CELL CULTURE TEXTBOOK (BIOT 77 IVC)



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Cell Culture

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Introduction to Cell Culture

1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model

1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs

1.3: How Cell Culture Developed

1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains

1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth

1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body

1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab

1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology

1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models

1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion

1.11: Chapter Summary

2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace

2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results

2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk

2.3: Layers of Protection

2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness

2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure

2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization

2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures

2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer

2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks

2.10: Centrifuges and Separation

2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care

2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment

2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design

2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready

2.15: Chapter Summary

3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems

3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record

3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure

3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control

3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs

3.5: Recording Work as It Happens

3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History

3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability

3.8: Inventory and Material Status
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
3.14: Chapter Summary

4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells

4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
4.4: The Cell Cycle
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
4.14: Chapter Summary

5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control

5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
5.11: Testing For Contamination
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
5.15: Chapter Summary

6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment

6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment

6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
6.14: Chapter Summary

7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells

7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
7.13: Chapter Summary

8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating

8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records

8.13: Chapter Summary

9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking

9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
9.12: Chapter Summary

10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations

10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
10.10: Checking Count Quality
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
10.13: Chapter Summary

11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization

11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images

11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
11.15: Chapter Summary

12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection

12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
12.14: Chapter Summary

13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays

13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
13.11: Chapter Summary

14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis

14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE

14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
14.12: Chapter Summary

15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results

15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
15.13: Chapter Summary

16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications

16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
16.13: Chapter Summary

Index

Glossary

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1: INTRODUCTION TO CELL CULTURE

Growing cells outside the body allows scientists to control their surroundings and study how they respond to changes. However, a culture cannot reproduce all the conditions found in a living organism. Scientists must choose cells and methods that match the question they want to answer. This chapter introduces **cell culture**, **tissue culture**, and **organ culture**. It compares common types of cultured cells, traces the development of culture methods, and explains how observations and measurements help scientists draw supported conclusions.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter you should be able to:

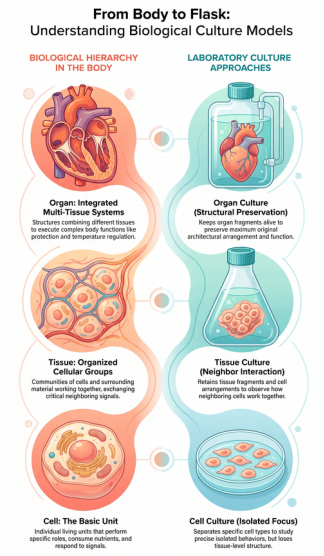
1. Explain what cell culture is and distinguish it from tissue and organ culture.
2. Compare primary cultures, finite cell lines, continuous cell lines, and cell strains.
3. Distinguish adherent growth from suspension growth.
4. Explain how a culture model differs from cells in a living body.
5. Describe how MSCs, THP-1 cells, and NHDFs serve as models for different biological questions.
6. Identify the observations, controls, and records needed to support a cell culture conclusion

1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
1.11: Chapter Summary

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1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model

Imagine looking through a microscope at cells in two flasks. In one



flask, the cells attach to the bottom and spread out. These **adherent cells** grow attached to a suitable surface. In the other flask, round cells float in the liquid. These **suspension cells** grow without attaching to a surface. Both cultures may be healthy. Their different appearances reflect how the cells normally grow. To understand what you see, you need to know the identity of the cells and their expected growth pattern.

Now suppose the cells that usually attach begin to round up and float. This change may be a sign of stress, damage, or a response to treatment. It may also happen during a planned procedure that releases cells for transfer to another vessel. The meaning depends on when the change occurs and how the culture was handled. An appearance that is normal for one cell type may signal a problem in another.

Recognizing these differences helps guide everyday culture work. When replacing the liquid surrounding adherent cells, most healthy cells remain attached to the flask. In a suspension culture, removing that liquid can also remove the cells. Growth pattern therefore affects how cells are fed, collected, counted, and transferred. Using a handling method suited to the cells helps prevent accidental cell loss and supports reliable measurements.

Cell culture is the maintenance of living cells outside their original organism under controlled conditions. The laboratory provides an environment that supports their survival, growth, or activity. The purpose of a culture depends on the question being studied. For example, researchers may use cells to study division, measure protein production, or test a response to treatment.

A culture is a living **model**, a system used to study selected features of a larger biological system. Cells in a flask can show how a cell population responds under chosen conditions. However, they do not receive all the signals or have all the contacts found in the body. **In vitro** means outside a living organism, such as in a laboratory flask or plate. **In vivo** means within a living organism. An in vitro result can help explain cell behavior, but it does not automatically predict what will happen in a person.

With mammalian cells, researchers can compare what they see with what they measure. Measurements may include cell number, the fraction of living cells, RNA, proteins, and cell activity. Knowing the model's limits helps explain what these results can support.

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1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs

Cells in a flask come from a larger living system. In the body, cells work with
nearby cells and the material around them. Consider a small cut in the skin. Several cell types work together to protect the damaged area and rebuild tissue. Growing one of these cell types in a flask allows researchers to study part of this process. To understand the result, it helps to know how cells fit into tissues and organs.

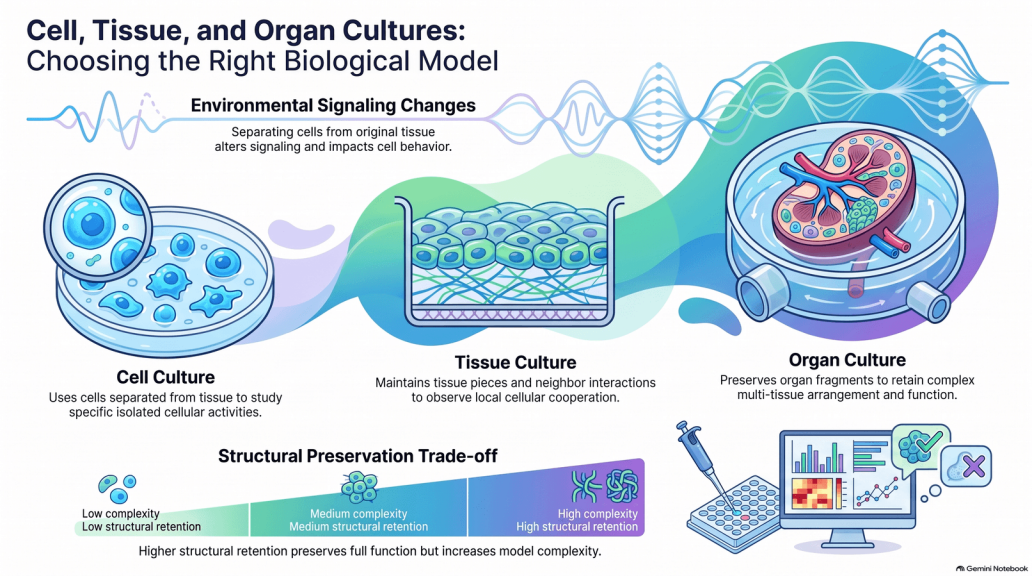
A **cell** is the basic living unit of an organism. Each cell uses nutrients, maintains its boundaries, and responds to signals. Cells also perform different jobs. Some skin cells form a protective barrier, while other cells produce material that supports the skin. Some cells divide readily; others divide rarely. Their roles help explain why different cells may need different culture conditions.

A **tissue** is an organized group of cells and surrounding material that performs related functions. Connective tissue, for example, helps support and hold body structures together. Within a tissue, cells receive signals from their neighbors and their surroundings. Separating cells from that tissue changes the signals they receive and may affect how they behave.

An **organ** contains different tissues that work together. Skin is an organ with a protective outer layer, supporting connective tissue, blood vessels, and nerves. These parts help protect the body, sense the surroundings, and regulate body temperature. A culture containing one skin cell type can help researchers study a specific activity, such as cell movement during repair. It cannot reproduce every function of skin.

How a sample is grown affects how much of its original structure remains. **Cell culture** often uses cells separated from their original tissue. **Tissue culture** can keep pieces of tissue and some of their original arrangement. The term is also widely used to describe cell culture work. **Organ culture** aims to keep an organ or an organ fragment alive while preserving some of its structure and function.

These approaches help researchers ask different questions. A culture of one cell type can show how those cells respond to a treatment. A tissue fragment can help reveal how neighboring cells work together. An organ fragment may preserve more of their original arrangement. When reading a result, ask what was grown and which features were kept or lost. The answers help explain what the model can reveal.



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1.3: How Cell Culture Developed

Cell culture developed from a basic question: could living cells survive and remain active outside an animal? Researchers had to provide nutrients and support normally supplied by the body. Their goal expanded from keeping tissue alive to growing cell populations that could be studied repeatedly.

In 1907, Ross Harrison studied nerve growth using tissue from frog embryos. He placed small tissue pieces in frog lymph, a body fluid that formed a clot around the sample. He observed nerve fibers extending from the tissue. This showed that developing cells could remain active outside the animal and allowed direct observation of their growth.

These experiments used a **tissue explant**, a small piece of tissue removed and placed in culture. Cells grew outward while some of the original tissue stayed together. This helps explain why tissue culture is a broad term. Later methods separated tissue into individual cells. Researchers could then study groups of cells with less of their original arrangement.

Progress required more than nutrients. Bacteria and fungi could contaminate cultures, and changing conditions could stop cell growth. Improvements in cleanliness, feeding, observation, and environmental control made cultures more useful and dependable. Successful work required both biological knowledge and careful laboratory practice.

Cell culture also supported virus research because viruses need living cells to reproduce. In 1949, John Enders, Thomas Weller, and Frederick Robbins demonstrated that poliovirus could grow in cultures of human tissues outside nervous tissue. Their work helped lay the groundwork for polio vaccine development.

In 1951, the HeLa cell line was established from cervical tumor cells taken from Henrietta Lacks. Under suitable conditions, HeLa cells could keep dividing through repeated transfers. This made them useful for repeated experiments and sharing between laboratories. However, the cells were collected and used without Lacks's knowledge or consent. Their history shows why scientific work carries responsibilities toward tissue donors.

Harry Eagle helped develop standard nutrient mixtures, including Eagle's Minimum Essential Medium. Using known ingredients made media easier to prepare in the same way each time. Many cultures still needed serum or other supplements. Better media made experiments easier to compare, but no single mixture met every cell type's needs.

In 1961, Leonard Hayflick and Paul Moorhead reported that normal human diploid cell strains could divide only a limited number of times in culture. **Diploid cells** have two sets of chromosomes. Their findings helped separate finite populations from continuous cell lines and supported studies of cell aging. Cells could stop dividing because of their natural limits rather than a handling mistake.

Cryopreservation is the storage of cells at very low temperatures. It allowed laboratories to save cell stocks and return to starting populations with known histories. Cell banks also made cultures available to other laboratories. These changes helped researchers repeat their work. The risk of mixed or mislabeled cultures showed why checking cell identity was still necessary.

Today, cell culture supports disease research, treatment testing, and biological production. Models include flat cell layers and three-dimensional arrangements with multiple cell types. Each represents selected features of a living system. The history of cell culture shows why useful results depend on suitable cells, controlled conditions, accurate records, and respect for biological sources.

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1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains

A **primary culture** begins when cells are first taken from a tissue or other biological sample and placed in culture. It may contain several cell types. The preparation method and growth conditions influence which cells remain. A primary culture can retain useful features of its source, but it does not perfectly reproduce that source. Removing cells changes their environment. Donor differences, handling, and time in culture can also affect behavior.

Subculture, also called **passaging**, transfers cells from an existing culture into fresh culture conditions. It provides space and nutrients for continued maintenance. A **cell line** is a population maintained through subculture. A cell line is not necessarily able to divide forever.

A **finite cell line** has a limited capacity to divide. Cells may eventually enter **senescence**, a state in which they remain alive but stop dividing. A **continuous cell line** can keep dividing over many passages under suitable conditions. Such lines may arise from tumors or from cells that have undergone changes that support continued growth. Continuous growth does not make cells indestructible. Poor conditions can still kill them.

A **cell strain** is a selected population with particular characteristics, derived from a primary culture or a cell line. A strain may have a useful property, but selection alone does not establish unlimited growth.

Culture origin and growth potential answer different questions. Origin asks where the cells came from. Growth potential asks how long they can continue dividing. Neither tells you, by itself, whether the cells attach to a surface.

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1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth

Adherent cells grow attached to a suitable surface. **Suspension cells** grow dispersed in the culture medium. These growth patterns affect how cells are observed, counted, and transferred.

Adherent cells often spread out after attachment. A **monolayer** is a layer of cells that is approximately one cell thick. **Confluence** describes how much of the available growth surface is covered. A flask at about 50% confluence has roughly half of its growth area covered by cells. This estimate does not give an exact cell count.

For suspension cultures, the number of cells per volume is usually more useful than surface coverage. This value is the **cell concentration**, commonly reported as cells per milliliter. Cells can settle during handling, so a sample from one location may not represent the whole culture.

Growth pattern can also change. Some cells become more adherent after a treatment that changes their state. Therefore, always compare observations with the expected behavior for that cell type and condition.

Liquid removal must match the growth pattern. Removing medium from attached cells may leave most cells behind. Removing liquid from a suspension can remove the cells too. Select a handling method that preserves the population needed for the next task.

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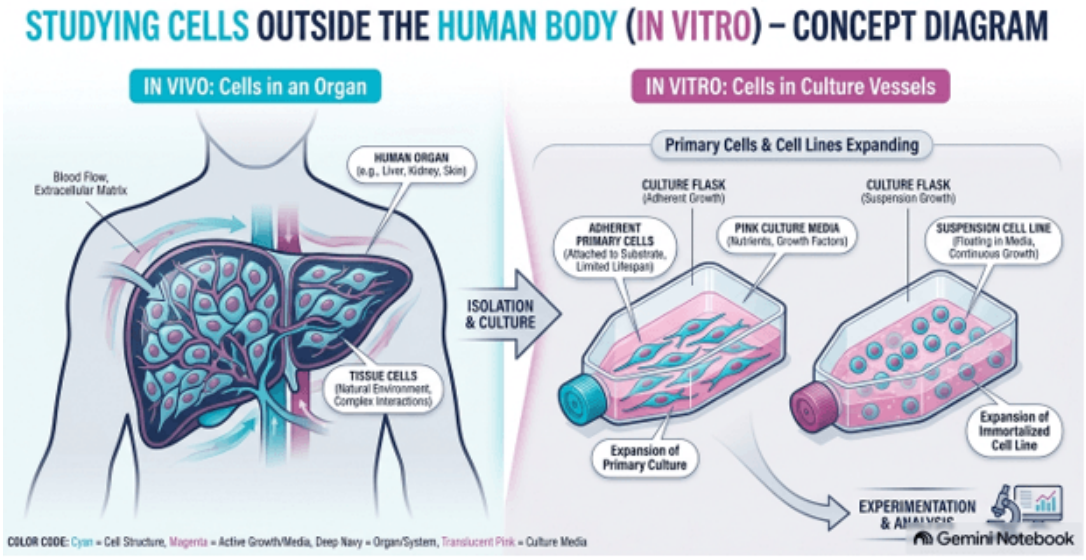
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1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body

Inside the body, cells receive support from nearby cells, circulating fluids, and surrounding structures. In culture, the laboratory provides selected parts of that support.

Culture medium is the liquid preparation that supplies nutrients and other components



needed for cell maintenance. Its composition must match the cells and the task. A medium suitable for one population may not support another.

Temperature, acidity, gas conditions, and nutrient supply can influence cell behavior. The effects are connected. For example, a change in gas conditions may change the acidity of a medium that uses a gas-dependent buffer. Cells also consume nutrients and release waste as they grow.

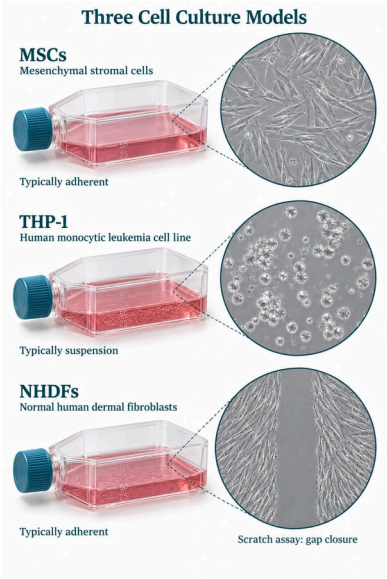
Homeostasis is the maintenance of a relatively stable internal environment. Cells continue to regulate themselves in culture, but their ability to do so depends on the conditions around them. A flask can look normal while an important condition is changing.

Avoid treating a familiar setting as a universal rule. Use the identified cell source information and the approved laboratory procedure. Later chapters explain media, equipment, and environmental control in greater detail.

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1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab



Different cell models reveal different growth patterns and biological functions. Three useful examples are MSCs, THP-1 cells, and NHDFs.

Mesenchymal stromal cells, often called mesenchymal stem cells or **MSCs**, are studied for their growth, signaling, and ability to develop into certain cell types under appropriate conditions. Common preparations grow attached to culture surfaces. Their properties depend on the tissue source and culture history. The name MSC alone does not establish every property of a preparation.

MSC cultures can connect routine maintenance to studies of gene expression and cell-derived samples. Changes in the source culture may affect the samples collected from it, so both need a linked record.

THP-1 cells are a human cell line derived from a patient with acute monocytic leukemia. They are commonly maintained in suspension and used to study aspects of immune cell responses. Certain treatments can produce more adherent, differentiated cells. THP-1 results must be interpreted as results from this model, rather than as a complete representation of normal human immune cells.

Normal human dermal fibroblasts, or **NHDFs**, come from the connective tissue of human skin. A **fibroblast** helps produce and maintain the material surrounding cells. NHDF cultures generally attach to a surface. They support studies of cell behavior, including scratch assays that measure how a gap in a cell layer closes.

These models also help you connect appearance to function. A spindle-shaped cell and a round cell may both be healthy. Their appearance must be judged against the correct model. Exact donor, supplier, lot, and passage information belongs in the culture record.

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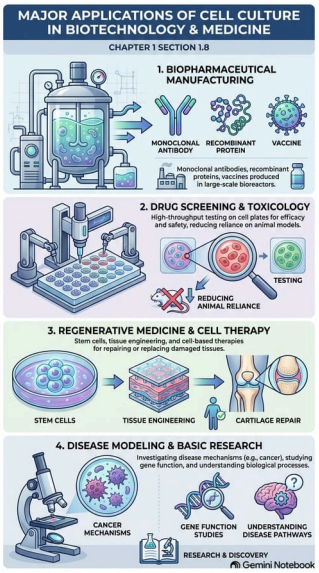
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology

A culture can help a scientist isolate one part of a complex process. For example, a researcher can expose cells to a treatment and measure whether fewer cells remain viable. A **viable cell** is alive under the test conditions. Viability does not necessarily mean that the cell is dividing or carrying out every normal function.

Cultures can also be used to study gene activity. A researcher may change the amount of an RNA or protein and then measure a response. The observed response must be compared with suitable untreated and handling controls.

In biotechnology, cultured cells can produce biological materials or serve as tools for testing. A technician may maintain cultures, collect samples, check equipment, and document results. These tasks support the quality of the final measurement or product.

One culture can provide several kinds of evidence. Cell counts describe the population. Molecular assays measure selected molecules. Functional assays measure a response. These measurements answer related questions, but one cannot replace another. More RNA, for example, does not by itself show more protein or improved cell function.



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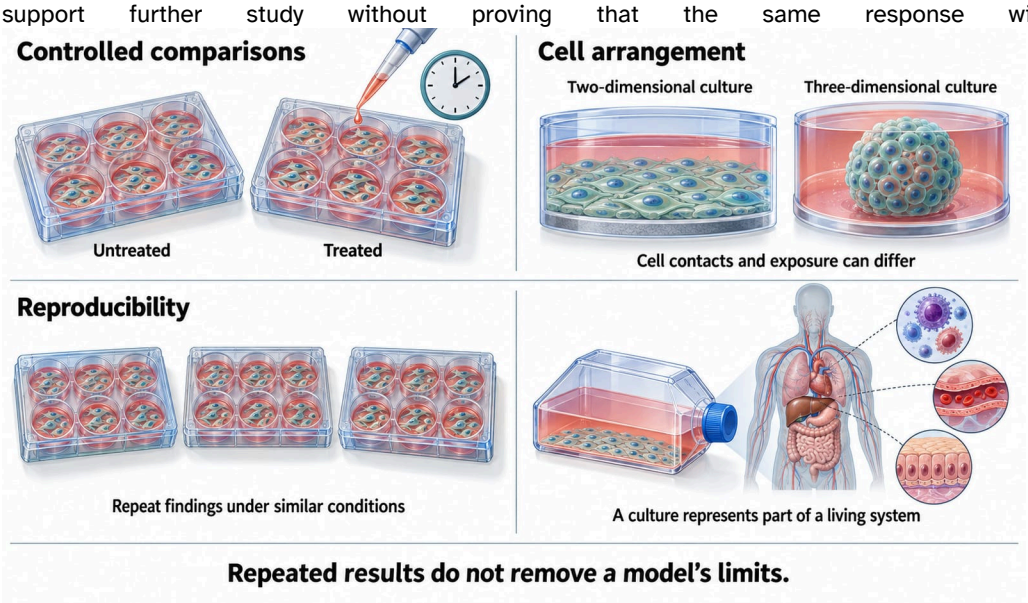
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models

Cell culture gives researchers a way to study cells under controlled conditions. They can choose treatment groups, collect samples at planned times, and compare results. For example, similar cultures grown with and without a treatment can help reveal how cells respond to that treatment. Researchers can also repeat the experiment to check whether the response is consistent.

