrafish embryos (Supplementary Fig. S1A). True Negatives were derived from oligo-dT primed RNA-Seq reads with at least five genomically templated terminal adénines or proximal thymines and were not present in 3pseq (Supplementary Fig. S1A). The training set consists of 22770 True Positives and 9219 True Negatives.

![Fig. 1](https://academic.oup.com/bioinformatics/article-abstract/29/20/2564/277787)
representing the majority of zebrafish-coding genes (data not shown). As expected of pA sites (Graber et al., 1999), True Positives exhibited a prevalence of adenines and thymines upstream of the cleavage site (Fig. 1A) and a canonical PAS clustered near the 3' end (Fig. 1B and C). Downstream of the pA site we noted thymine and a slight enrichment of guanine (Fig. 1A). By contrast, True Negative sites failed to exhibit characteristics associated with pA sites (Fig. 1D and E), and the small fraction of PASs in these sequences did not cluster near the 3' end (Fig. 1F and G).

3.1 Algorithm training and performance

To delineate the True Positives from the True Negatives, we chose algorithm features to represent sequence elements known to direct cleavage and polyadenylation (Supplementary Fig. S2A). In the upstream sequence region, this included all hexamer permutations to allow for self-discovery of potential canonical and variant PASs and uracil-rich elements (Supplementary Fig. S2B). Downstream of a putative cleavage site, guanine/uracil- or uracil-rich elements may signify a true pA site (Proudfoot, 2011), while adenine richness may indicate internal oligo-dT priming. Therefore, we also included mono- and di-nucleotide counts, as well as the average distance of the adenines to the pA site, as features (Supplementary Fig. S2B). The upstream features were modeled as a binomial distribution and the downstream features were modeled as a normal distribution. The relative importance of each feature is listed in Supplementary Table S2A. As expected, canonical PASs, AATAAA and ATTTAA, are among the top four most important binary features (Supplementary Table S2A), while downstream T/GT rich elements, adenine richness and proximity to the pA site are among the most important continuous features (Supplemental Table S2B). Variant PASs also aid in identification of true pA sites (Supplemental Table S2C: top 200 positive hexamers upstream). Variation of up- (20–50 nt) and downstream (30–50 nt) sequence lengths for these features (Supplementary Fig. S2C) demonstrated low variability between the different models (Supplementary Table S1). We chose 40 nt of upstream sequence, as not to miss any possible PASs in the upstream region due to variations in cleavage site usage, and 30 nt downstream for subsequent training (Pauws et al., 2001).

To develop and test the naïve Bayes classifier, we randomly sampled 70% of the training set to build the classifier (training) and the remaining 30% to evaluate performance (cross-validation) and averaged the results of 10 trials. Following training, we found that the naïve Bayes classifier recalled 92.2% of True Negatives (true negative rate, Table 1 and Fig. 2A) and 93.8% of True Positives (recall, Table 1 and Fig. 2B), while it incorrectly categorized only 3.2% of predicted positives (false discovery rate, Table 1 and Fig. 2C). By contrast, a heuristic filter defined as 8 or more adenines in 10 nt downstream of the pA site (referred to hereafter as 8A) generally performed worse at identifying True Negatives and False positives, although recall with this filter was quite good (Fig. 2 and Table 1). While removing all sites without a putative PAS in combination with the 8A filter (PAS + 8A) improved performance (Fig. 2A–C), the naïve Bayes classifier generally outperformed both of these heuristic filters, as determined by MCC, a balanced measure of true positives, false

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<th>Table 1. Performance measurement from naïve Bayes classifier and indicated heuristic filters</th>
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<td>True-negative rate</td>
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Note: naïve Bayes classifier outperforms heuristic filters based on the number of adenines downstream of a putative site and polyadenylation consensus signal upstream of a putative pA site. See methods for a description of filters and equations of the performance metrics.

3.2 Application to PAS-Seq data

To more generally test the performance of the naïve Bayes classifier, we used all True Positives and True Negatives to build the classifier and used it to categorize unfiltered oligo-dT primed 3' end deep sequencing (PAS-Seq) data from 24 hpf zebrafish embryos. Genomic sequence flanking 3' ends from unfiltered
PAS-Seq data shows enrichment for adenines upstream and downstream of the pA site (Fig. 3A), similar to our True Negative training set (see Fig. 1D and E; $r_A = 0.89$, $r_C = 0.78$, $r_G = 0.79$, $r_T = 0.76$). Furthermore, we failed to identify a canonical PAS as an over-represented motif upstream of putative pA sites in unfiltered PAS-Seq data (Fig. 3A). Indeed, only 20.6% of the putative pA sites contain an upstream AATAAA and 55.4% have no identifiable PAS (Fig. 3B). Thus, this dataset likely contains a high proportion of sequences derived from internal oligo-dT priming. Filtering these data with the trained naïve Bayes classifier calls 65.4% of putative pA sites from PAS-Seq as false, and the nucleotide profile of pA sites called true resembled that of pA sites identified at the same developmental stage by the more technically rigorous 3pseq approach (compare Fig. 3C and D; $r_A = 0.83$, $r_C = 0.68$, $r_G = 0.85$, $r_T = 0.86$). Similar upstream (canonical PAS) and downstream sequence (guanine/thymine-rich) elements were also easily identified in both 3pseq and filtered PAS-Seq datasets (Fig. 3C and D). In all, 49% of the true pA sites called by the classifier contain AATAAA and only 19.2% have no PAS, in agreement with genome-wide PAS distributions (Li et al., 2012; Ulitsky et al., 2012) and similar to 3pseq data (Fig. 3B). In contrast to the naïve Bayes classifier, categorizing PAS-Seq using the 8A heuristic filter classified only 18.1% of putative pA sites as false, leading to only slightly better correlation of sequence composition of the remaining sites with those from 3pseq data ($r_A = 0.45$, $r_C = 0.12$, $r_G = 0.65$, $r_T = 0.61$) compared with the unfiltered PAS-Seq. However, the adenine richness in the downstream sequence region and lack of identifiable consensus PAS suggest a large number of internally oligo-dT primed sites are called as positives after applying the 8A filter (Fig. 3B and E). The PAS+ 8A heuristic filter performs better than the 8A filter, likely by excluding more false positives ($r_A = 0.76$, $r_C = 0.57$, $r_G = 0.83$, $r_T = 0.82$; Fig. 3F). However, based on its strict definition, the PAS+ 8A filter eliminates all true pA sites that do not contain a consensus PAS (Fig. 3B). Together, these results demonstrate that our naïve Bayes classifier performs better than heuristic filters, resulting in a set of putative pA sites that closely resembles 3pseq. Importantly, our classifier is also able to identify 3` ends that do not bear a consensus PAS. Further examination of this subset reveals 53% contain the top 50 positive hexamers upstream, and 74% contain the top 100 positive hexamers upstream (Supplementary Table S2C).

Comparison of the proportion of pA sites common to PAS-Seq and 3pseq data in 24 hpf zebrafish embryos revealed an increase from 13.0 to 35.7% after filtering PAS-Seq data with the naïve Bayes classifier (Fig. 4A). Interestingly, both common and unique pA sites exhibit characteristics typical of true PAS (Fig. 4B–D), although those unique to only 3pseq or PAS-Seq datasets show a higher proportion of variant PAS usage (Fig. 4E). The occurrence of these sites in only 3pseq or PAS-Seq datasets may be due to low levels of expression that are not consistently detected at this sequencing depth. Accordingly, pA sites common to PAS-Seq and 3pseq comprise significantly ($P < 2.2e-16$) more sequencing reads than those unique to either PAS-Seq (mean of 288.69 versus 8.85) or 3pseq (mean of 204.94 versus 21.4; Fig. 4F). Other technical issues may also
Fig. 5. Biological validation of filtered 3’ ends. (A and B) Schematics depicting (A) G Tailed poly(A) Tail Length Assay and (B) oligo-dT Primed poly(A) Tail Length Assay. (C) Left, UCSC genome browser screenshot of 3’ end of nrp2a annotated by Ensembl (v68) and RefSeq in 6 and 24 hpf PAS-Seq and 3pSeq datasets. Right, GPAT and dtPAT assays for 3’ end of nrp2a. (D) Left, UCSC genome browser (reversed to show negative strand in same orientation as C) shows a putative false pA site in an EST expressed in 24 hpf PAS-Seq but not 24 hpf 3pSeq. Right, GPAT and dtPAT assay for 3’ indicated at left. (C and D) ‘+’ reaction included reverse transcriptase; ‘−’ no reverse transcriptase. ‘PAT Assay R’ denotes use of assay-specific reverse primer. ‘Gene Specific R’ denotes use of gene-specific reverse primer. ‘G-tailed’ or ‘oligo-dT’ indicate the method by which the initial cDNA template was made, and which assay-specific reverse primer was used for the lanes labeled ‘PAT Assay R’. Total RNA from 24 hpf whole embryos was used for biological validation. Confusion matrices for biologically validated sites compared with (E) naïve Bayes classifier or (F) 8A filter.