A **model** is a simplified system used to study a larger or more complex system. A culture preserves selected features of cell behavior, but it leaves others out. Cells in a flask do not experience all the blood flow, immune responses, tissue structures, or chemical processes found in a person. These limits affect what a result can tell us about the body.

The arrangement of cells also matters. A **two-dimensional culture** grows mainly across a surface, while a **three-dimensional culture** allows cells to form a structure with depth. These arrangements can change how cells contact their neighbors and receive nutrients or treatments. Three-dimensional models may preserve more features of tissue, but they still represent only part of a living system.

Reproducibility means that findings can be obtained again under similar conditions. Repeated results increase confidence in the observed response. However, repetition does not remove a model's limits. A dependable result in cultured cells can support further study without proving that the same response will occur in a person.



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1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion

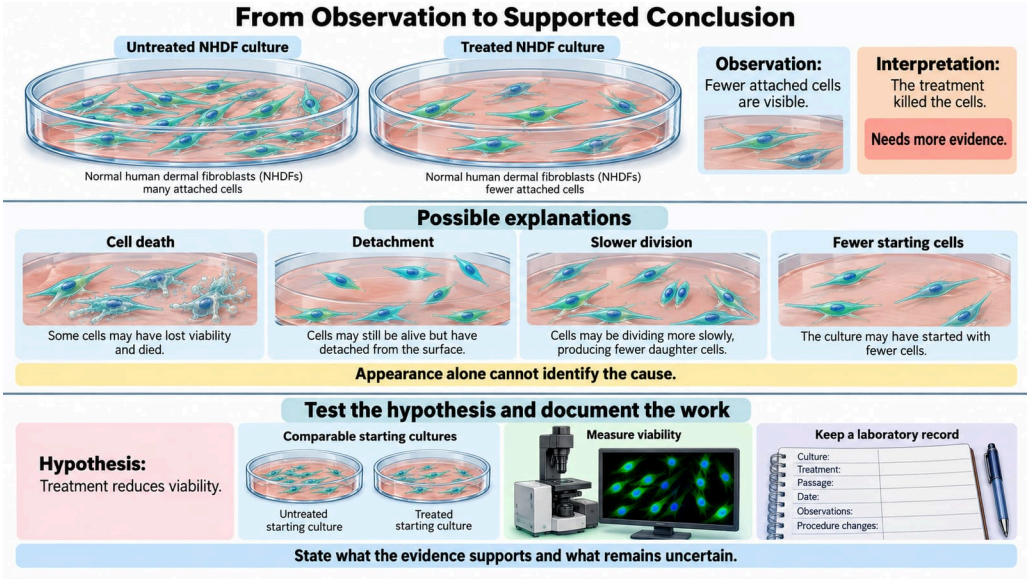
Suppose a treated NHDF culture has fewer attached cells than an untreated culture. Several explanations are possible. Cells may have died, detached, divided more slowly, or started at a lower number. Appearance alone cannot select among these explanations.

An **observation** records what you see or measure. An **interpretation** explains what that finding might mean. Write them separately. “Fewer attached cells were visible” is an observation. “The treatment killed the cells” is an interpretation that needs more evidence.

A **control** is a comparison or check used to help interpret an experiment. Depending on the question, controls may address the treatment, the delivery method, or the measurement itself. Comparable starting cultures and a suitable viability measurement would strengthen the NHDF example.

A **hypothesis** is a testable proposed explanation. You could propose that the treatment reduces viability, then choose measurements that test that idea. A useful conclusion states what the data support and what remains uncertain.

Records make this reasoning reviewable. Identify the culture, treatment, passage, date, observations, and any departure from the procedure. Without these details, another person may be unable to tell whether the groups were comparable.



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1.11: Chapter Summary

Cell culture maintains living cells outside their original organism. It allows focused experiments, but a culture represents only selected parts of a living system. Primary cultures begin with cells collected from a biological source. Cell lines are maintained by subculture and can have finite or continuous growth potential. Cell strains are selected populations with particular properties. Adherent cells attach to a surface, while suspension cells grow dispersed in medium. Culture origin, growth potential, and growth pattern are separate features. MSCs, THP-1 cells, and N DFs provide models of different cell behaviors and functions. Knowing their expected behavior helps guide observation and interpretation. Reliable conclusions require appropriate comparisons, suitable measurements, and complete records. A change in appearance can suggest a question, but additional evidence is needed to explain its cause. Choose a culture by considering its source, division li its, and growth pattern together. These features guide maintenance and help explain changes. Suitable controls connect observations to supported conclusions. The history of cell culture also shows why research must respect tissue donors. Accurate identification and records preserve a model's usefulness and its biological history.

Key Terms

Cell culture	in vitro	in vivo	cell
tissue	organ	tissue culture	organ culture
primary culture	subculture	passaging	cell line
finite cell line	senescence	continuous cell line	cell strain
adherent cells	suspension cells	monolayer	confluence
cell concentration	culture medium	homeostasis	MSCs
THP-1 cells	NHDFs	fibroblast	viable cell
model	two dimensional culture	three dimensional culture	reproducibility
observation	interpretation	control	hypothesis

Review Questions

1. Explain why two healthy cultures might have different appearances.

2. Distinguish cell culture, tissue culture, and organ culture.

3. Why does the term cell line not necessarily mean unlimited growth?

4. Compare a cell strain with a continuous cell line.

5. Explain why culture origin and growth pattern must be described separately.

6. Why is confluence useful for an adherent culture but not a direct measure of suspension cell concentration?

7. Compare the expected routine growth patterns of THP-1 cells and NHDFs.

8. Give one advantage and one limitation of studying cells outside the body.

9. Explain why a reproducible culture result may still fail to predict a response in a person.

10. A culture has fewer attached cells after treatment. Give three possible explanations and identify an additional measurement that could help.

11. What records would help another technician compare two cultures fairly?

12. What does the history of HeLa cells teach about the responsibilities connected to biological samples?

Apply Your Understanding

Two groups compare a treatment using NHDFs. Group A begins with a nearly covered growth surface. Group B begins with only a few attached cells. Both groups use the same treatment and report different final cell counts.

Identify a starting difference that could affect the comparison. Explain why the final counts alone do not show which group experienced the stronger treatment effect. Describe the observations and controls you would want before drawing a conclusion.

A student removes and discards the culture medium from a flask of THP-1 cells, expecting the cells to remain attached as NHDFs do. Explain how this decision could affect the culture. What information should the student check before removing the liquid?

A culture has been transferred into fresh vessels several times. A student concludes that it must be a continuous cell line. Explain why repeated transfers alone do not support this conclusion. How would a finite cell line differ from a continuous cell line over time?

Two NHDF cultures receive the same treatment, but only one shows a change in cell shape. The cultures came from different donors and were maintained in different media. Identify two possible explanations for the different responses. How would you redesign the comparison to investigate whether the treatment caused the change?

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2: LABORATORY SAFETY EQUIPMENT AND WORKSPACE

Safe, reliable cell culture begins with a prepared workspace and equipment suited to the task. A cabinet, pipette, centrifuge, or incubator can affect both worker safety and experimental results. This chapter explains how to recognize hazards, assess risk, select protection, and check equipment. You will also connect liquid transfer, centrifuge settings, and environmental control to culture quality.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Identify biological, chemical, and physical hazards associated with cell culture work.
2. Explain how risk assessment guides equipment, protective clothing, and workspace decisions.
3. Distinguish the purposes of a biosafety cabinet, a clean bench, and a chemical fume hood.
4. Explain the proper selection and basic care of microscopes, pipettes, centrifuges, and incubators.
5. Distinguish rotational speed from relative centrifugal force and solve a simple conversion problem.
6. Evaluate equipment checks and records before deciding whether work can proceed.

2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
2.3: Layers of Protection
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
2.15: Chapter Summary

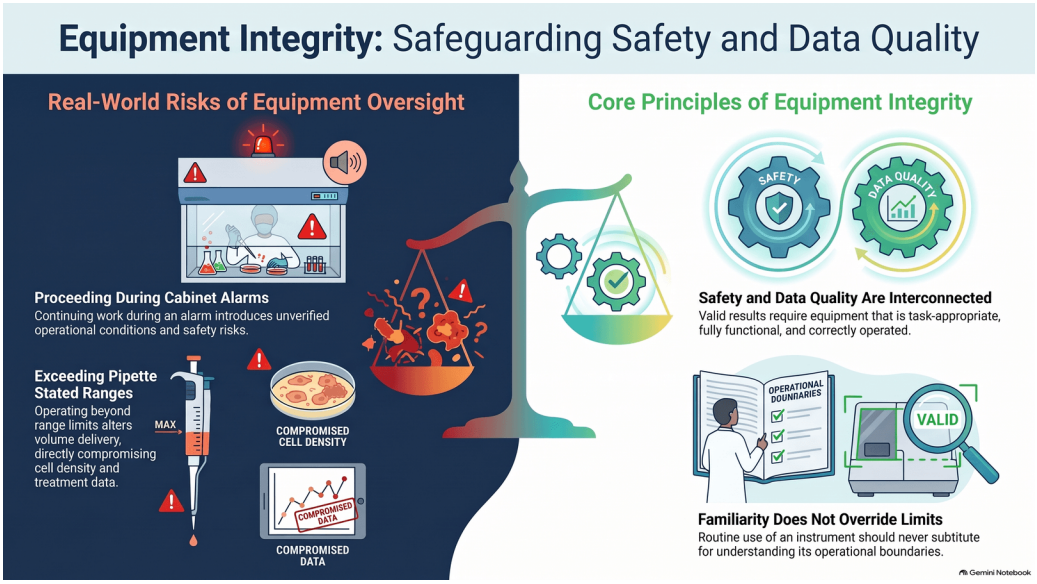
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2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results

A technician is ready to transfer cells when a cabinet alarm sounds. The supplies are already arranged, and the cultures have been removed from the incubator. Continuing may seem convenient, but the alarm creates an unanswered question: is the equipment operating as required?

A second technician discovers that a pipette has been set beyond its stated range. Even if the liquid transfer looks normal, the intended volume may not have been delivered. That uncertainty can affect cell density, treatment concentration, and the interpretation of later results.

These situations show why safety and data quality are connected. Equipment must be appropriate for the task, functioning correctly, and used as intended. A familiar instrument should never be treated as a substitute for understanding its limits.



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2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk



A **hazard** is something with the potential to cause harm. **Risk** considers how likely harm is and how serious its consequences could be. The same material can create different risks in different procedures.

A closed vial and an open vessel containing the same biological material do not create identical exposure opportunities. Mixing, spilling, or breaking a tube can change the chance of exposure. An **aerosol** is a suspension of small particles or droplets in air. Some laboratory actions can produce aerosols that are difficult to see.

Risk assessment identifies hazards and selects ways to control them. It considers the material, amount, procedure, equipment, and worker experience. The institution uses this assessment to set required containment and practices. A label such as “human cells” or “nonpathogenic” does not supply enough information on its own.

Biological hazards include infectious agents and potentially hazardous biological materials. **Chemical hazards** include substances that are toxic, corrosive, flammable, or otherwise harmful. **Physical hazards** include moving rotors, hot surfaces, electricity, sharp objects, and extremely cold materials.

Before beginning, identify what could go wrong and how it would be controlled. A clear assessment links a hazard to a practical action, such as using an approved enclosure, selecting compatible gloves, or keeping a moving instrument closed.

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2.3: Layers of Protection

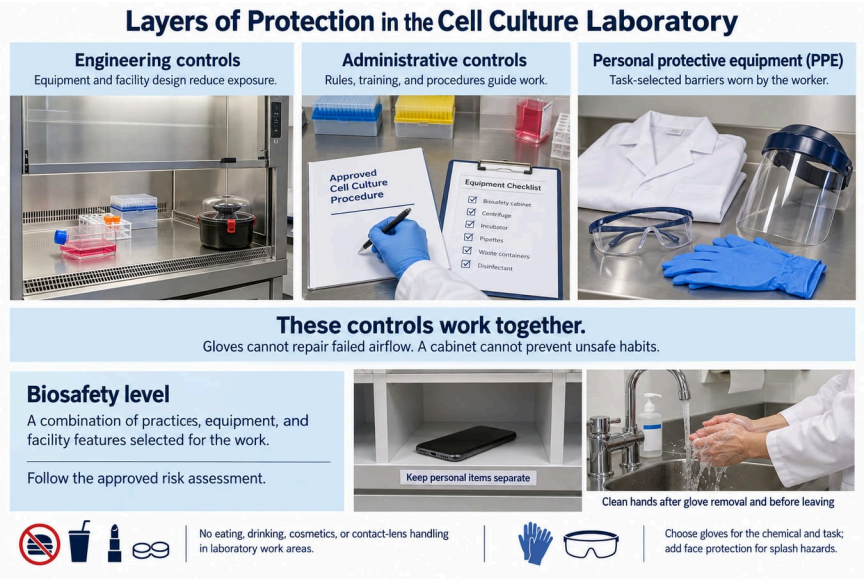
An **engineering control** uses equipment or facility design to reduce exposure. Examples include a suitable ventilated enclosure and a centrifuge containment system. An **administrative control** uses rules, training, or procedures to guide work. **Personal protective equipment**, or **PPE**, provides a barrier worn by the worker.

These controls work together. Gloves cannot correct a failed cabinet airflow system. A cabinet cannot prevent a worker from touching a phone with contaminated gloves. Training is needed to use both properly.

A **biosafety level** describes a combination of practices, equipment, and facility features selected for particular work. It is not simply a room label or a property of a cell line. A laboratory's approved risk assessment determines the conditions required for its activities.

PPE selection depends on the task. Protective clothing, gloves, and suitable eye protection are common components. A splash hazard may require additional face protection. Disposable examination gloves do not provide equal resistance to every chemical.

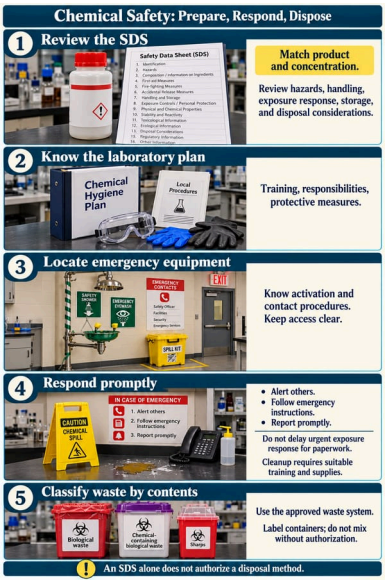
Keep personal items separate from active work. Avoid eating, drinking, applying cosmetics, or handling contact lenses in laboratory work areas. Perform hand hygiene after glove removal and before leaving. These habits limit the movement of material from the laboratory to the worker and the surrounding environment.



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2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness



A **safety data sheet**, or **SDS**, describes a chemical's hazards, safe handling, exposure response, storage, and disposal considerations. Review the relevant sections before using an unfamiliar substance. Check that the SDS matches the product and concentration being used. A product name alone does not reveal all its hazards, and different formulations may require different precautions.

A **chemical hygiene plan** is an institution's written program for managing laboratory chemical hazards. It identifies responsibilities, protective measures, and practices intended to reduce exposure. Local procedures explain how the program applies to a specific laboratory, including required training, protective equipment, and approved handling methods. Know where these documents are available.

Before beginning work, locate emergency equipment, exits, and the means of contacting the instructor or responsible supervisor. Emergency equipment may include an eyewash, safety shower, and spill supplies. Know how to activate the equipment and obtain assistance. Keep access routes clear of bags, carts, and other materials.

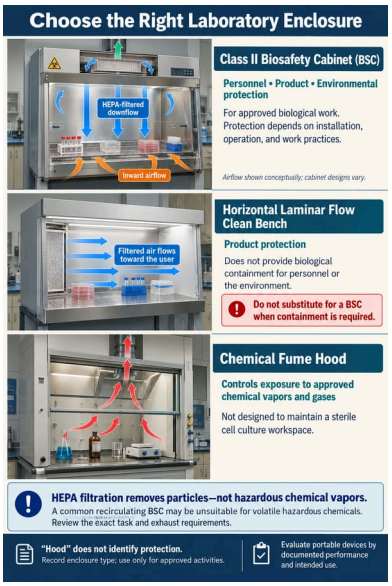
Respond to an exposure or spill using the institution's emergency instructions. Alert others who may be affected and report the event promptly. Do not delay an urgent exposure response while searching for paperwork. Do not improvise a cleanup when the material, exposure risk, or appropriate response is uncertain. Cleanup should be performed only by people with suitable training and supplies.

Classify waste by its contents. A biological liquid containing a hazardous chemical may require different handling from biological waste alone. Place sharp objects in their designated puncture-resistant containers. Label waste containers as required, and do not mix materials unless the approved procedure permits it. Disposal decisions must follow the laboratory's approved waste system; an SDS alone does not authorize a disposal method.

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2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure



Different enclosures can look similar while providing different protection. Selecting one requires knowing both its design and the hazards of the work.

A **Class II biosafety cabinet**, or **BSC**, uses controlled airflow and filtration to support personnel, product, and environmental protection during appropriate biological work. Its protection depends on installation, operating condition, and work practices.

A **laminar flow clean bench** supplies filtered air to protect the work product. It does not provide the same personnel and environmental containment as a BSC. A horizontal clean bench can direct air from the work toward the user. It must not replace a BSC when biological containment is required.

A **chemical fume hood** draws air away from the user to control exposure to approved chemical vapors or gases. It is not designed to maintain a sterile cell culture workspace.

High-efficiency particulate air filtration, or **HEPA filtration**, removes airborne particles. It does not reliably remove hazardous chemical vapors. A common recirculating BSC may therefore be unsuitable for volatile hazardous chemicals. The exact task must be reviewed before a specialized cabinet or exhaust arrangement is selected.

The word “hood” is too broad to establish protection. Record the enclosure type and use it only for approved activities. A portable clean-air device should be evaluated by its documented performance and intended use rather than its size or appearance.

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2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization

A cabinet may sound as though it is working normally, but sound alone cannot tell you whether it provides the expected protection. **Certification** evaluates whether the cabinet meets specified performance requirements. Tests may examine airflow, filter integrity, and containment. These checks provide evidence that cannot be gained by simply switching on the blower.

Before beginning, take a moment to confirm that you are using the correct cabinet and that its certification is current. Check the required window position and airflow indicators, then follow the model-specific startup instructions. If an alarm sounds or a required check fails, report the problem and resolve it before starting work.

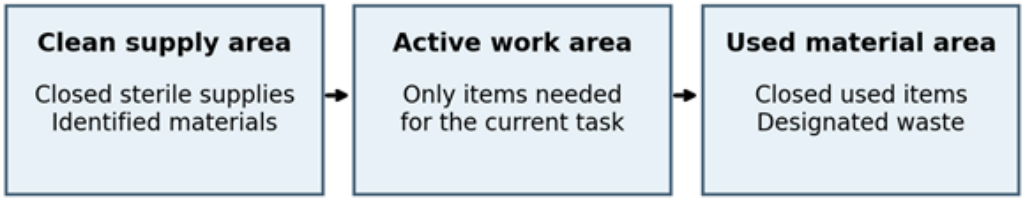
The **sash** is the movable front window. Its position helps establish the opening and airflow needed for operation. Air intake and return **grilles** also need to remain clear. A pad, supply container, or arm resting across a grille can interfere with airflow, even when the workspace otherwise looks organized.

Arrange supplies around the order in which you will use them. Give clean supplies, active work, and used materials clear positions. A left-to-right or right-to-left arrangement can work, depending on the task. Imagine moving through each step: can you reach what you need without passing used items over open vessels or clean supplies?

Bring in only the materials needed for the activity. Extra equipment takes up space and can make careful movements more difficult. Position records and frequently touched objects so you can use them without interrupting biological work or blocking airflow.

Prepare and clean the cabinet with approved agents that are compatible with its surfaces. Allow the required contact time so the disinfectant can work as intended. Wiping a surface does not make the entire cabinet sterile. If a UV lamp is present, it does not replace cleaning and appropriate chemical disinfection.

As you become familiar with a cabinet, avoid relying on remembered times or distances from another model. Use its operating instructions to guide work position, startup intervals, and shutdown. Understanding the equipment helps turn each check into a purposeful part of protecting yourself, your cultures, and others in the laboratory.



Arrange the direction to fit the task and equipment instructions.

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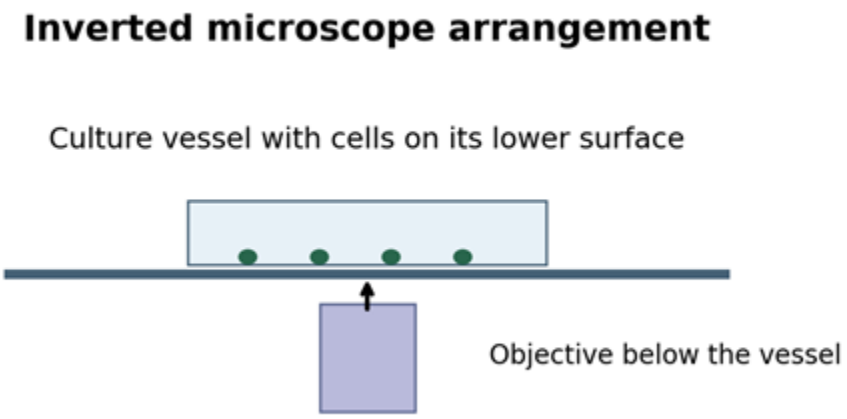
"2. Locker area and entry into the laboratory" ECACC https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YeaZveRaMdY Standard YouTube License. No changes made.

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2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures

A microscope helps evaluate cell shape, attachment, density, and visible changes. It also supports specific assays when paired with suitable illumination and labeling.

An **inverted microscope** places the objective lenses below the specimen. This arrangement is usef



ul for viewing cells near the bottom of a culture vessel. An **upright microscope** places objectives above the specimen and is commonly used for prepared slides and other applications.

Magnification makes an image appear larger. **Resolution** is the ability to distinguish nearby features as separate. Increasing magnification without improving resolution does not reveal useful new detail.

Brightfield microscopy uses transmitted light to view the specimen. **Phase-contrast microscopy** improves contrast in many unstained living specimens. **Fluorescence microscopy** uses suitable illumination and filters to detect fluorescent labels. Fluorescence work also requires attention to light exposure, background signal, and matching the label to the optical system.

Begin with a suitable low-power objective to locate the area of interest. Follow the instrument instructions when changing focus or objectives. Keep the lens from contacting the vessel, and use immersion oil only with objectives designed for it.

Clean optical surfaces with approved lens materials. Ordinary paper towels can damage coatings or leave debris. Report poor focus, damaged parts, or unexpected illumination instead of forcing controls. Record the imaging method, objective, and other settings needed to interpret or repeat an image. A scale bar depends on a calibrated imaging system; a magnification label alone may not show the size of a digitally displayed image.

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2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer

A **serological pipette** is a graduated pipette commonly used for milliliter-scale transfers. A **micropipette** transfers smaller volumes, often measured in microliters. One milliliter equals 1,000 microliters. Select a device with a stated range that includes the required volume. A pipette labeled for 20–200 microliters should not be used to transfer 10 microliters. Check the exact model because names and display conventions vary.

A **pipette controller** moves liquid into and out of a serological pipette. Mouth pipetting is never acceptable. Protect the controller from liquid entering its interior, and use the appropriate pipette type and volume markings. Many micropipettes use **air displacement**, where a moving piston changes the air space above the liquid. Their performance depends on correct tips, a good seal, suitable technique, and the liquid's properties. In standard **forward pipetting**, press to the first plunger stop before drawing up the set volume. To dispense, move through the first stop and then to the second as the device instructions direct. Starting from the second stop can draw up extra liquid. Other pipetting techniques use different steps, so identify the intended technique before beginning.

Move the plunger smoothly. Excessive immersion, rapid release, and poor positioning can affect delivery. Keep a liquid-filled pipette oriented as specified and avoid drawing liquid into the instrument. Use a fresh suitable tip when changing samples or when contamination could occur. **Filtered tips** help limit the passage of aerosols toward the pipette, but they do not replace careful handling or maintenance.

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2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks

Accuracy describes how close a measurement is to the accepted value. **Precision** describes how closely repeated measurements agree.

If a device repeatedly delivers 90 microliters when set to 100, its transfers may be precise but inaccurate. If repeated transfers vary widely, precision is poor. Both problems can affect an experiment.

Calibration evaluates an instrument against a reference and may support adjustment under an approved process. **Verification** checks whether specified performance requirements are met. A pre-use inspection is useful, but it is not a full calibration.

A pipette check can include the instrument identity, approved service status, physical condition, tip fit, and signs of leakage. A laboratory may also use a performance check based on a defined procedure. Record the actual check rather than writing “calibrated” without evidence.

Consider a dilution intended to deliver the same treatment to every well. A systematic pipette error can shift all doses. Variable delivery can create differences among wells. Careful volume transfer therefore supports both treatment comparability and sound interpretation.

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2.10: Centrifuges and Separation



A **centrifuge** spins samples to separate components according to their behavior under centrifugal force. A **rotor** holds the tubes or other vessels during rotation.

After centrifugation, collected material may form a **pellet**. The liquid above it is the **supernatant**. Whether the experiment needs the pellet, the supernatant, or both depends on the purpose. A pellet may be small or difficult to see.

Revolutions per minute, or **rpm**, describes rotational speed. **Relative centrifugal force**, or **RCF**, describes force relative to gravity and is commonly written as a multiple of g. The same rpm can produce different RCF values in rotors with different radii.

A commonly used relationship is:

$RCF = 1.118 \times 10^{-5} \times r \times rpm^2$

Here, r is the applicable rotor radius in centimeters. The rotor documentation identifies which radius should be used for the intended setting.

Worked example: A rotor with a specified radius of 10 cm operates at 2,000 rpm.

$RCF = 1.118 \times 10^{-5} \times 10 \times 2{,}000^2 = 447.2$

The resulting force is approximately 447 × g. A different rotor radius would give a different value at 2,000 rpm.

A device that allows direct RCF entry may simplify setup, but the selected rotor information must still be correct. Time, temperature, acceleration, and braking can also affect separation. Use all the conditions specified for the sample.

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2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care

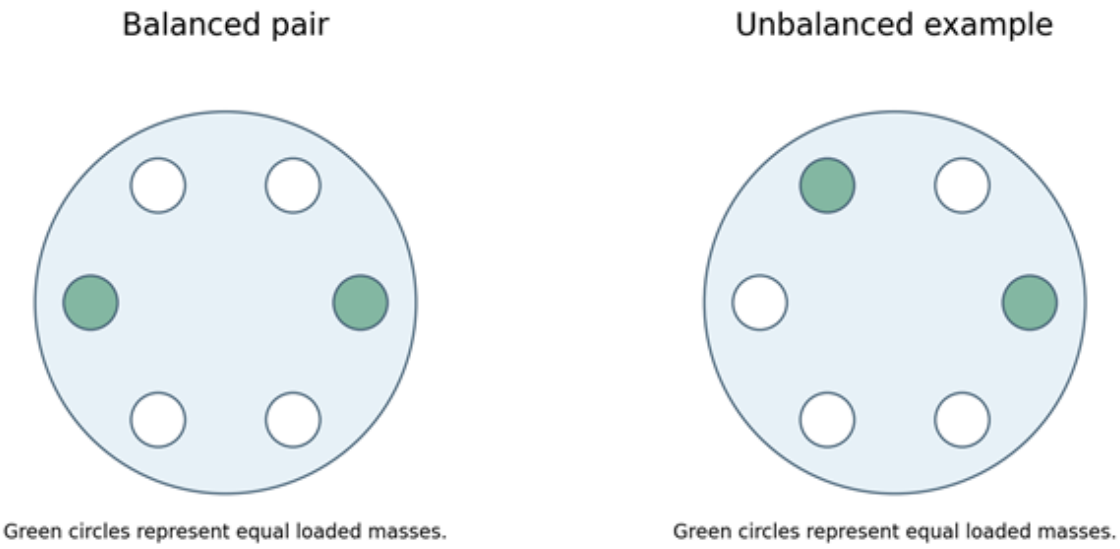
Before starting the centrifuge, take a moment to check how the rotor is loaded. Follow the instrument's approved loading pattern and balance the complete loads, including tubes, caps, adapters, and liquid. Two tubes may look equally full but have different masses because their containers or contents differ. Check the loaded masses rather than relying on appearance alone.

As you load the samples, inspect the rotor, tubes, adapters, and seals. Look for cracks, corrosion, or other damage, and confirm that each part is compatible with the instrument and intended settings. A small defect is easier to address before the run than after the rotor begins turning. If you are unsure about a part, ask the instructor or responsible supervisor before using it.

Consider what could happen if a tube leaked or broke. Some biological samples require sealed rotors or safety cups to help contain aerosols, along with a specific procedure for opening them. Follow the laboratory's risk assessment and response instructions. If breakage is suspected, keep the instrument closed and obtain guidance before opening it.

Close the centrifuge as directed and start the run. Unusual vibration or noise is a reason to act: stop the run using the instrument controls and obtain assistance. Wait until the rotor has stopped completely before opening the instrument, and never bypass the lid interlock.

Record the rotor used, force or speed, run time, temperature when relevant, and any unexpected event. These details help another person understand what happened to the samples. After use, follow the approved cleaning and maintenance procedures. If a rotor is dropped or damaged, report it and have it assessed before it is used again.



Green circles represent equal loaded masses.

Green circles represent equal loaded masses.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

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"Basic Centrifugation" LabXchange https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-CQP5bLD6A Standard YouTube License. No changes

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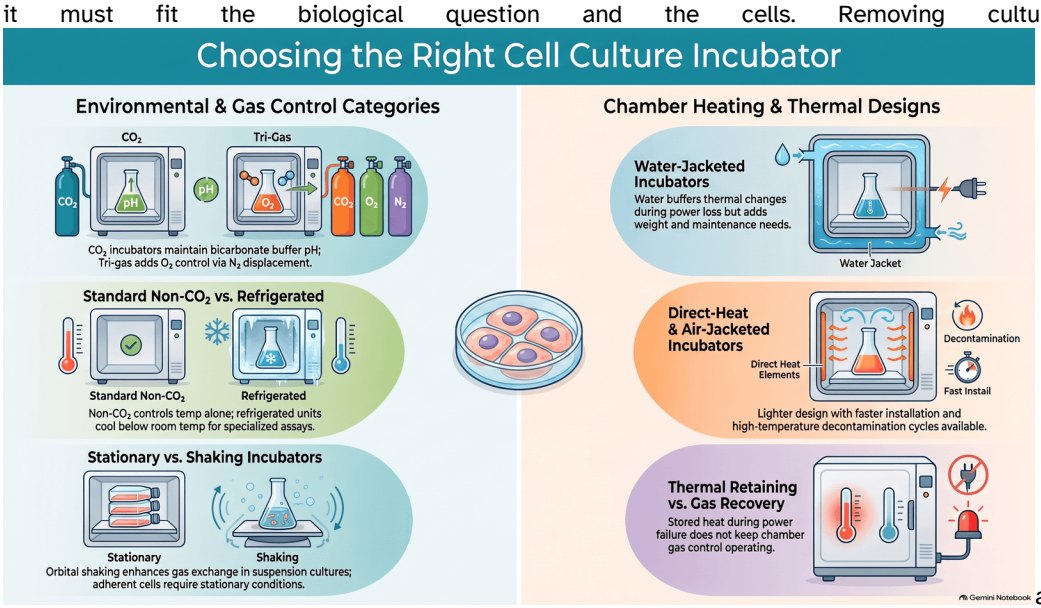
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment

A **cell culture incubator** maintains selected environmental conditions around cultures. Many systems control temperature and carbon dioxide, while humidity helps limit evaporation. Carbon dioxide can help maintain pH in media designed with a compatible bicarbonate buffering system.

Incubator settings must match the cells and medium.

CO_2 incubators control temperature and carbon dioxide and usually provide a humid environment. They are used for many mammalian cell cultures whose media rely on bicarbonate buffering. Carbon dioxide helps keep the medium at the intended pH, while humidity reduces evaporation. Both adherent cells and some suspension cells can grow in stationary vessels in these incubators. Select the temperature and gas concentration specified for the cell line and medium rather than assuming one setting fits every culture.

Tri-gas incubators control oxygen as well as carbon dioxide and temperature. Nitrogen is commonly used to lower the oxygen concentration. These incubators are useful when an experiment requires reduced oxygen, such as studies of stem cells, tumor biology, or cellular responses to oxygen availability. Reduced oxygen is not automatically better for every culture; it must fit the biological question and the cells. Removing cultures into room air ch



anges their oxygen exposure. Experiments requiring continuous low-oxygen conditions may also need a controlled-oxygen workstation for handling.

Standard, non-CO_2 incubators mainly control temperature without adding carbon dioxide. They are used for cultures and assays that do not require a controlled CO_2 atmosphere, including many bacterial and yeast cultures. For animal cells, use this type only when the selected medium and culture system support growth without added CO_2. Temperature control alone cannot replace the gas conditions required by a bicarbonate-buffered medium.

Refrigerated incubators can cool as well as heat, making them useful when the required temperature is near or below room temperature. Applications include growth studies of microorganisms at lower temperatures and tests that require a stable cool environment. Choose this type when a heat-only incubator cannot maintain the required temperature. Cooling capability does not, by itself, provide the gas control needed for mammalian cell culture.

Shaking incubators combine temperature control with a moving platform, often using an orbital motion. Shaking mixes the culture and supports gas exchange in suitable vessels. These incubators are used for many bacterial, yeast, and insect cell suspension cultures. A CO_2 incubator shaker adds controlled carbon dioxide and humidity for mammalian suspension cultures adapted to shaking, including some protein-production cell lines. Suspension growth alone does not mean a cell line should be shaken. Match the vessel, motion, and speed to the culture; cells that must attach to a surface generally require stationary conditions.

Incubators also differ in how they maintain temperature. These heating designs are separate from gas-control categories: a CO_2 incubator, for example, may use either a water jacket or direct heating.

Water-jacketed incubators have water surrounding the chamber. The water stores heat and slows temperature changes, which can help protect cultures during a brief power interruption. This design is useful when thermal stability is a priority, but it adds weight and requires jacket maintenance. Stored heat does not keep gas control operating during a power failure. The jacket is separate from the water pan or reservoir used to humidify the chamber.

Direct-heat incubators use heaters around the chamber without a water jacket. They are generally lighter and avoid filling and maintaining a jacket; some models include high-temperature decontamination cycles. They are useful when easier installation and those cleaning features suit the laboratory. Air-jacketed designs use a surrounding layer of warm air. Compare the actual model's temperature uniformity, recovery after door openings, and maintenance needs rather than choosing by its heating label alone.

Choose an incubator by first identifying the cells' temperature, gas, humidity, and mixing requirements. Then consider capacity, cleaning, alarms, and how quickly conditions recover after access. The best choice supports both the culture and the experiment.

The **setpoint** is the value entered into an instrument. A displayed reading does not prove that every part of the chamber or every sample has reached that value. Check performance using the laboratory's approved reference methods.

Opening a door changes the chamber environment. Plan retrieval and placement so doors are open only as long as necessary. Crowding can interfere with access and may affect environmental uniformity.

Keep vessels identified and organized. Follow instructions for chamber cleaning, water quality where a water reservoir is used, and alarm response. Water that appears clear is not evidence that it is free of contamination.

Record relevant conditions and abnormal events. If a temperature alarm occurs overnight, the cultures may need evaluation even if the current display has returned to normal.

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2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design

Water baths, refrigerators, freezers, balances, aspiration systems, and tube racks support routine work. Each has a purpose and its own limitations.

A water bath can transfer heat efficiently, but its water and exterior surfaces can be contamination sources. Keep vessels appropriately closed and follow approved handling before moving them to a culture workspace.

An **aspiration system** removes liquid using suction. It may require a collection trap, overflow protection, and suitable filtration. Its design must protect the vacuum system and fit the biological and chemical hazards involved.

Cold storage equipment preserves materials under specified conditions. Storage temperature, inventory, container compatibility, and alarm response all matter. Very cold storage and cryogenic liquids introduce hazards that require separate training and protective measures.

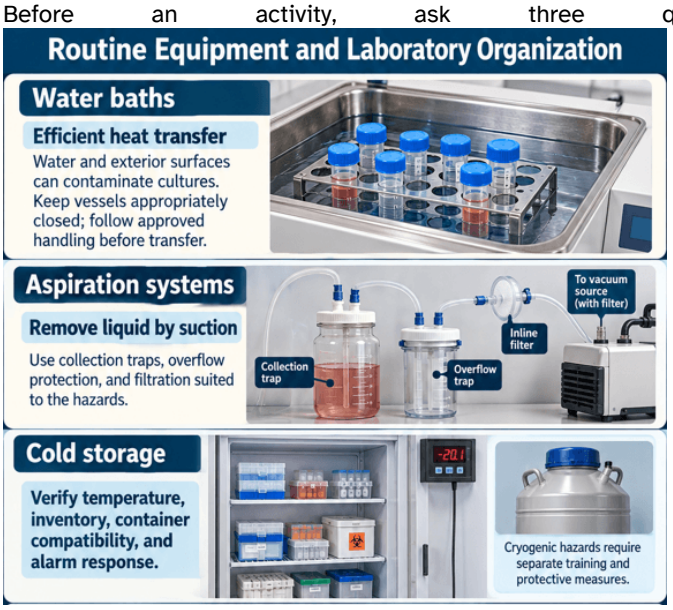
A well-organized laboratory separates storage, preparation, biological handling, observation, and waste activities where practical. It also keeps emergency access clear. Organization should support actual work rather than simply making a bench look tidy.

Label materials before identity becomes uncertain. Use racks and defined locations to reduce tube mix-ups. Keep amplified nucleic acid materials separated from areas where clean culture work or sensitive sample preparation occurs.

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2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready

Before an activity, ask three questions: Is the equipment appropriate?



Is its status acceptable? Can it be used as required?

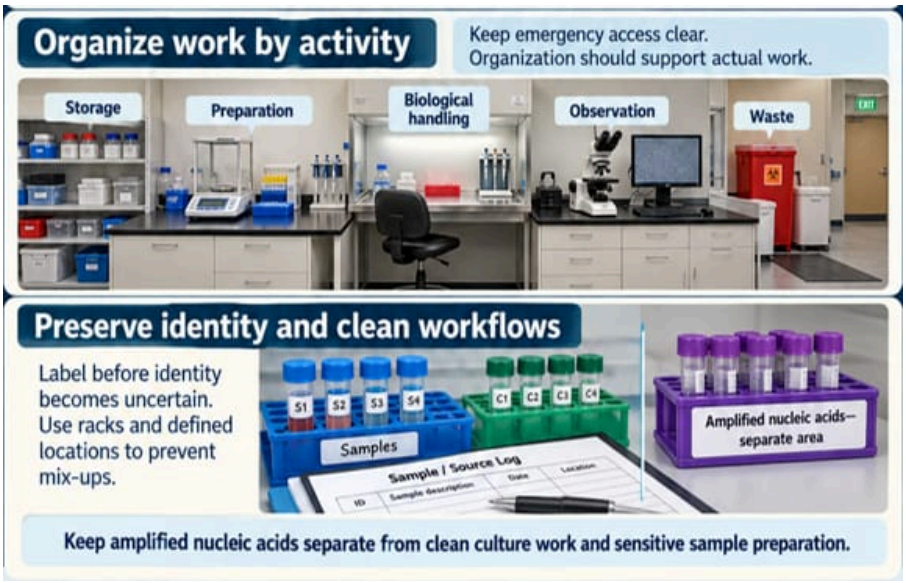
A **pre-use check** evaluates readiness before work begins. It may include identity, service status, required settings, physical condition, and performance indicators. The exact checks depend on the equipment.

An **equipment log** records use, checks, maintenance, and relevant events. An instrument's history helps determine whether a problem may have affected previous work. Write actual readings and observations rather than expected values.

If a required check fails, identify the affected work and report the problem. Do not silently change the procedure or assume that a normal-looking sample makes the failure irrelevant.

For example, a cabinet airflow alarm can affect handling conditions. A pipette problem can affect transferred volumes. A centrifuge setup error can affect cell recovery. These problems require different assessments because they affect different parts of the process.

Good judgment connects the equipment condition to the possible consequence. Clear records allow that judgment to be reviewed.



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2.15: Chapter Summary

Laboratory safety begins with identifying hazards and evaluating the risks of the actual procedure. Equipment, practices, and PPE provide complementary protection. Biosafety cabinets, clean benches, and chemical fume hoods have different purposes. Their appearance or a general “hood” label does not establish suitability. Microscopes support observation, while their optical design and settings determine what can be seen. Careful cleaning and documentation preserve useful performance. Pipettes must fit the required volume and be used with suitable technique. Accuracy, precision, and verification are related but distinct ideas. Centrifuge force depends on both speed and rotor radius. Balanced loading, compatible parts, and appropriate containment support safe separation. Incubators and supporting equipment maintain selected conditions. A setpoint or normal appearance alone does not establish readiness. Appropriate pre-use checks and complete records help protect workers, cultures, and the reliability of experimental results. Choose equipment for the material, procedure, and measurement. Then check that it is ready and use it within its intended conditions. Record actual settings, readings, and relevant events. If results are unexpected, review equipment performance alongside possible biological causes. Safe operation and reliable measurements depend on the same careful preparation.