A putative pA site being uniquely found in either dataset. For example, internal oligo-dT binding may block extension from an oligo-dT bound to the poly(A) tail (Nam et al., 2002), thus inhibiting identification of true 3’ ends in adenine-rich genomic loci in PAS-Seq. Variable PAS usage due to polymorphisms between the zebrafish strains used to generate the PAS-Seq and 3pSeq datasets may also be possible (Howe et al., 2013).

To biologically cross-validate the in silico predictions, we conducted two different poly(A) tail length (PAT) assays to verify a putative pA site. In the G-tailed PAT assay (GPAT), yeast poly(A) polymerase is used to ligate guanosines and inosines to the 3’ end of polyadenylated RNA, followed by reverse transcription with an anchored poly-cytosine primer (Fig. 5A). Alternatively, an oligo-dT containing primer was used for reverse transcription (dtPAT; Fig. 5B) (Murray and Schoenberg, 2008). In both assays, nested PCR was performed using a gene-specific forward primer and an assay-specific reverse primer to amplify the 3’ end of the transcript including the poly(A) tail, as well as gene-specific forward and reverse primers to amplify fragments without the poly(A) tail (Fig. 5A and B).

Due to different poly(A) tail lengths or variable oligo-dT binding along the poly(A) tail, validation of a true 3’ end resulted in a smear on an agarose gel in both assays (Fig. 5A-C). Conversely, an internally primed site will result in no product in the GPAT assay and a single product in the dtPAT assay (Fig. 5A, B and D). We applied GPAT and dtPAT assays to 50 putative pA sites in the zebrafish genome defined by our classifier (Supplementary Table S3). Forty-two of these sites were called True by the classifier, of which 22 corresponded to annotated 3’UTRs (Zv9, ENSEMBL v68) and 20 represented novel 3’ ends. All of these True sites were amplified using the GPAT assay, indicating these are true polyadenylated 3’ ends (Fig. 5C and E; Supplementary Table S3), including 11 novel 3’ ends that were identified by 24 hpf PAS-Seq but not 24 hpf 3pSeq. Thirteen validated True sites contained PASs other than the canonical AAUAAA within 40 nt upstream of the cleavage site and one lacked any consensus motif, demonstrating that our classifier can identify 3’ ends without a consensus PAS (Supplementary Table S3).

Along with the putative True set, we assayed eight sites that were classified as False, only one of which was annotated as a 3’ end in ENSEMBL (Supplementary Table S3). Half of these sites displayed a variant PAS near the putative 3’ end, while the remaining sites contained no PAS 40 nt upstream. Seven out of the eight sites classified as False failed to amplify in the GPAT assay, but were detected by dtPAT suggesting that they arise from internal oligo-dT priming (Supplementary Table S3; Fig. 5D, E). Furthermore, six of these sites contained fewer than eight adenosines in the downstream region and were called true by the 8A heuristic filter (Fig. 5F; Supplementary Table S3). One False site, which did not possess a consensus PAS and contained only three downstream adenosines, was amplified by the GPAT assay (Fig. 5E). Together, our biological cross-validation of putative pA sites demonstrates the high accuracy of the naïve Bayes classifier. Importantly, our classifier facilitated the identification of novel pA sites from PAS-Seq allowing the discovery of new 3’UTRs in the zebrafish transcriptome.