Key Terms

Hazard	risk	aerosol	risk assessment
biological hazard	chemical hazard	physical hazard	engineering control
administrative control	PPE	biosafety level	SDS
chemical hygiene plan	Class II BSC	laminar flow clean bench	chemical fume hood
HEPA filtration	certification	sash	grille
inverted microscope	upright microscope	magnification	resolution
brightfield	phase contrast	fluorescence	serological pipette
micropipette	pipette controller	air displacement	forward pipetting
filtered tip	accuracy	precision	calibration
verification	centrifuge	rotor	pellet
supernatant	rpm	RCF	incubator

setpoint	aspiration system	pre-use check	equipment log

Review Questions

1. Explain how a hazard differs from a risk.

2. Why can the same material require different controls in different procedures?

3. Give an example of an engineering control, an administrative control, and PPE.

4. What information would you seek in an SDS before using an unfamiliar chemical?

5. Compare a Class II BSC, a clean bench, and a chemical fume hood.

6. Why does HEPA filtration not establish protection from hazardous chemical vapors?

7. Explain why blocking a cabinet grille can affect performance.

8. Distinguish magnification from resolution.

9. Why is an inverted microscope useful for many culture vessels?

10. Which pipette would you select for 10 microliters if the available ranges are 2–20 and 20–200 microliters?

11. Give an example of a precise but inaccurate transfer.

12. Why can two rotors produce different RCF values at the same rpm?

13. Calculate RCF for a specified radius of 8 cm at 2,000 rpm.

14. Explain why an incubator setpoint alone does not establish the conditions experienced by a culture.

15. What should be recorded when a required equipment check fails?

Apply Your Understanding

A technician needs to transfer 100 microliters of a cell suspension. The available pipette has an acceptable service status but shows visible leakage during a pre-use check. A second pipette has no visible damage, but its identity and service record cannot be confirmed. The technician is also assigned a centrifuge procedure written in × g, while the centrifuge currently displays rpm.

Explain what must be resolved before work proceeds. Describe the information needed to select a pipette and set the centrifuge correctly. State which observations belong in the equipment record and why copying the expected values would be inadequate.

A stem cell culture doubles in cell number. A student concludes that the cells have successfully self-renewed. Explain why the increased count alone is not enough to support this claim. What evidence would help determine whether the new cells retained their stem cell properties?

Two groups grow the same cells with the same nutrients and growth factors, but they use different attachment surfaces. The cells develop different shapes and growth patterns. Explain how their physical surroundings could contribute to these differences. How would you design a comparison to investigate the effect of the surface?

After a treatment, a culture contains fewer cells than its untreated control. A researcher concludes that the treatment killed the cells. Explain how a change in cell cycle progression could also produce this result. What measurements would help distinguish slower division from increased cell death?

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3: SOPS LABORATORY RECORDS AND QUALITY SYSTEMS

Reliable cell culture work needs a history that another person can follow. Instructions describe how work should be performed; records show what actually happened. This chapter explains how procedures, labels, inventory records, and original data connect a culture to its materials, methods, and results. It also introduces quality assurance, quality control, and the review of problems. These practices help you evaluate results, repeat work, and make decisions supported by evidence.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Distinguish an SOP, a master batch record, and an executed batch record.
2. Explain how document control keeps instructions current and available.
3. Create clear record entries and correct mistakes while preserving the original information.
4. Trace a culture or sample to its source materials, equipment, operator, and results.
5. Calculate material balances, label reconciliation, and unit yield.
6. Compare quality assurance and quality control and describe how discrepancies are reviewed.

3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
3.14: Chapter Summary

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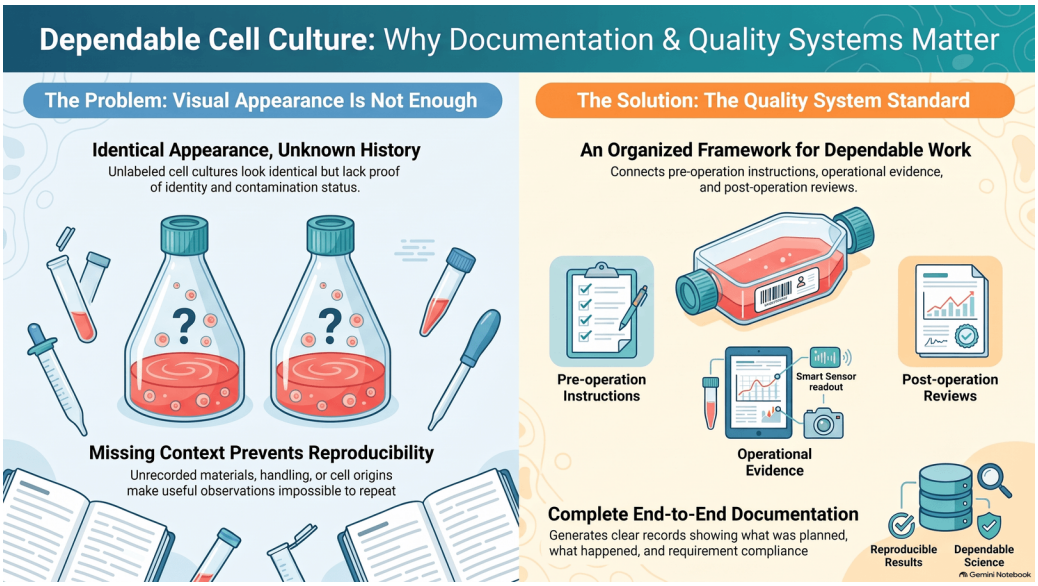
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record

Two flasks of fibroblasts look alike. Both contain clear medium and attached cells. One flask has a complete **record** of its cell source, passage number, medium lot, and handling dates. The other is labeled only “cells.” Their appearance does not establish their identity or show that they are free of contamination. The first flask has a history that another person can evaluate; the second does not.

A culture result depends on more than what happened at the microscope. The identity of the cells, the materials used, the treatment conditions, and the way measurements were made all affect its meaning. Missing information can make a useful observation difficult to repeat or interpret.

A **quality system** is the organized set of responsibilities, procedures, checks, and records used to support dependable work. In a cell culture laboratory, it connects the instructions used before an operation with the evidence collected during it and the review performed afterward.

This chapter explains how to make those connections. The aim is to produce records that let another person understand what was planned, what actually happened, and whether the work met its requirements.



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3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure

A **standard operating procedure**, or SOP, is an approved written instruction for a recurring task. Examples include changing culture medium, checking a pipette, receiving a cell line, and responding to suspected contamination. A **research protocol** describes how a particular study will be performed and may refer to several SOPs.

An SOP supports consistency by describing the required actions and checks. It also helps people recognize when they need assistance. A procedure that tells an operator to stop when an equipment check fails makes that decision part of the process rather than leaving it to guesswork.

A useful SOP explains its purpose and scope. Scope identifies the situations in which it applies. An instruction for suspension cells may be unsuitable for an adherent culture, even when the document title sounds similar.

Typical SOP sections identify purpose, scope, responsibilities, hazards, materials, equipment, preparation, steps, **acceptance criteria**, and required records. Acceptance criteria are the stated requirements used to decide whether a condition, result, or item is acceptable. They should specify limits and how to assess them, so different people can reach the same decision from the same evidence.

For example, “check the incubator” leaves several questions unanswered. A clearer instruction identifies the incubator, the required reading or check, the acceptable range, where to record it, and whom to contact if the result falls outside the range. Actual limits must come from the procedure appropriate to the cells and equipment.

Read the full instruction before beginning. Confirm that it fits the task and that required supplies and records are available. If a step is unclear, resolve the question before acting. Do not quietly replace an approved step with a method remembered from another experiment.

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3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control

Document control is the process used to identify, approve, distribute, revise, and retire documents. It helps ensure that people use the intended instructions and can later determine which version governed the work.

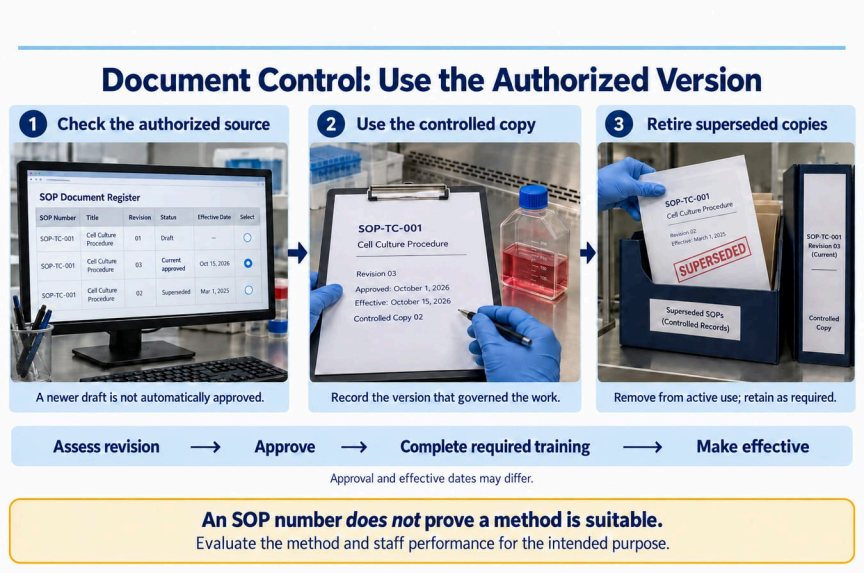
A document normally has an identifier, title, **revision**, approval information, and **effective date**. A revision identifies a particular version. The effective date is the date on which that version becomes authorized for use. Approval and effective date may differ when training or other preparation is needed.

Before work begins, check the document against the laboratory's authorized source. A file saved on a computer or a printout in a drawer may have been replaced. A newer draft is not automatically the current approved version.

A **controlled copy** is a copy managed through the document control system. It may have a copy number or **batch** assignment, or it may be available through an approved electronic platform. The system should help staff identify the current approved instructions and trace the version used for earlier work.

When a procedure changes, responsible staff assess and approve the revision and arrange any required training before it takes effect. Superseded versions are removed from active use and retained according to the laboratory's retention rules. Earlier records should identify the version used at the time.

An SOP number does not prove that a method works. A laboratory must also evaluate whether the method is suitable for its intended purpose and whether staff can perform it correctly.



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3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs

A record is retained evidence of an activity or result. An SOP describes what to do; a completed record documents what was done. A blank form is a document used to collect information. Once completed and retained, it is a record.

A **laboratory notebook** provides a dated account of questions, plans, procedures, observations, and results. It can be paper or electronic. Organized entries connect an experiment to its samples and supporting files without requiring every image or instrument output to be pasted into one place.

In this chapter, a batch is a defined quantity of material prepared together under specified conditions. A **master batch record**, or MBR, contains approved instructions and required checks for a particular batch type and size. It may refer to SOPs for tasks used in several processes. A research culture is not automatically a manufacturing batch.

An **executed batch record** is the completed record for one specific batch. It may also be called a batch production record, or BPR. It identifies the actual material lots, equipment, operators, times, measurements, results, and departures from instructions. It is commonly completed using an issued copy of the approved master record.

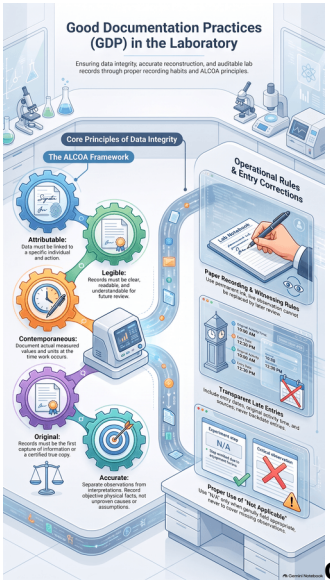
In US finished pharmaceutical manufacturing, regulations specify separate requirements for master production and control records and for the records of each batch produced. These requirements apply within that regulated setting. Here, the examples illustrate a broader documentation principle: distinguish approved instructions from evidence of a particular operation.

Research laboratories may use notebooks and experiment forms instead of manufacturing batch records. The format should fit the activity, while still preserving its history. Using a batch form in a classroom or research setting does not by itself establish compliance with manufacturing regulations.

Document or record	Main purpose	Cell culture example
SOP	Describes a recurring task	Approved medium change procedure
Master batch record	Defines instructions for a batch type and size	Approved medium preparation instructions
Executed batch record	Records one batch as performed	Actual lots, volumes, times, and checks
Notebook and supporting logs	Preserve experiment history and linked evidence	Culture observations and incubator log

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3.5: Recording Work as It Happens



Good documentation practices are habits and rules that make records clear, timely, and trustworthy. Record actual values and observations when the work occurs. A target volume belongs in the instructions; the measured volume belongs in the completed record.

A useful cell culture entry identifies the date and relevant times, operator, culture or sample ID, procedure version, material lots, equipment IDs, observations, and results. Record the details needed to reconstruct the work. Include units with measured values: “5.0 mL” communicates more than “5.0” alone.

Describe observations separately from interpretations. “Cells were rounded and many were floating” records an appearance. “The medium was toxic” proposes a cause. The second statement needs supporting evidence and should not replace the first.

Data integrity means that data are complete, consistent, and accurate. **ALCOA** is a reminder that data should be attributable, legible, contemporaneous, original or a true copy, and accurate. Attributable means the person responsible can be identified. Contemporaneous means recorded when the activity occurs. A true copy preserves the information and context of the original. FDA discusses these principles in drug-manufacturing guidance; they also help students evaluate laboratory records.

For paper records, use the required permanent ink and identify entries according to the local procedure. Do not prefill results, sign for someone else's work, or record a check that was not performed. Where a second person must witness an activity, a later review is not a substitute for that observation.

Use “not applicable” only when a field truly does not apply, following the form's instructions. A missing observation is not the same as an inapplicable field. If information was not recorded, state that fact and use the approved process for addressing the omission.

A late entry should show the date and time it was added, the time of the original activity if known, and the source supporting the information. Do not backdate the entry. If only memory is available, identify that limitation rather than presenting a recalled value as an original measurement.

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3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History

Errors happen in records. The **correction** must make the information clearer while preserving the original entry.

For a paper entry, a common practice is to draw one line through the error so it remains readable, enter the corrected information, and add the required initials, date, and reason. Follow the laboratory's correction procedure. Do not erase, cover the entry with correction fluid, or rewrite a page simply to remove evidence of the mistake.

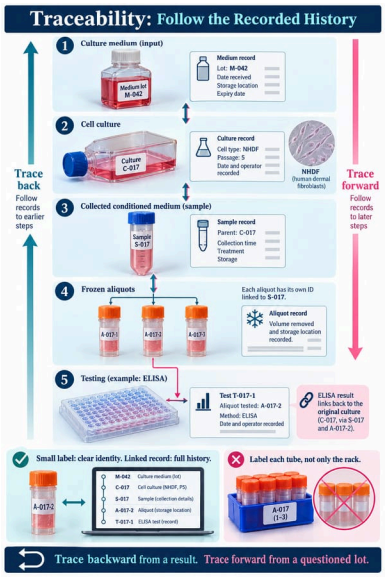
A correction changes the recorded information, not the event itself. If a technician dispensed too much medium, changing the written volume to the target would hide a processing error. The record should retain the actual volume and document the response to the error.

Figure 5.1 shows a correction to a transcription mistake. The original worksheet supports the corrected value. If no reliable source supports a correction, the operator should document uncertainty rather than invent a replacement value.

Recorded volume	~~5.8 mL~~ 5.0 mL
Correction added	VP 08 Oct 2026
Reason	Transcription error; see worksheet W-014

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3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability



Traceability is the ability to follow a material, sample, or result through its recorded history. A unique identifier links a physical item to its records. Use identifiers that distinguish individual items, including replacement tubes and repeat tests. Keep those links throughout handling, storage, and analysis.

A culture label may include its unique ID, cell type, passage number, preparation or handling date, and operator. A collected sample may also need a sample type, collection time, treatment group, and storage information. Exact fields depend on the task and the laboratory's labeling rules.

Small containers may not **hold** every detail. In that case, the label should carry enough information to identify the item without confusion, while the linked record holds the full history. A rack label alone is weak protection if tubes can be moved between racks.

An **aliquot** is a portion separated from a larger sample. Give each aliquot an identifier linked to its parent. Record how much was removed and where it was stored. A later test result can then be traced back through the aliquot to the original culture.

For example, **conditioned medium** is medium collected after cells have grown in it. Medium collected from a **normal human dermal fibroblast**, or NHDF, culture receives a sample ID linked to the culture ID. Each frozen aliquot receives its own ID linked to that sample. An **enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay**, or ELISA, detects or measures a selected substance. Its record identifies the aliquot tested, so a reviewer can trace the result to the collection conditions and parent culture.

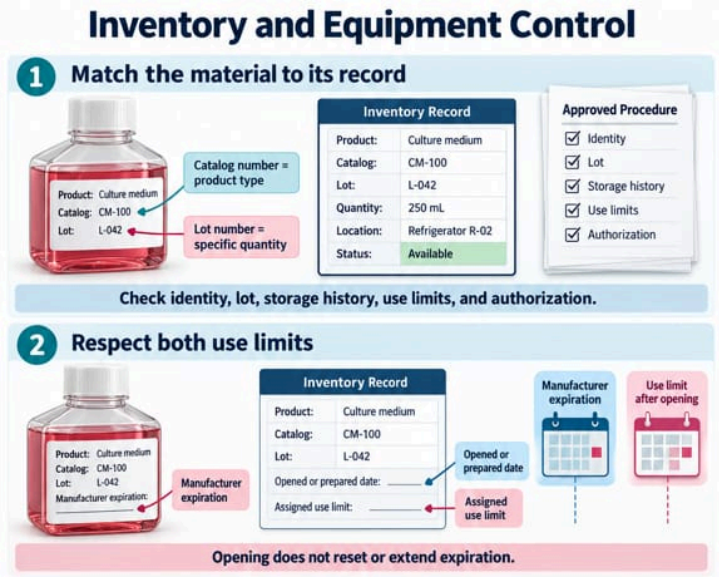
This connection works in both directions. A result can be traced back to a medium lot, and a questioned medium lot can be traced forward to cultures and samples that used it.

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3.8: Inventory and Material Status

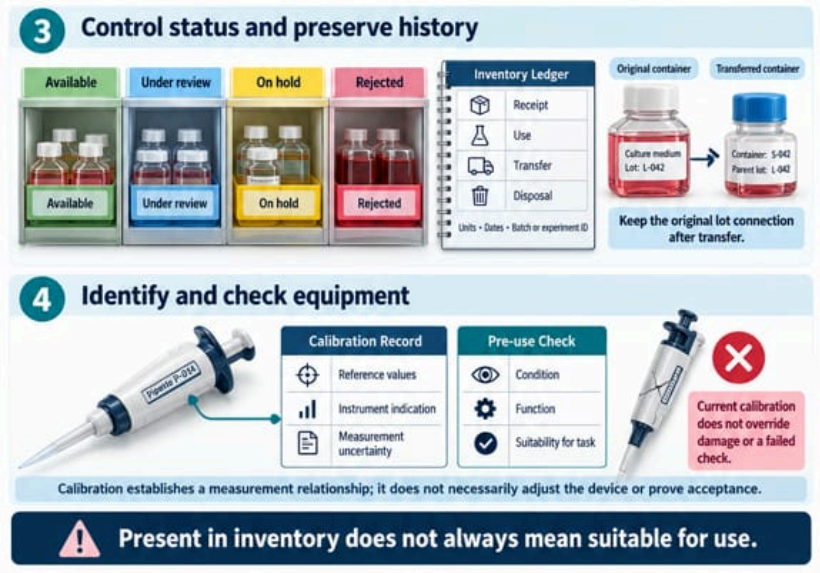
An **inventory record** tracks the identity, quantity, location, and **status** of



materials. A **lot number** identifies a particular manufactured or prepared quantity. A catalog number identifies a product type and cannot replace a lot number when the history of a specific supply matters.

Before using a material, compare its container label with the inventory record and procedure. Check identity, lot, storage history, expiration or assigned use limit, and authorization for the intended task. A material can be present in inventory yet unsuitable for use.

A manufacturer's expiration date and a laboratory's assigned use limit after opening or preparation may differ. Record opening or preparation dates when required. Follow the applicable storage conditions and use limits supported by the manufacturer's instructions and the laboratory's procedure. Do not assume that opening a container resets or extends its expiration date.



A material's status indicates whether it is available for use, under review, on hold, or rejected under the local system. Physical segregation, labels, and electronic restrictions can help keep unsuitable material from being selected accidentally.

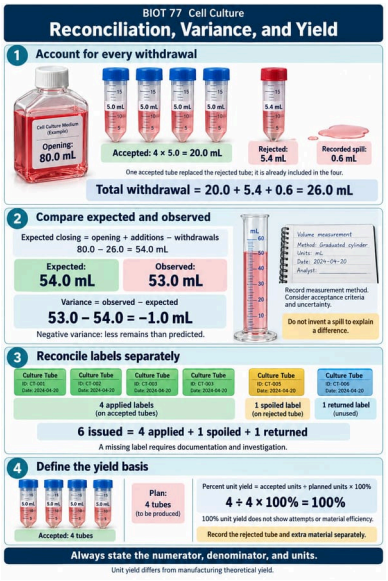
Record receipts, use, transfers, and disposal with units and dates. Identify the batch or experiment that used a material so the inventory ledger supports traceability. If material is moved into another container, preserve the connection to its original lot.

Equipment also needs identification. A pipette ID links a measurement to the device's history. **Calibration** establishes the relationship between an instrument's indication and reference values, including **measurement uncertainty**. It does not necessarily adjust the instrument or show that it meets a particular requirement. A pre-use check assesses suitability for the immediate task. A current calibration record does not justify using a damaged device or ignoring a failed check.

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3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels



Reconciliation compares recorded quantities with the material or items actually accounted for. It can reveal omissions, unexpected losses, or mix-ups. Agreement supports accountability, but does not prove that every operation was correct.

For a material balance, begin with a verified opening quantity. Add documented receipts and subtract documented withdrawals, including material dispensed, transferred out, spilled, or discarded. Define each category clearly so one withdrawal is not counted twice.

Expected closing balance = opening balance + additions − total documented withdrawals.

Variance is the difference between two quantities being compared. For this example, variance = observed closing balance − expected closing balance.

Suppose a bottle begins with 80.0 mL. Four accepted tubes each contain 5.0 mL. An additional rejected tube contains 5.4 mL, and a separate spill accounts for 0.6 mL. One of the four accepted tubes replaced the rejected tube. Total withdrawal is 20.0 + 5.4 + 0.6 = 26.0 mL.

Expected closing balance is 80.0 − 26.0 = 54.0 mL. If the observed balance is 53.0 mL, variance is 53.0 − 54.0 = −1.0 mL. The negative sign means less material remains than the records predict.

Record how the closing balance was measured or estimated. A bottle's approximate volume markings may not support the same precision as a suitable measuring device. Compare the difference with the stated acceptance criteria and the uncertainty of the measurements. Do not assign an unexplained difference to a spill without evidence.

Count labels separately from material volumes. If six labels were issued, four were applied, one was spoiled, and one was returned, all six are accounted for. If only five can be accounted for, document and investigate the missing label. Check whether it could have been applied to the wrong item.

Yield compares output with a defined reference amount. For this classroom example, **percent unit yield** = accepted units ÷ planned units × 100%. Four accepted tubes from four planned tubes give 100% unit yield. This result does not show how many attempts were needed or how efficiently material was used. Record the rejected tube and the extra material separately. This calculation is not the same as percent **theoretical yield** used in manufacturing.

State what the numerator and denominator represent. Yield may refer to units, volume, mass, or another measure. A manufacturing procedure may compare actual output with theoretical output calculated from the inputs. Different definitions answer different questions, so never report "percent yield" without explaining its basis.

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3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions

A **discrepancy** is a difference between information or quantities that should agree, or between an observation and a requirement. A **deviation** is a departure from an approved procedure or specified condition. Laboratories may define these terms differently. Examples include an unexplained inventory difference, a failed equipment check, and a culture held outside its specified conditions.

Take appropriate steps to protect people and affected materials, notify the responsible person, and follow the laboratory's response procedure. Do not continue merely because a culture or material looks acceptable. A hold restricts use while the issue is assessed. Clearly identify held material so it is not used accidentally.



Record what happened, when it occurred or was discovered, what was affected, and what action was taken. Separate known facts from possible causes. Include related culture IDs, reagent lots, equipment IDs, and record references.

An investigation asks how widely the problem extends and what evidence supports its cause. A pipette problem may affect several measurements. A mislabeled tube may raise questions about neighboring tubes. The review should consider these links rather than examining only the first item noticed.

A correction addresses an identified problem, such as replacing a damaged label after confirming the sample's identity. A **corrective action** addresses the cause of a problem to prevent it from recurring, such as revising a label process that allowed repeated mix-ups. A **preventive action** addresses the cause of a potential problem before it occurs. Check whether each action achieved its intended result.

Disposition is the documented decision about what may happen to the affected material, such as acceptance, continued hold, or rejection. The person authorized by the quality system makes that decision. An operator's completed signature is not automatically a release authorization.

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3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control

Quality assurance, or QA, includes planned activities that provide confidence in the work and its quality. Examples include document control, staff training, method evaluation, equipment programs, and review of how problems are handled.

Quality control, or QC, includes operational checks and tests used to assess whether requirements are met. Examples include checking a medium's measured pH, evaluating cell viability, testing for mycoplasma, or confirming that assay controls meet their criteria.

QA and QC support one another. A documented testing process helps make a QC result dependable. QC findings can reveal a weakness that needs a change in the wider system. A passing test cannot recover missing identity information or establish that an unrecorded step occurred.

A **quality management system**, or QMS, brings these responsibilities and activities together. Its scope should fit the laboratory's work. WHO describes laboratory quality management as a coordinated approach to supporting accurate and reliable results.

A review by another qualified person can identify errors or gaps that the operator missed. The reviewer examines source data, calculations, acceptance criteria, and unresolved issues. The laboratory's procedure determines who reviews the work and what independence is required. A neat form can still contain an incorrect formula or a missing material lot.

Activity	Main contribution	Evidence
Approve and control procedures	QA supports consistent work	Revision and approval history
Check viability against a criterion	QC evaluates a culture result	Raw counts, calculation, and decision
Test assay controls	QC evaluates test performance	Control results and acceptance check
Investigate recurring mix-ups	QA improves the process	Cause assessment and follow-up checks

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3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports

Raw data are the original observations and measurements, together with the information needed to understand and evaluate them. Cell counts, microscope images, absorbance readings, and instrument files can all be raw data. A final average does not preserve the individual values used to calculate it.

Keep the full set of observations and identify excluded values with the reason and authorization required by the local procedure. An unexpected result should not disappear simply because a repeat test produced a more convenient value.

For digital files, use sample IDs and an organized naming system. Retain original files and create clearly identified working copies for analysis. Link an image to its culture, acquisition date, and relevant microscope settings so a later reader can understand it.

Metadata are information that gives context to data, such as acquisition time, sample identity, or instrument settings. An **audit trail** is a record of electronic activities and changes that helps reconstruct a record's history. Its design should make relevant changes traceable to the person and time involved.

Use individual authorized accounts and access controls appropriate to the system. Maintain backups and retention arrangements that keep records available and readable. A screenshot may preserve a displayed result while losing underlying measurements or settings. Retain the original electronic record and its necessary context when a static image cannot preserve that information.

A **laboratory report** presents the question, methods, results, interpretation, and conclusion. State the procedure and any changes, identify samples and controls, and present values with units. Explain how the evidence supports the conclusion and where uncertainty remains. The report summarizes the work while pointing to the records that support it.

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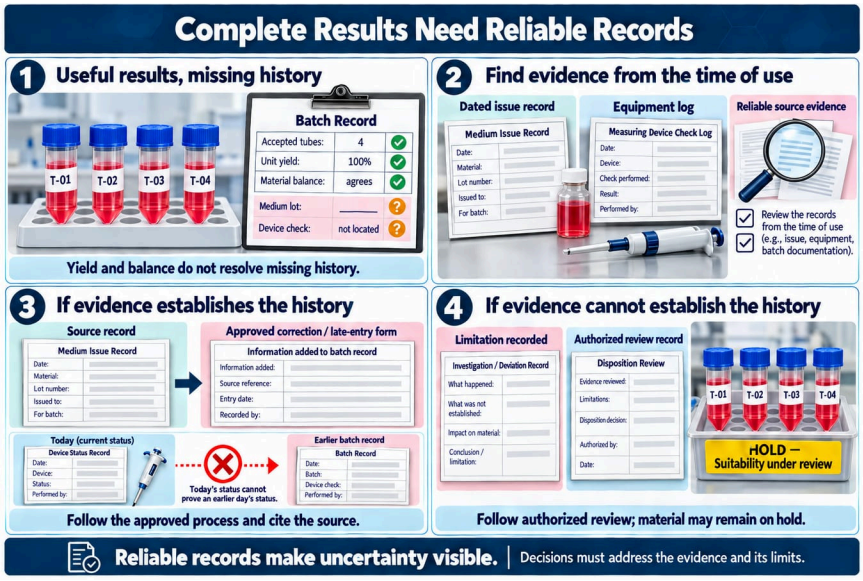
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information

A batch record shows four acceptable tubes and a 100% unit yield. Its inventory balance agrees with the calculated balance. However, the medium lot field is blank, and the measuring device check cannot be located.

The unit yield and material balance answer useful questions, but they do not resolve the missing history. A reviewer must determine whether reliable evidence identifies the medium lot and establishes whether the measuring device met the required checks at the time of use.

A dated issue record or equipment log may provide that evidence. If it does, add the information through the approved correction or late-entry process and cite the source. Do not copy today's device status into an earlier record as though it described that earlier day.

If the missing information cannot be established, record the limitation and follow the authorized review process. The material may remain on hold while its suitability is assessed. Reliable records make uncertainty visible so decisions can address it.



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3.14: Chapter Summary

SOPs describe approved recurring tasks. Document control helps staff identify the correct version and preserves the instructions needed to interpret earlier work. A master batch record contains approved batch instructions. An executed batch record documents the actual history of a particular batch. Notebooks and supporting logs provide related evidence for research and routine operations. Record actual observations as work happens, identify the author, and include units. Corrections must preserve the original entry. Missing information and late entries should remain visible. Unique labels and linked records make cultures, samples, aliquots, materials, and results traceable. Inventory and equipment records help establish the identity and suitability of the inputs used. Reconciliation accounts for materials and labels. Yield describes acceptable output relative to a defined expectation. Matching numbers do not replace checks of identity, process, and quality. QA provides confidence in the processes used to achieve quality. QC uses operational checks and tests to assess whether specific requirements are met. Problems need documented review and an authorized decision. Reports summarize the evidence and link readers to the original records. In the laboratory manual, use these principles when labeling cultures, recording passage histories, tracking reagent lots, and retaining cell-count or assay data. Record what you actually did and observed. If information is missing or a result is unexpected, document the issue and follow the review procedure rather than filling the gap with an assumption.

Key Terms

Quality system	standard operating procedure	acceptance criteria	document control
revision	effective date	controlled copy	record
laboratory notebook	batch	master batch record	executed batch record
good documentation practices	data integrity	ALCOA	traceability
aliquot	inventory record	lot number	status
calibration	reconciliation	variance	yield
discrepancy	deviation	hold	correction
corrective action	preventive action	disposition	quality assurance
quality control	quality management system	raw data	metadata
audit trail	laboratory report		

Review Questions

1. Why can missing records limit the usefulness of a healthy-looking culture?

2. What should an SOP explain beyond the actions needed to perform a task?

3. Distinguish a revision number from an effective date.

4. Compare an SOP, a master batch record, and an executed batch record.

5. Explain why a target value should not be copied into a field for an actual measurement.

6. What does ALCOA help a reader evaluate?

7. How should a paper error be corrected while preserving its history?

8. Distinguish a missing observation from a field that is not applicable.

9. What links are needed to trace an ELISA result back to its source culture?

10. Explain why a catalog number cannot replace a lot number.

11. A source contains 60.0 mL, and recorded withdrawals total 18.0 mL. The observed balance is 41.5 mL. Calculate the expected balance and variance using the chapter's sign convention.

12. Eight labels were issued, five applied, and two returned. If none were recorded as spoiled, how many are unaccounted for?

13. Explain how a batch can have 100% unit yield and still require investigation.

14. Compare QA and QC using one cell culture example for each.

15. Why should raw values and original images be retained when a report includes averages and selected figures?

Apply Your Understanding

A technician prepares four tubes under an approved master record. One tube is rejected because its volume is outside the stated range. A replacement is prepared, giving four accepted tubes. The record reports 100% unit yield but includes only the volume placed in the accepted tubes. One issued label is missing. The operator notices that the source lot was entered incorrectly and covers the entry with correction fluid.

Identify the errors in the material balance. Explain which withdrawals must be included and why 100% unit yield does not show that no material was lost.

Describe the records and physical checks that could help account for the missing label. Explain why matching label totals would still not prove that each tube was labeled correctly.

Explain how the lot-number error should have been corrected. Describe how to document the obscured entry now, using reliable supporting evidence and the laboratory's procedure.

State what an independent reviewer needs to assess the affected tubes and make an authorized disposition decision. Distinguish confirmed facts from unresolved questions.

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4: CELL GROWTH DEVELOPMENT AND STEM CELLS

Cells in a culture may become larger, divide, specialize, stop dividing, or die. These changes can occur together, but each answers a different biological question. This chapter connects cell structure, the **cell cycle**, **signaling**, and **gene expression** to those changes. It also explains **stem cell self-renewal** and **potency**. You will learn to choose measurements that show what cells are doing and support a clear interpretation.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Connect major mammalian cell structures to growth, signaling, and cell behavior.
2. Distinguish cell growth, proliferation, differentiation, and cell death.
3. Describe the major stages of the cell cycle and explain the purpose of checkpoints.
4. Explain how gene expression and environmental signals guide development.
5. Compare stem cell self-renewal, potency, and directed differentiation.
6. Interpret changes in cultured cells while considering senescence, cancer-related changes, and measurement limits.

4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
4.4: The Cell Cycle
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
4.14: Chapter Summary

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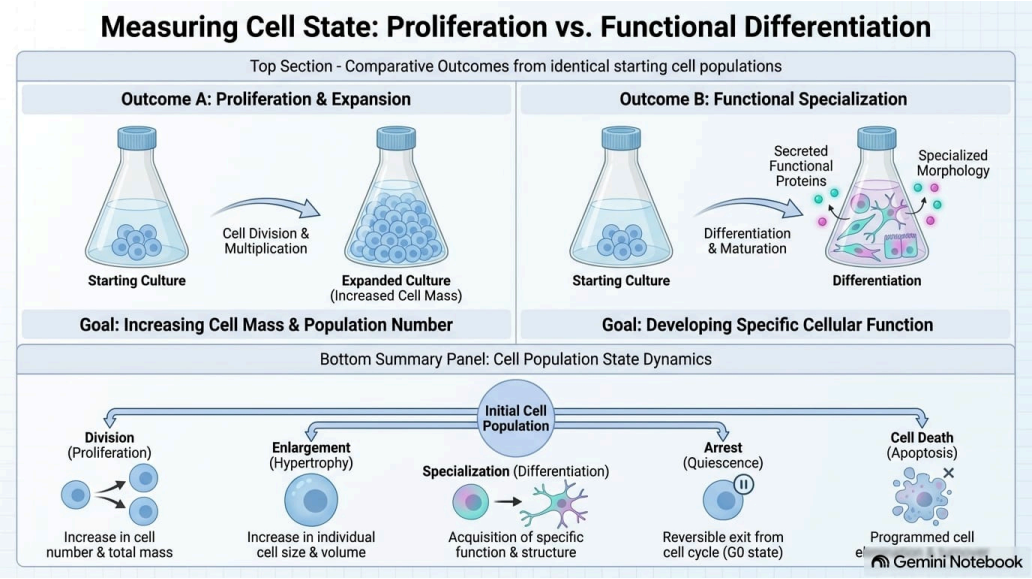
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells

Imagine that two cultures begin with the same number of cells. After several days, one contains twice as many cells. The other contains about the same number, but its cells now produce a protein linked to a specialized function.

Which culture was more successful? The answer depends on the goal. The first may be useful when the aim is to increase cell number. The second may be useful when the aim is to develop a particular function. Counting cells answers an important question, but it does not answer every question about their state.

Cells can become larger, divide, specialize, stop dividing, or die. These events may occur together within one population. Understanding them helps you choose a suitable measurement and explain what the result can establish.

This chapter follows the connection between cell structure and cell behavior. It explains how cells divide, how they receive instructions, and how stem cells develop into more specialized cells. These ideas apply to normal cells, stem cell populations, and cancer-derived cell lines.

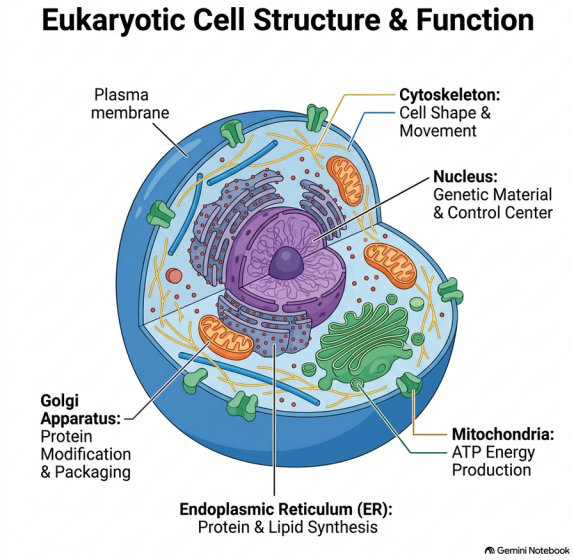


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4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior

Mammalian cells are **eukaryotic cells**, meaning that they contain a membrane-bound nucleus and other internal compartments. An **organelle** is a specialized structure within a cell. Different structures work together rather than acting as separate systems.



The **cell membrane** forms the boundary between the cell and its surroundings. It controls movement of many substances and contains proteins that help cells receive signals. The **cytoplasm** includes the material inside the membrane, outside the nucleus.

The **nucleus** contains most of the cell's DNA. **Deoxyribonucleic acid**, or **DNA**, stores genetic information. A **gene** is a DNA sequence that contributes to a functional product, such as an RNA or protein. The cell uses selected parts of its genetic information according to its needs.

Ribosomes build proteins. The **endoplasmic reticulum**, or **ER**, supports activities such as making and processing proteins and lipids. The **Golgi apparatus** modifies and sorts many molecules for delivery. **Mitochondria** help supply energy in the form of **adenosine triphosphate**, or **ATP**. They also participate in other processes, including signaling and cell death.

The **cytoskeleton** is a network of protein filaments that supports shape, movement, and division. **Actin filaments** help cells change shape and move. **Microtubules** support transport and help separate chromosomes during division.

These structures give meaning to common measurements. A stain that labels mitochondria shows where its target is located under the test conditions. It does not automatically measure all aspects of energy production. Likewise, a change in cell shape can suggest altered cytoskeletal activity, but shape alone does not identify the cause.

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4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation

Cell growth means an increase in the size or mass of an individual cell. **Cell proliferation** means an increase in cell number through division. A cell may grow without dividing, so the two terms should not be treated as identical.

Differentiation is the development of a more specialized cell state. A differentiating cell changes which genes it uses and may change its shape, proteins, and function. Some differentiated cells continue dividing, while others divide rarely or stop.

Consider a fibroblast culture. An increase in the area covered by cells could result from more cells, larger cells, or cells spreading across a wider area. Surface coverage alone cannot distinguish these events.

A useful experiment matches its measurement to its question. Cell counts can support a claim about population size. A division-related measurement can help assess proliferation. A specialized protein and a functional test can support a conclusion about differentiation.

A population also changes when cells are lost. If division and death occur at similar rates, the total number may stay nearly constant. A stable count therefore does not prove that nothing happened.

YouTube Video

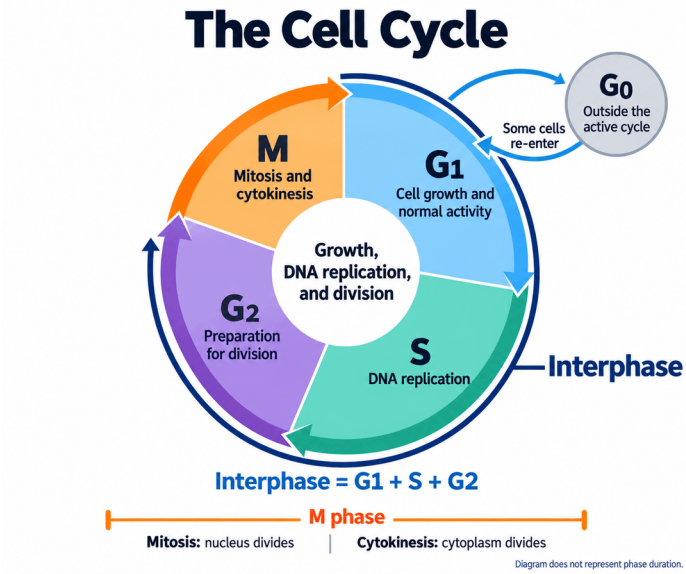
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4.4: The Cell Cycle

The **cell cycle** is the sequence of events through which a cell grows, prepares for division, 

and produces daughter cells. Before dividing, the cell must copy its DNA and prepare to distribute that genetic information. The resulting **daughter cells** each receive a set of chromosomes and cellular materials needed to function.

Most of the cell cycle occurs during **interphase**, which includes **G1 phase**, **S phase**, and **G2 phase**. Interphase is an active period. The cell performs its usual functions while preparing for possible division.

During G1 phase, the cell grows and makes proteins and other materials needed for its activities. It also responds to signals from its surroundings. Conditions such as nutrient supply and growth signals influence whether the cell continues toward division.