3.3 Naïve Bayes classifier displays utility in other species

To determine whether our algorithm, which was trained using zebrafish datasets, could be applied to other species, we used it to filter mammalian datasets generated using polyA-seq, an alternative oligo-dT primed 3’ end sequence method (Derti et al., 2012; see following and data not shown). In this previous study, data were filtered using an empirically derived threshold of a log ratio, calculated as a product of mono-nucleotide frequencies in the 10 nt downstream of putative 3’ ends relative to those from internal priming sites (referred to hereafter as the ‘Derti filter’). As a metric to assess the efficacy of our classifier, we compared the results of filtering polyA-seq data with the naïve Bayes classifier to the output of the Derti filter. For example, unfiltered polyA-seq data from human kidney exhibited similarities to our negative training set, consistent with internal oligo-dT priming (Fig. 6A). From approximately half million putative 3’ ends in the unfiltered data, application of the naïve Bayes classifier identified >130,000 pA sites, which exhibited the expected characteristics for true polyadenylated 3’ ends (Fig. 6B).
In comparison, the Derti filter (Derti et al., 2012) classified 94,945 as true 3' sites, which also exhibited the expected sequence patterns (Fig. 6C). Of these, approximately 77,000 were commonly assigned by the two filtering methods (Fig. 6D). Closer inspection revealed that nearly all pA sites identified uniquely by the Derti filter have fewer than 5 adenines in the 10 nt downstream (Fig. 6E), consistent with the focus of this filter on nucleotide frequencies in the downstream region (Derti et al., 2012). In comparison, our naïve Bayes classifier identifies pA sites with all proportions of adenines in the downstream region, including 54,046 true pA sites called false by the Derti filter (Derti et al., 2012). Importantly, the majority of sites uniquely identified by our classifier possess a canonical PAS, suggesting that they are true 3' ends (Fig. 6F). By contrast, the majority of true sites uniquely identified by the Derti filter did not display a PAS in the upstream region (Fig. 6F), suggesting that many may be false-positive calls. However, without biological cross-validation, it is difficult to assess the false-positive rate within this group. In any event, these observations suggest that our naïve Bayes classifier, trained on zebrafish 3' end sequencing data, performs well in the identification of pA sites from mammalian species. Furthermore, our classifier discovered many more likely true positive pA sites from unfiltered data than the Derti filter. This is likely due to the interrogation and analysis of multiple sequence elements during the training of this classifier, while the Derti filter is restricted to consideration of only mono-nucleotide frequencies immediately downstream of the pA.

Based on our work, a trained naïve Bayes classifier is clearly beneficial to identify true pA sites from oligo-dT primed 3' end sequencing data from both zebrafish and other animal species. Additionally, this approach may also be helpful to assess and improve the quality of 3' ends of RNA-seq transcript models built from standard transcript annotation software, such as Cufflinks or Scripture (Guttman et al., 2010; Trapnell et al. 2010). Indeed, application of our classifier to previously published RNA-seq transcript models from zebrafish (Pauli et al., 2012) suggests a significant number of transcript ends may be due to internal oligo-dT priming, while filtering enriches for canonical and variant PAS hexamers (Supplementary Fig. S4). The usage of our classifier could also be extended to RefSeq and other sequence databases, as these gene models have been largely built from oligo-dT primed cDNAs and likely contain a significant number of incorrect 3' end annotations. Indeed, an estimated 12% of ESTs labeled as 3' ends in dbEST human (release October 04, 2001) are due to internal oligo-dT priming (Nam et al., 2002), and our naïve Bayes classifier correctly predicted that the 3' end of vegfc, as annotated by ENSEMBL in the zebrafish genome (Zv9), is due to mis-priming (Supplementary Table S3). Thus, naïve Bayes filtering of annotated sequences in available databases, in addition to previously published genome-wide oligo-dT primed sequencing data, will likely lead to identification of new pA sites and eliminate false internally primed sites. Further studies are needed to assess the performance of the naïve Bayes classifier, trained on zebrafish data, in yeast and plants. In conclusion, the naïve Bayes classifier developed in these studies will facilitate the identification of novel pA sites in combination with simple oligo-dT primed 3' end sequencing.

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Conflict of Interest: none declared.

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