During S phase, the cell copies its DNA through **DNA replication**. DNA carries the instructions that guide cell activities. It is organized into **chromosomes**, structures made of DNA and associated proteins. After replication, each duplicated chromosome consists of two connected copies called **sister chromatids**. These copies must later separate so that each daughter cell receives the genetic information it needs.

During G2 phase, the cell continues preparing for division. It makes materials needed to separate the chromosomes and divide the cell. Control systems help check whether DNA replication is complete and whether damage needs repair before division proceeds.

During **M phase**, the cell undergoes **mitosis** and usually **cytokinesis**. Mitosis separates the duplicated chromosomes into two nuclei. Its major stages describe how the chromosomes become organized and move.

During **prophase**, the chromosomes become more tightly packed, and a structure called the **mitotic spindle** begins to form. The spindle contains fibers that help move chromosomes. As the cell progresses toward **metaphase**, the nuclear boundary breaks down, spindle fibers attach to the chromosomes, and the chromosomes line up near the middle of the cell. During **anaphase**, sister chromatids separate and move toward opposite ends. During **telophase**, new nuclear boundaries form around the separated chromosome sets.

Cytokinesis divides the cell's cytoplasm, the material inside the cell membrane but outside the nucleus. In a typical mammalian cell, the membrane pinches inward until two daughter cells separate. Mitosis and cytokinesis overlap, but they accomplish different tasks: mitosis divides the genetic material between nuclei, while cytokinesis divides the cell. DNA replication occurs during S phase, before mitosis begins.

Some cells leave the active cycle and enter **G0**, a state outside the usual dividing cycle. These cells may continue carrying out important functions without preparing to divide. Some remain outside the cycle for long periods. Others enter **quiescence**, a

resting state from which they may return to the cycle when suitable signals are present. Quiescent cells are alive. A lack of division does not mean that a cell has died.

A culture usually contains cells at several stages of the cycle. This mixture is called an **asynchronous population**. While some cells copy DNA, others grow, divide, or remain outside the active cycle. Seeing a few dividing cells under the microscope therefore does not mean that the entire culture is dividing at that moment.

The time needed to complete the cycle varies with cell type and culture conditions. Nutrient supply, growth signals, stress, cell density, and treatments can affect progression. Even a continuous cell line does not divide at the same rate under every condition.

These differences matter when interpreting culture results. A slower increase in cell number could reflect slower cycling, entry into a nondividing state, cell death, or a combination of these events. Cell counts show the change in population size, while additional measurements help explain its cause.

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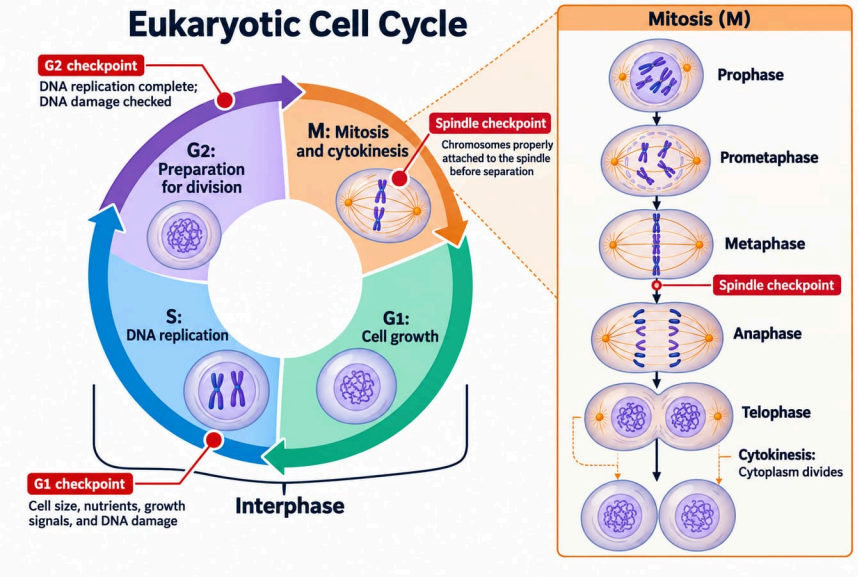
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"The Phases of Mitosis" LabXchange https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2od1IBkeoSU Standard YouTube License. No changes made.

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4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control

A **cell cycle checkpoint** is a control mechanism that can delay progression when



a problem is detected. Different checkpoints monitor conditions such as damaged DNA, incomplete DNA replication, or chromosomes that are not properly attached to the mitotic spindle. A delay can give the cell time to correct the problem. If serious damage cannot be repaired, the cell may stop dividing permanently or activate a controlled cell-death process. Checkpoints reduce division errors, but they do not prevent every error.

Cyclins and **cyclin-dependent kinases**, or **CDKs**, help control movement through the cycle. CDKs are enzymes that modify other proteins to regulate cell activities. They require binding to appropriate cyclins for activation, and other signals also regulate their activity. Changes in cyclin levels help coordinate the timing of cell-cycle events. The key idea is that division depends on regulated protein activity and signals from both inside and outside the cell.

The culture environment also affects division. Many normal adherent cells slow or stop proliferation as they become crowded and make more contact with neighboring cells. This response is called **contact inhibition of proliferation**. It varies among cell types and may be weakened or lost in some altered cells, including many cancer-derived cells.

Crowding can also change nutrient availability, waste accumulation, and access to growth signals. These effects can occur alongside contact inhibition. Starting treatment and control cultures at comparable densities helps prevent differences in crowding from being mistaken for treatment effects.

A treated culture with fewer cells than its control has not necessarily experienced more cell death. Its cells may have divided more slowly, stopped dividing, died, or been lost during handling. Compare the final count with the starting count, and combine a suitable viability test with measurements of division or cell-cycle state. Together, these results help explain why cell numbers differ.

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4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell

Cell signaling is the process through which cells receive and respond to information. Signals help regulate activities such as growth, division, movement, and survival.

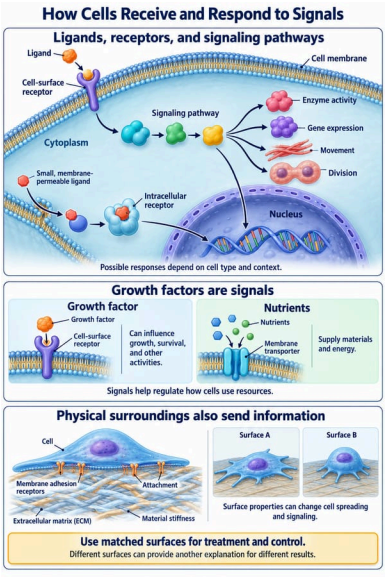
A **receptor** is a protein that recognizes and binds particular molecules. A molecule that binds a receptor is called a **ligand**. Receptors may be located on the cell surface or inside the cell. Whether a cell responds to a signal depends partly on which receptors it has and how those receptors are connected to its internal control systems.

A **signaling pathway** is a series of molecular events that links a signal to a response. The response may involve changes in enzyme activity, gene expression, movement, or division. The same signal can produce different responses in different cell types because their receptors and internal pathways differ.

A **growth factor** is a signaling molecule that can influence growth, division, survival, or other activities. Growth factors and nutrients have different roles. Nutrients supply energy and building materials. Growth factors help regulate how cells use those resources.

Cells also respond to their physical surroundings. The **extracellular matrix**, or **ECM**, is a network of molecules outside cells that provides support and influences cell behavior. Cells interact with this matrix through surface proteins. These interactions can affect attachment, spreading, survival, and differentiation. The stiffness of the surrounding material can also affect the response.

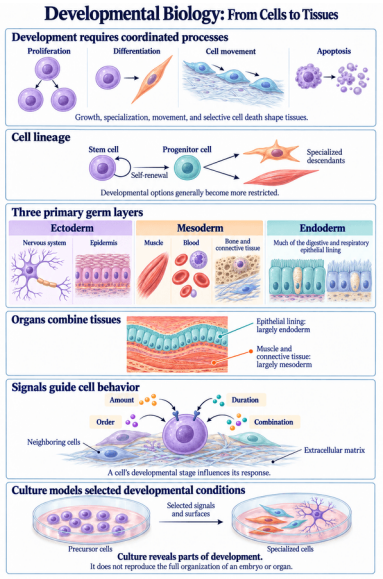
For example, cells placed on two different surfaces may spread differently and receive different signals. If a treatment group and its control grow on different surfaces, the surface becomes another possible explanation for the results. Matching culture surfaces helps make the treatment comparison easier to interpret.



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4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues



How does a single fertilized egg give rise to an organism with many different tissues and organs? **Developmental biology** studies this process, examining how cells multiply, acquire specialized functions, and become organized into working structures. Development involves more than an increase in cell number. It requires coordinated **proliferation**, or cell multiplication; **differentiation**, the development of specialized features and functions; cell movement; and selective cell death. Together, these processes help shape the developing organism.

Selective cell death may seem surprising in a process that builds tissues, but removing cells can be just as important as producing them. **Apoptosis**, a regulated form of cell death, helps remove certain cells during development. For example, it contributes to the removal of tissue between developing fingers and toes. The resulting shape depends on a balance between the cells that grow, remain, move, and are removed.

During early development, cells receive signals that influence their behavior and future roles. Their responses depend partly on where they are located, which cells surround them, and which signals they have already encountered. As development proceeds, many cells become more specialized and their possible future roles become more restricted. A cell that initially has several developmental options may eventually become committed to a particular pathway.

A **cell lineage** describes a sequence of related cells or cell states connected through development and division. Following a lineage helps researchers investigate where cells came from and how their properties changed over time. For example, a blood-forming stem cell can produce descendants that eventually develop into different types of blood cells. These changes occur through intermediate stages rather than through a single, immediate transition.

A **progenitor cell** is a precursor that generally has fewer developmental options than a broadly potent stem cell. Progenitor cells can divide and produce more specialized descendants, but their capacity for self-renewal is often more limited than that of the stem cells that maintain a tissue over time. Think of a progenitor as a cell moving along a more restricted developmental route: it still has steps ahead, but fewer possible destinations.

During embryonic development, cells become organized into three primary **germ layers**. These major cell groups provide the starting populations for many tissues. **Ectoderm** contributes to the nervous system and the epidermis, the outer layer of the skin. **Mesoderm** contributes to muscle, blood, bone, and much connective tissue. **Endoderm** contributes to many internal epithelial linings, including much of the digestive and respiratory tract lining.

These examples provide a useful starting point, but an entire organ rarely comes from just one germ layer. The intestine, for instance, includes an epithelial lining derived largely from endoderm, along with muscle and connective tissue derived largely from mesoderm. Understanding an organ's development therefore requires attention to its different tissue components and how they become organized together.

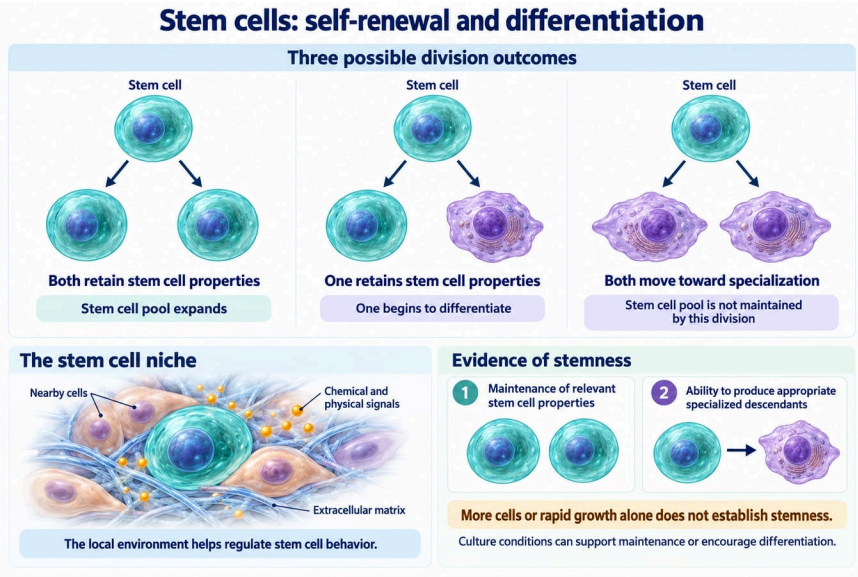
Developmental signals also work in combinations and sequences. A cell's response can depend on a signal's amount, how long it is present, and whether it arrives before or after another signal. The same signal may produce different responses in cells at different developmental stages. Neighboring cells and the **extracellular matrix**, the material surrounding cells, also provide information that influences cell behavior. Development emerges from these interacting conditions rather than from a single instruction acting alone.

In culture, researchers can provide selected conditions that reproduce parts of a developmental process. They may change the culture medium, add signaling molecules, or alter the surface on which cells grow to encourage a particular response. Such experiments help reveal how cells maintain their identity or move toward specialization. However, a culture captures only selected features of development. It does not reproduce the full arrangement, timing, and interactions of an embryo or organ. Interpreting the results requires asking both what the culture model reveals and which parts of the developmental process it leaves unexplored.

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4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal



A **stem cell** has two central abilities: it can maintain its stem cell identity and produce more specialized descendants. **Self-renewal** occurs when cell division produces cells that retain the relevant stem cell properties. **Differentiation** is the process through which cells develop more specialized features and functions. These abilities allow stem cells to help maintain tissues while also supplying cells needed for growth or repair.

An increase in cell number alone does not demonstrate self-renewal. The new cells must retain the properties that define the stem cell population being studied. Imagine watching a population double in size. If its descendants have all become specialized, the population has grown, but its stem cell pool has not been maintained.

Stem cell division can produce several outcomes. Both descendants may retain stem cell properties, expanding the stem cell population. Both may move toward specialization, or one may remain a stem cell while the other begins to differentiate. The familiar illustration of one stem cell producing one stem cell and one developing descendant shows a useful example, but it does not represent every division.

A **stem cell niche** is the local environment that helps regulate stem cell behavior. Within a tissue, nearby cells, the **extracellular matrix**, and chemical or physical signals can influence whether stem cells remain in their current state, divide, or differentiate. The niche provides a changing set of conditions that helps coordinate stem cell activity with the tissue's needs.

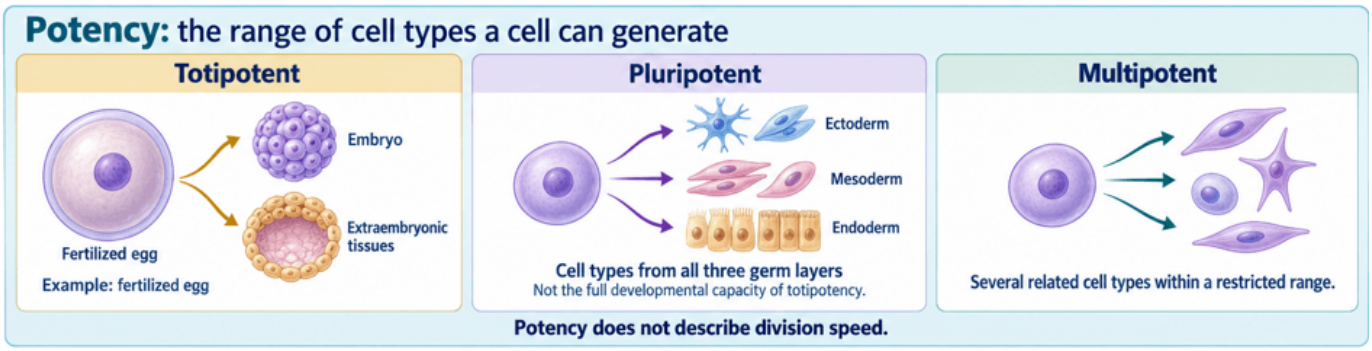
In culture, researchers provide selected conditions to support stem cell maintenance or encourage differentiation. However, rapid growth alone does not establish **stemness**, the properties that define a cell as a stem cell. A cancer-derived cell line may divide rapidly without meeting the definition of the stem cell population under study. Evidence must therefore address both the maintenance of relevant stem cell properties and the ability to produce appropriate specialized descendants.

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4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types

Potency describes the range of cell types a cell can generate. It does not describe how quickly the cell divides. **Totipotent cells** can contribute to the embryo and the extraembryonic tissues needed for development. The fertilized egg is the standard example. **Pluripotent cells** can give rise to cell types from all three germ layers, but do not have the same full developmental capacity as a totipotent cell. **Multipotent cells** can produce several related cell types within a more restricted range. **Embryonic stem cells** come from an early embryo and are pluripotent.

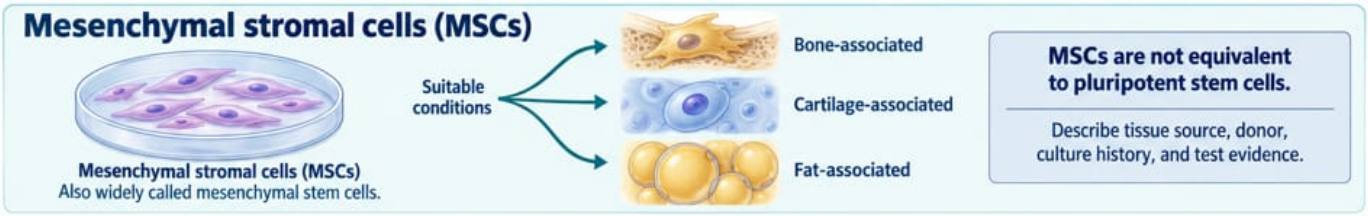


Adult stem cells, also called somatic stem cells, help maintain and repair specific tissues. They usually produce a narrower range of cell types. Scientists make **induced pluripotent stem cells**, or iPSCs, by changing the state of somatic cells. This process is called reprogramming. Reprogrammed cells may retain some features of the starting cell, including disease-related DNA changes.



Mesenchymal stromal cells, or **MSCs**, are commonly studied for their ability to produce certain mesenchymal cell types under suitable conditions. The name mesenchymal stem cell is also widely used. Typical differentiation studies evaluate bone-, cartilage-, and fat-associated outcomes.

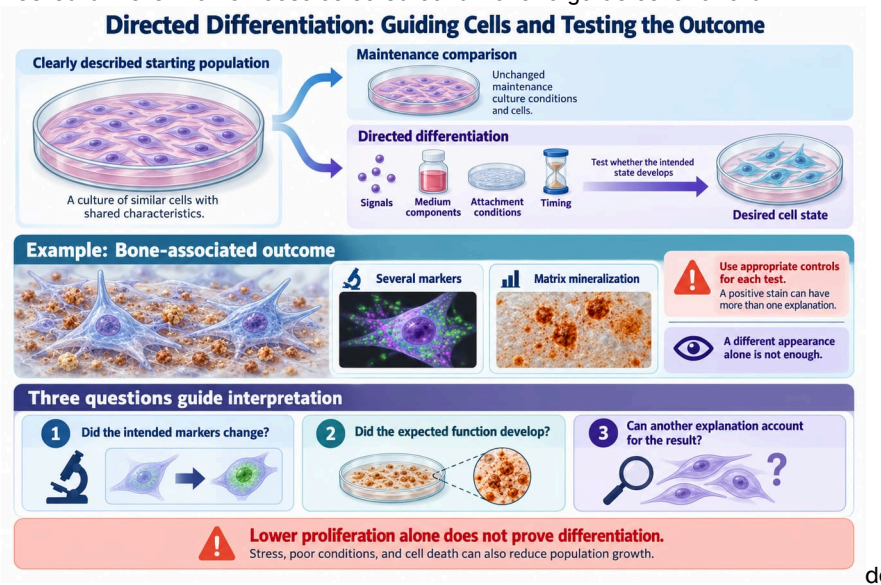
An **MSC** preparation is not equivalent to a pluripotent stem cell preparation. Tissue source, donor, culture history, and the tests performed all matter. A useful report describes the preparation and evidence instead of relying on the label alone.



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4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture

Directed differentiation uses selected conditions to guide cells toward a 

desired state. Researchers may change signals, medium components, attachment conditions, or timing.

A reasonable study begins with a clearly described starting population. It includes a maintenance comparison and tests whether the intended state develops. The goal is evidence of a change, rather than a culture that merely looks different.

For example, a population exposed to conditions intended to support a bone-associated outcome might be evaluated using several markers and evidence of matrix mineralization. Each test needs appropriate controls because a positive stain can have more than one explanation.

Differentiation may reduce proliferation, but lower proliferation alone does not prove differentiation. Stress, poor conditions, and cell death can also reduce population growth.

Three questions guide interpretation: Did the intended markers change? Did the expected function develop? Can another explanation account for the result? These questions help distinguish a supported conclusion from an assumption.

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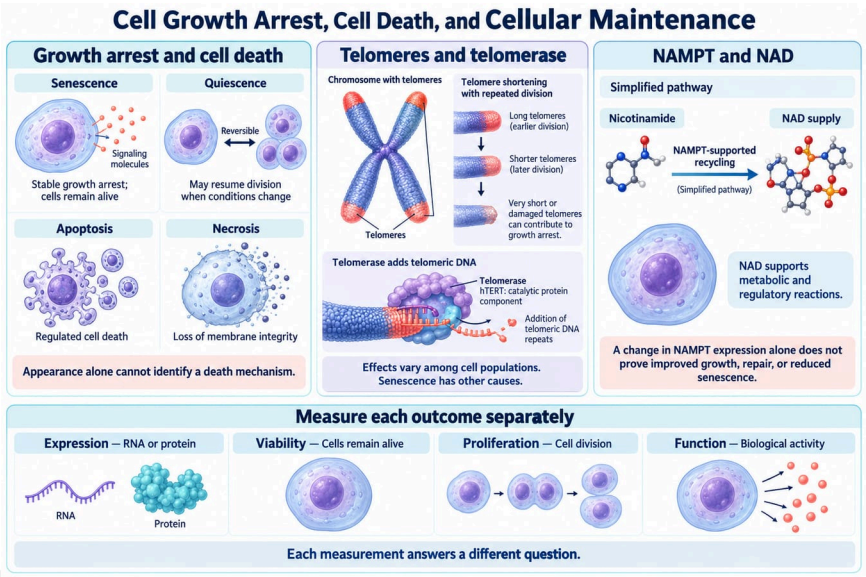
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death

Cells can respond to repeated division or stress in different ways. Some stop dividing but remain alive, while others undergo cell death. Understanding these outcomes helps researchers interpret changes in a culture.

Senescence is a stable state of growth arrest in which cells remain alive but stop dividing. It can develop after repeated division or in response to stress. Senescent cells may remain metabolically active and release molecules that influence nearby cells. **Quiescence**, by comparison, is a reversible state of growth arrest: quiescent cells may resume division when conditions change.

Cell death is a different outcome. **Apoptosis** is a regulated form of cell death that helps shape developing tissues and remove damaged or unneeded cells. **Necrosis** commonly describes cell death associated with severe injury and loss of membrane integrity. However, cell death mechanisms are complex, and appearance alone cannot reliably identify the mechanism involved.

One factor that can contribute to growth arrest is the condition of the chromosome ends. **Telomeres** are protective DNA–protein structures at these ends. In many somatic cells, telomeres can shorten with repeated division. When telomeres become critically short or damaged, they can trigger a DNA damage response that contributes to growth arrest.



Telomerase is an enzyme complex that can add telomeric DNA. **Human telomerase reverse transcriptase**, or **hTERT**, is its catalytic protein component. Telomere maintenance can influence how many times a cell can divide, but changing hTERT expression does not produce the same effect in every cell population. Senescence also has causes beyond telomere shortening, so hTERT expression alone cannot establish whether cells have avoided or entered senescence.

Cell metabolism provides another part of the picture. **Nicotinamide phosphoribosyltransferase**, or **NAMPT**, helps cells recycle nicotinamide through a pathway that supports the supply of **nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide**, or **NAD**. NAD participates in metabolic and regulatory reactions. However, a change in NAMPT expression alone does not demonstrate improved growth, increased tissue repair, or reduced senescence. Each outcome requires its own supporting measurements.

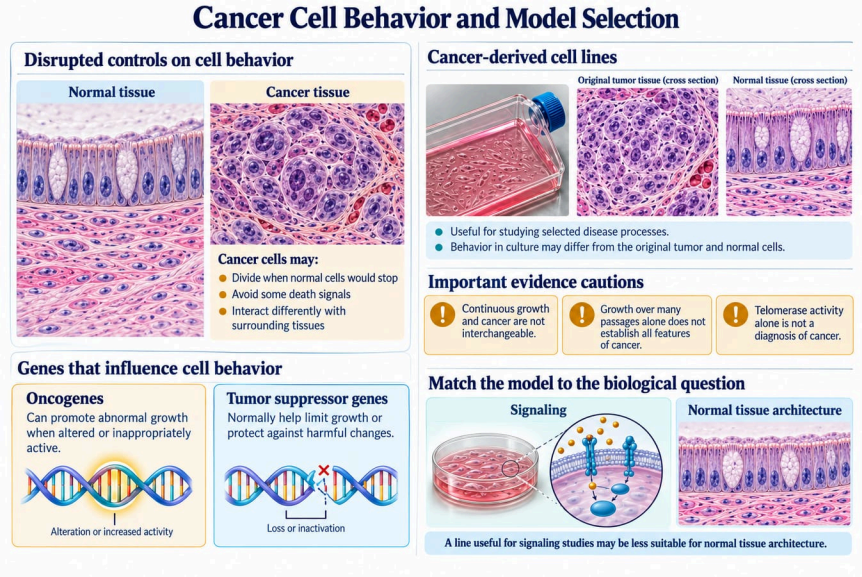
When interpreting an experiment, ask what each measurement actually shows. **Expression** measurements reveal changes in the RNA or protein being studied. **Viability** measurements assess whether cells remain alive, while **proliferation** measurements assess cell division. **Function** measurements evaluate the biological activity of interest. Together, these distinct lines of evidence build a clearer picture of how cells respond to a treatment.

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4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth

Cancer develops through changes that disrupt normal controls on cell behavior. Canc



er cells may divide when normal cells would stop, avoid some death signals, or interact differently with surrounding tissues. **Oncogenes** can promote abnormal growth when altered or inappropriately active. **Tumor suppressor genes** normally help limit growth or protect against harmful changes.

Cancer-derived cell lines are useful for studying selected disease processes. However, the behavior of a line in culture may differ from the original tumor and from normal cells.

Continuous growth and cancer are related concepts in some models, but they are not interchangeable. A cell's ability to grow over many passages does not, by itself, establish all features of cancer. Likewise, telomerase activity alone is not a diagnosis of cancer.

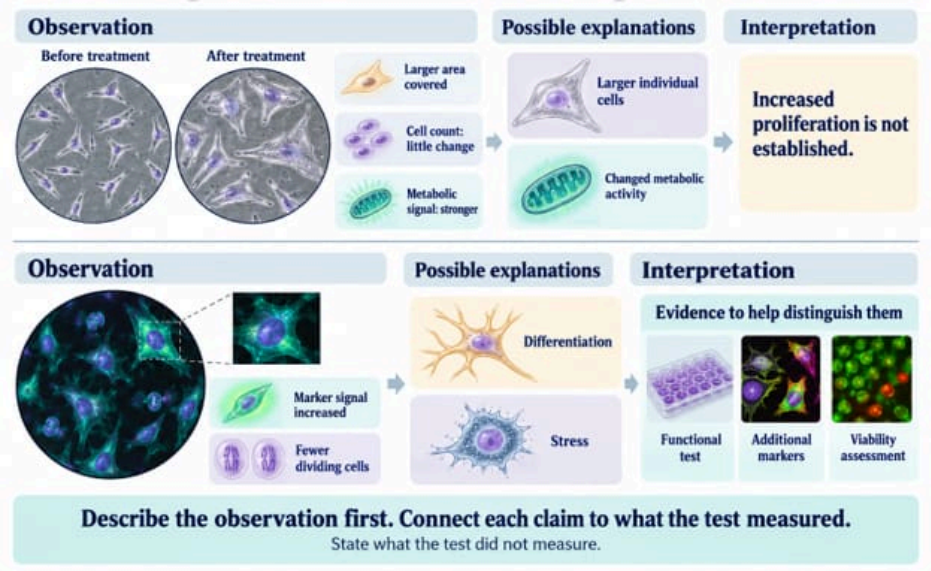
When selecting a model, take into consideration which feature it represents. A line useful for studying signaling may be less suitable for studying normal tissue architecture. The model must fit the biological question.

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4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture

Consider a culture that becomes larger in appearance after treatment. Cell counts



show little change, while a metabolic assay produces a stronger signal. One possible explanation is that individual cells became larger or changed their metabolic activity. The result does not establish increased proliferation.

Now consider a culture that shows a new marker and fewer dividing cells. Differentiation is one explanation, but stress is another. A functional test, additional markers, and a viability assessment would help distinguish them.

Keep an observation separate from its explanation. Record “cells spread across a larger area” before concluding that growth increased. Record “marker signal increased” before concluding that differentiation occurred.

A well-supported interpretation connects the measurement to the claim. It also states what the test did not measure. This habit is central to evaluating growth, stem cell state, and treatment responses.

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4.14: Chapter Summary

Cell structures work together to support survival and cell behavior. **Cell growth** increases cell size or mass, **proliferation** increases cell number, and **differentiation** produces a more specialized state. These processes can occur together, so appearance or surface coverage alone cannot distinguish them. The **cell cycle** coordinates growth, DNA replication, and division. Checkpoints, cyclins, and CDKs help regulate progression. Growth signals, nutrients, the extracellular matrix, and cell density also influence cell behavior. During development, signals guide cell lineages and tissue organization. The three primary **germ layers** contribute to different tissues. Stem cells maintain their properties through **self-renewal**, while **potency** describes the range of cell types they can produce. Stem cell types differ in origin and capabilities, and **directed differentiation** uses selected conditions to guide specialization.

Quiescence may be reversible, while **senescence** is stable growth arrest. Apoptosis and necrosis involve cell death. Telomeres, telomerase, and hTERT influence replicative lifespan, while NAMPT supports NAD supply. Changes in these factors alone do not establish improved growth or cancer. Reliable interpretation connects measurements to the question. Use relevant markers, functional tests, viability measurements, and matched controls to distinguish changes in cell number, state, and function.

Key Terms

Eukaryotic cell	organelle	cell membrane	cytoplasm
nucleus	DNA	gene	ribosome
endoplasmic reticulum	Golgi apparatus	mitochondrion	ATP
cytoskeleton	actin filament	microtubule	cell growth
proliferation	differentiation	cell cycle	interphase
G1	S	G2	M phase
mitosis	cytokinesis	G0	quiescence
checkpoint	cyclin	CDK	contact inhibition
signaling	ligand	receptor	growth factor
extracellular matrix	developmental biology	lineage	progenitor
germ layer	stem cell	self-renewal	niche

potency	totipotent	pluripotent	multipotent
embryonic stem cell	adult stem cell	iPSC	MSC
directed differentiation	senescence	apoptosis	necrosis
telomere	telomerase	hTERT	NAMPT
NAD	oncogene	tumor suppressor gene	

Review Questions

1. Connect the nucleus, ribosomes, and mitochondria to activities needed for cell maintenance.

2. Distinguish growth, proliferation, and differentiation using one example of each.

3. What occurs during S phase, and why must it precede division?

4. Why can a living culture contain cells that are not actively dividing?

5. Explain how checkpoints can protect a dividing population.

6. Describe how a surface or extracellular matrix can influence cell behavior.

7. Compare totipotent, pluripotent, and multipotent cells.

8. Why does rapid division alone not prove self-renewal?

9. Compare embryonic stem cells, adult stem cells, and iPSCs.

10. What evidence would you use to evaluate directed differentiation?

11. Distinguish quiescence, senescence, and cell death.

12. Why does increased hTERT expression not establish that a culture has become cancerous?

13. Why can a stronger metabolic signal occur without increased cell number?

Apply Your Understanding

A researcher treats an MSC population and reports three findings: the cells look larger, the cell count is unchanged, and one differentiation-associated marker increases. The researcher concludes that the treatment caused successful differentiation.

Explain which findings support the conclusion and which remain ambiguous. Propose two additional types of evidence that would help assess the claim. Describe a suitable comparison group and explain why its starting culture conditions should match those of the treated group.

1. For the MSC case above, decide whether larger cells with an unchanged cell count show increased growth, proliferation, or both. Explain your choice.

2. One marker increases after treatment. Plan a second measurement that tests specialized cell function and explain how it would strengthen the conclusion.

3. A culture stops dividing but its cells still exclude a viability dye. Identify two possible cell states and describe evidence that could distinguish them.

Two cultures of the same normal adherent cell type begin at different densities. After several days, the crowded culture divides more slowly than the less crowded culture. Explain how contact inhibition could contribute to this result. Why should starting density be matched when testing a treatment's effect on proliferation?

A stem cell population doubles in number, but its descendants can no longer produce the specialized cell types expected from the starting population. Does the increased cell count demonstrate self-renewal? Explain your reasoning and describe the evidence needed to determine whether the cells retained their stem cell properties.

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5: ASEPTIC TECHNIQUE AND CONTAMINATION CONTROL

Contamination can enter a culture through materials, handling, equipment, or another cell population. Some problems are visible, while others remain hidden even when the cells appear healthy. This chapter explains how aseptic technique, workspace organization, and appropriate cleaning and disinfection reduce contamination risks. It also examines contamination tests and documented responses to handling errors. The central idea is that a clear culture is not proof of freedom from contamination; dependable decisions require both careful practices and valid evidence.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

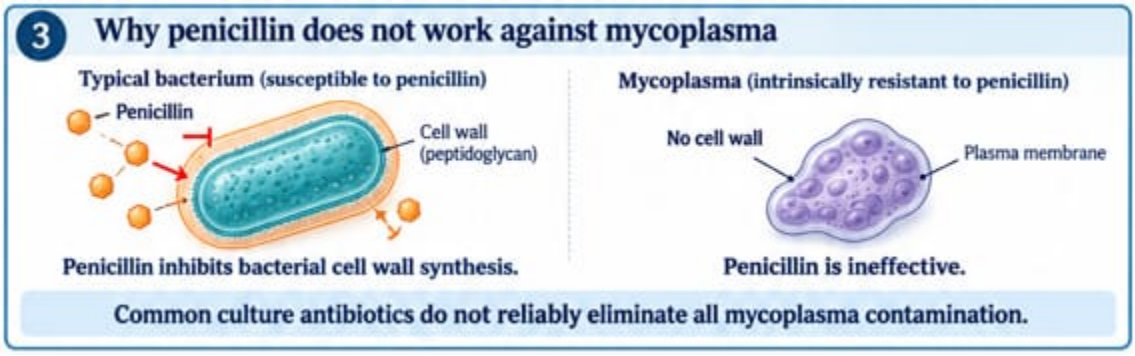
  1. Explain how aseptic technique protects cultures and identify common routes of contamination.
  2. Distinguish cleaning, disinfection, sterilization, and aseptic handling.
  3. Evaluate handling practices that protect sterile surfaces and cabinet airflow.
  4. Compare visible microbial contamination, mycoplasma contamination, and contamination by another cell line.
  5. Interpret contamination tests using appropriate controls and explain the limits of a negative result.
  6. Describe a documented response to a handling error or suspected contamination.

5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
5.11: Testing For Contamination
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
5.15: Chapter Summary

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5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated

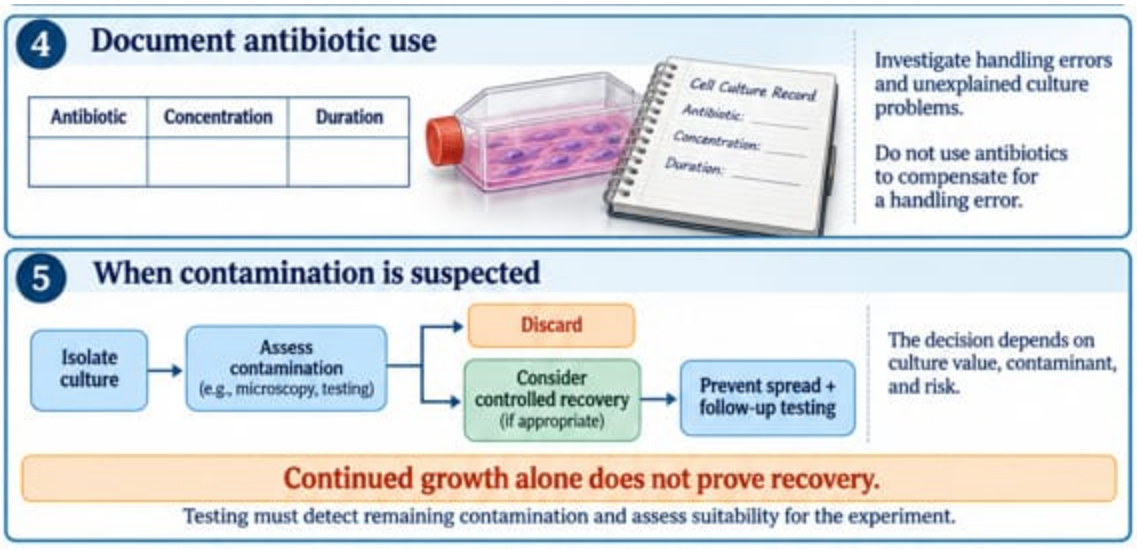
A culture may appear healthy under the microscope, with clear medium and



cells of the expected shape, yet test positive for **mycoplasma**. These small bacteria lack a cell wall and can contaminate cultures without causing visible cloudiness. They may alter cell growth, metabolism, and experimental responses. Visual observation shows the culture's appearance, while a mycoplasma test checks for a specific contaminant.



Visual checks can reveal some problems, but they cannot detect every contaminant. Unwanted microorganisms may be present before they cause noticeable changes in the medium, cell shape, or growth. For example, a sterile pipette tip that touches a work surface before entering a culture vessel creates a possible route of contamination. The culture may look unchanged afterward, but its appearance does not establish that the transfer was safe.



Aseptic technique consists of practices that reduce the chance of introducing unwanted microorganisms during handling. These practices include protecting sterile surfaces, using suitable supplies, and maintaining an appropriate workspace.

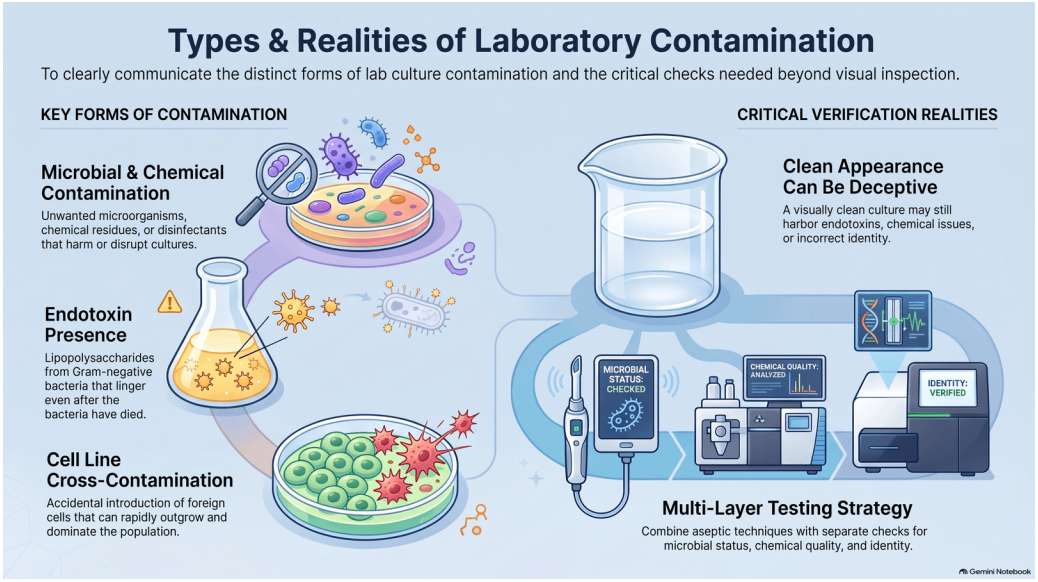
Contamination control must continue throughout the procedure. Careful preparation provides a strong starting point, but each transfer, vessel opening, and movement must preserve that protection.

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5.2: What Counts as Contamination

Contamination is the unintended presence of material that can interfere



with a culture, measurement, or process. Microorganisms are an important example, but not the only one.

Microbial contamination involves unwanted microorganisms such as bacteria, yeasts, or molds. Some organisms grow rapidly and produce obvious changes. Others remain difficult to detect.

Cross-contamination occurs when material from one source enters another. In cell culture, this can include accidental transfer of cells from one line into a different line. If the introduced cells grow more rapidly, they may eventually dominate the population.

Chemical contamination involves unwanted chemical material. Disinfectant carried into a vessel, unsuitable water, or residue from equipment can affect cells even if no microorganism is present.

Endotoxin is associated with lipopolysaccharide in the outer membrane of Gram-negative bacteria. It can affect sensitive cells or assays and may remain after bacteria have died. A test that finds no living bacteria does not establish the absence of endotoxin.

A clean-looking culture can also have the wrong identity. Aseptic handling helps prevent accidental transfer, but separate checks may be needed to establish microbial status, chemical quality, and cell identity.

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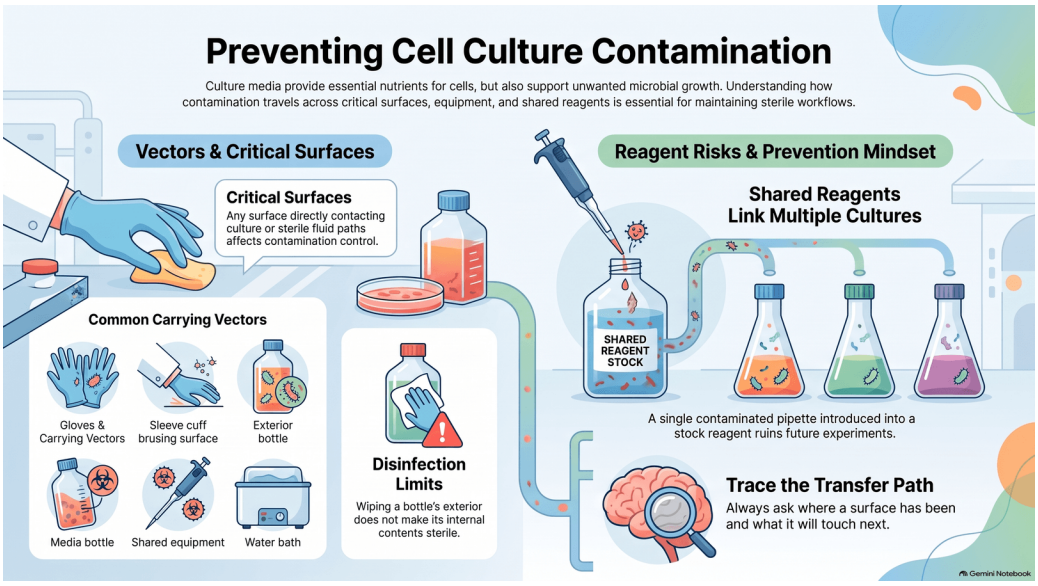
5.3: Routes Into a Culture

Culture medium provides nutrients for cells. Those nutrients can also support unwanted organisms. Once contamination enters, its effects may extend beyond the original transfer. Hands, gloves, sleeves, bottle exteriors, equipment, and shared reagents can carry material toward a culture. An exposed vessel opening or a pipette tip can become the point where that material enters.

A **critical surface** is a surface whose contact with the culture or a sterile fluid path can affect contamination control. Examples include the inside of a cap, the sterile tip of a pipette, and the inside of a receiving vessel. A bottle's outer wall and the inside of its opening have different roles. The exterior may be disinfected before it enters the work area, but wiping the exterior does not make the bottle's contents sterile.

Shared materials can connect several cultures. A contaminated pipette placed into a stock bottle may turn that bottle into a source for later experiments. This is why the history of a reagent matters when a problem is investigated.

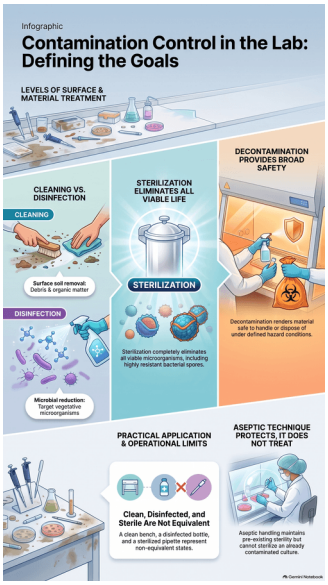
Think about each transfer as a path: where has the contacting surface been, and what will it touch next? This simple question helps identify risks that a tidy workspace alone may not reveal.



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5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization



Cleaning removes soil and other material from a surface. It can lower the amount of contamination and make a later treatment more effective. Cleaning alone does not establish sterility.

A laboratory surface may look clean and still carry microorganisms. A bottle may have a disinfected exterior while its contents remain contaminated. These examples show why cleaning, disinfection, and sterilization must be understood as separate processes. Each has a different purpose, and the appropriate choice depends on the material, the hazard, and what will happen next.

Cleaning removes unwanted material, such as dust, spilled medium, and other residue. It can also remove some microorganisms, but it does not establish that an item is disinfected or sterile. Cleaning is often an important first step because residue can shield microorganisms or interfere with a treatment. For example, dried culture medium on a work surface may prevent a disinfectant from making effective contact with the area beneath it.

Disinfection reduces or inactivates microorganisms using an appropriate treatment. Its effectiveness depends on the agent, the target organisms, the concentration, the time of contact, and the condition of the surface. A disinfectant that works well against one group of organisms may be less effective against another. Routine disinfection also does not necessarily eliminate resistant forms, such as bacterial spores.

Applying a disinfectant is only part of the process. **Contact time** is the period during which the treatment must remain in contact with the material to achieve its intended effect. For a surface disinfectant, this may require keeping the surface wet for the time specified in the approved instructions. Spraying a surface and immediately wiping it dry may not provide enough contact time. Likewise, using a stronger concentration does not automatically improve performance and may damage equipment or leave unwanted residue.

The material being treated also matters. Cracks, joints, rough surfaces, and dried deposits can make complete contact difficult. A disinfectant suitable for a bench may be unsuitable for an instrument, a sensitive plastic, or a material that will contact cultured cells. Effective disinfection therefore requires a method that addresses the microorganisms of concern while remaining compatible with the surface and its next use.

Sterilization is a process intended to eliminate viable microorganisms, including resistant forms such as **bacterial spores**. These spores are dormant structures produced by certain bacteria that can survive conditions that kill many actively growing cells. Their resistance helps explain why a treatment that disinfects a surface may not sterilize it.

A sterilization process must reach the relevant parts of the material. Depending on the item, laboratories may use methods such

as steam, dry heat, or other suitable treatments. No single method is appropriate for every material. Heat-sensitive solutions, for example, require a different approach from reusable glassware that can withstand high temperatures. The process must be evaluated for its intended use, and the laboratory must follow appropriate preparation, monitoring, and acceptance requirements.

Sterility must also be protected after processing. A sterilized pipette can become contaminated if its packaging is damaged, if it is stored improperly, or if its working end touches an unsuitable surface. Sterilization prepares the material; subsequent handling determines whether that protected condition is maintained.

These terms describe different goals. A cleaned bench has had unwanted material removed. A disinfected bottle exterior has received a treatment intended to reduce or inactivate relevant microorganisms on that exterior. A sterilized pipette has undergone a process intended to eliminate viable microorganisms. These items are not interchangeable simply because all three appear clean.

Decontamination is a broader term for making material sufficiently safe to handle or dispose of under defined conditions. It may involve cleaning, disinfection, sterilization, or another method suited to the hazard. The required outcome depends on both the contaminant and the next step. Preparing an instrument for reuse, treating biological waste, and responding to a chemical spill may require very different procedures. A method suitable for a biological hazard does not necessarily address a chemical hazard.

Aseptic technique protects previously prepared sterile materials during work by reducing opportunities for contamination. It includes careful handling of vessel openings, pipette tips, closures, and other surfaces that may contact the culture. It is not a treatment that sterilizes a contaminated culture or reverses an unprotected contact.

Imagine that a sterile pipette tip touches the bench before entering a culture vessel. The tip may look unchanged, but its protected status has been compromised. The appropriate response is to stop, replace the tip, and assess whether the contact affected any other material, following the laboratory's procedure. If the tip has already entered the culture, that contact must also be considered when evaluating the culture. Reliable aseptic work depends on responding to what happened rather than relying on appearance alone.

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5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection

Contact time is the period during which a disinfectant must remain in contact with a surface to achieve its specified effect. For many surface products, the surface must remain visibly wet for the stated time.



A quick wipe followed by immediate drying may not meet that requirement. Likewise, using the correct product at the wrong dilution can produce an ineffective treatment.

Choose the agent using the laboratory's approved procedure, product instructions, target organisms, and surface compatibility. Follow requirements for application, ventilation, protective equipment, and disposal.

Alcohol solutions are commonly used for compatible surfaces, but alcohol does not reliably destroy bacterial spores. An alcohol wipe is therefore not evidence of sterilization. Organic material and the type of organism can also affect treatment performance.

Do not mix disinfectants or assume that a stronger solution will work better. Some



combinations release hazardous gases, and some products damage equipment. The approved concentration and method are part of the process. Keep disinfectants identified, prepared correctly, and within their stated use period. Record the relevant agent and required treatment when documentation is needed. A record should show what was done, rather than merely stating that the area was “clean.”



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5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work

Preparation reduces the number of interruptions during handling. Begin by identifying the cultures, materials, volumes, equipment, and waste needed for the task.

Check the integrity of sterile packaging. A torn wrapper, damaged seal, or uncertain storage history can make a supply unsuitable. Open supplies only when they are needed, and protect the parts that will contact cells or medium.

Prepare labels before a vessel becomes difficult to identify. Organize materials so the clean supplies, active work, and used items have clear locations. Keep only necessary items in the working area.

Use the enclosure selected for the biological risk and task. A Class II biosafety cabinet provides protection only when operating correctly and used appropriately. Check its status, sash position, indicators, and model-specific instructions.

Airflow grilles must remain unobstructed. Movement, crowding, and nearby drafts can interfere with the intended airflow. A cabinet cannot correct direct contamination caused by touching a sterile surface.

Put on the required protective clothing and check glove condition. Gloves help create a barrier, but their outer surfaces can become contaminated. If a glove touches a phone, door handle, or other unapproved item, reassess it before returning to protected work.

This preparation supports careful handling. It does not justify leaving vessels open longer or making uncontrolled contacts afterward.

YouTube Video

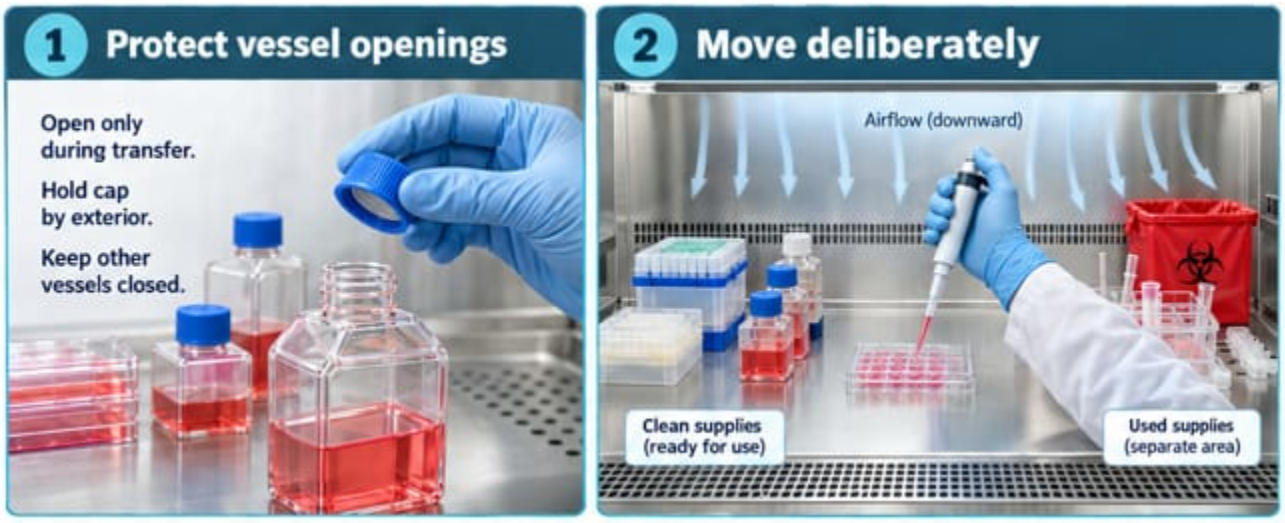
This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

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"Cell Culture 101: How to set up a cell culture hood" UAB_Biotechnology https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdE8s8jNnD0 Standard YouTube License. No changes made.

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5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling



Keep vessels closed except when access is needed. When opening a vessel, protect the inner cap surface and the op





ening from unapproved contact. Avoid passing hands, sleeves, and used items over exposed openings.

Use deliberate movements that preserve the workspace and the cabinet's airflow. A rapid reach may disturb airflow or move a used object into the clean supply area.

Maintain control of pipette tips and fluid paths. Do not let a protected tip touch the work surface, glove, vessel exterior, or another sample. When a tip becomes unsuitable, replace it using the approved procedure.

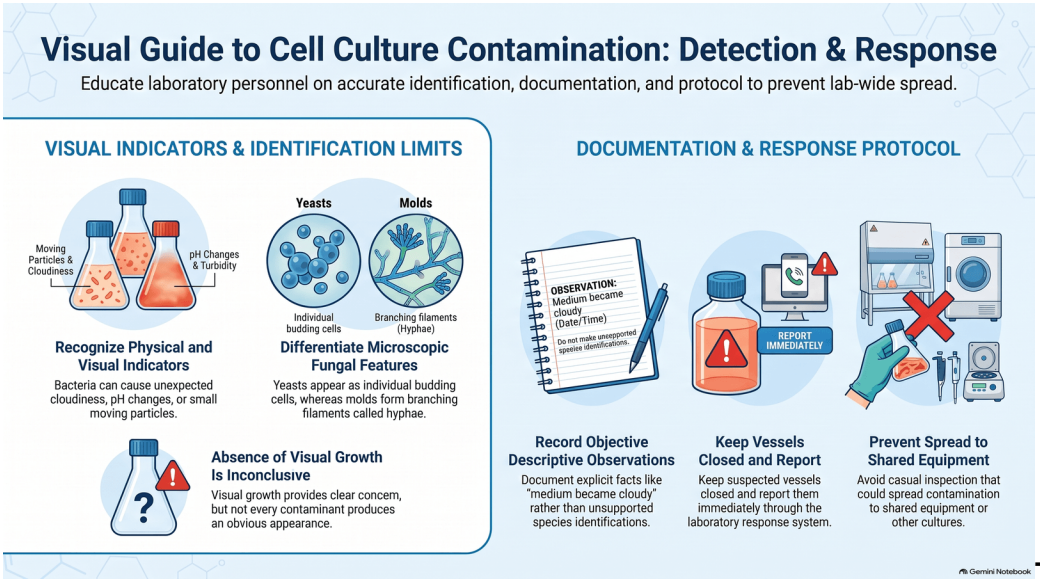
Use separate suitable tips or pipettes between sources where carryover could occur. Do not return unused liquid from a transfer vessel to a shared stock unless the approved process specifically permits it.
Limit open handling of different cell lines at the same time. Finish, close, and identify one operation before another creates a chance for mix-up or transfer. Keep source and receiving vessels clearly distinguishable.
Small choices have large consequences. A cap placed inner-side down on a surface creates a different risk from a cap held without touching its protected interior. A fresh tip does not correct a receiving vessel whose interior has already been touched. Good technique is continuous. It depends on protecting the next contact, not simply completing an initial cleaning step.



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5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible



Turbidity is cloudiness caused by particles in a liquid. Some bacterial contaminants can produce turbidity, unexpected pH changes, or many small moving particles. These findings should be evaluated rather than treated as a complete diagnosis.

Yeasts are fungi that commonly appear as individual cells and may show budding. **Molds** can form branching filaments called **hyphae**. Growth patterns and visibility depend on the organism and culture conditions.

Microscopic appearance can provide evidence of a problem, but identifying a contaminant may require additional tests. Cell debris can resemble small particles, and some normal culture materials can produce cloudiness or a color change.

Describe the observation accurately. “Medium became cloudy” is stronger documentation than an unsupported identification of a bacterial species.

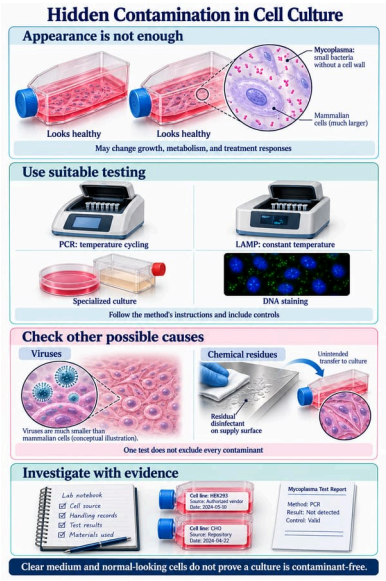
If a vessel appears contaminated, keep it closed and report it through the laboratory's response system. Further handling should follow the risk assessment and approved procedure. Casual inspection must not spread the problem to shared equipment or other cultures.

Visible growth usually provides a clear reason to question the culture's suitability. The absence of visible growth is much less informative because not every contaminant produces an obvious appearance.

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5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems



Mycoplasma are small bacteria that lack a cell wall. They can contaminate a culture without causing the usual visible cloudiness in the medium. Their small size and limited visible effects make them easy to overlook during routine observation. They may alter cell growth, metabolism, and experimental responses, even when the cells retain their expected appearance. A culture can therefore look healthy while giving misleading results. If a treatment group carries mycoplasma and the comparison group does not, contamination becomes another explanation for any difference. Researchers may incorrectly attribute that difference to the treatment unless they check the cultures' contamination status.

Routine light microscopy cannot reliably rule out mycoplasma. Clear medium and normal-looking cells are useful observations, but they do not establish that a culture is free of these bacteria. Detection requires suitable testing. Methods include nucleic acid tests, specialized culture methods, and DNA staining approaches, each with its own performance limits. Test selection should account for the sample type, the method's sensitivity, and the laboratory's approved procedures. Appropriate controls help determine whether the test worked and whether the result can be interpreted.

Polymerase chain reaction, or **PCR**, detects a target by amplifying selected DNA sequences. Repeated temperature changes support the amplification process. **Loop-mediated isothermal amplification**, or **LAMP**, also amplifies nucleic acid targets, but operates at a selected constant temperature rather than conventional PCR cycling. Although both approaches can support mycoplasma detection, their preparation requirements and result interpretation are not interchangeable. Use the method's own instructions and readout. A negative result applies to the tested sample under the conditions used; it does not guarantee that contamination cannot occur later.

Viruses can also affect biological materials, and their evaluation depends on the cell source and intended use. Some viral contaminants may produce obvious changes, while others may remain difficult to recognize through appearance alone. Testing for one contaminant does not exclude all others. Records of cell origin, handling, and previous testing help guide an appropriate evaluation.

Chemical residues can remain hidden as well. A culture that grows poorly after handling may have been exposed to disinfectant or another unwanted chemical. Residues on equipment or supplies can enter the culture through an unintended contact or transfer. Review when the problem began, which materials were used, and whether other cultures handled in the same way were affected. Investigate possible causes using records and suitable tests rather than assuming that every problem is microbial. Reliable conclusions require evidence that distinguishes among contamination, chemical exposure, and other changes in culture conditions.

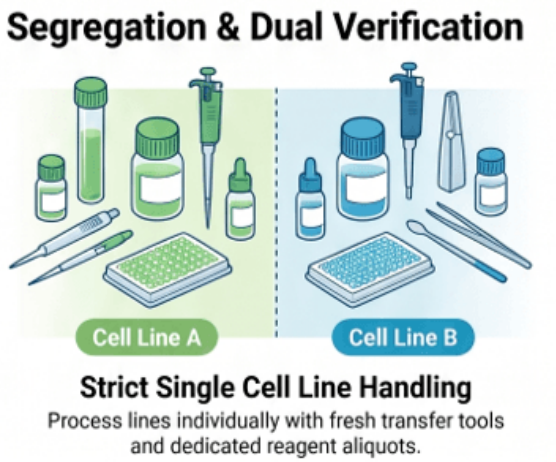
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5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines

Preventing contamination requires control of both the culture's surroundings and every material that contacts it. Microorganisms can enter through hands, supplies, exposed openings, or shared equipment. Cells from another line can enter through the same handling pathway. A culture may remain clear and continue growing after either problem begins, so prevention cannot depend on appearance alone.





Before work, confirm that the selected biosafety cabinet is operating correctly. Clean and disinfect its work surface using the approved product, concentration, and contact time. Disinfect compatible equipment and container exteriors before bringing them inside. Check sterile packaging and reagent condition. Arrange clean supplies, active cultures, and waste so used items do not cross the clean work area. Keep airflow grilles clear.

Wash hands and wear the required protective clothing. Treat glove exteriors as surfaces that can collect contamination, not as permanently sterile barriers. Change gloves when damaged or contaminated, and disinfect them as required by the procedure. After touching a phone, door handle, or other unapproved surface, restore the required glove condition before returning to culture work. Open vessels only when ready to use them and close them promptly afterward. Protect the inside of caps, vessel openings, and pipette tips from contact with gloves, bottle threads, and work surfaces. Avoid reaching over exposed openings. Use controlled pipetting to limit splashes and aerosols. If a sterile tip touches an unapproved surface, stop and replace it; a tip that still looks clean may no longer be suitable.

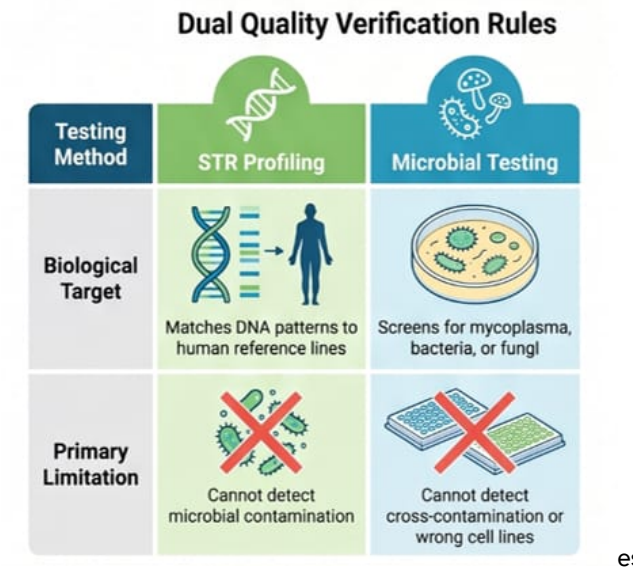


Handle one cell line at a time. Confirm the source and receiving vessel labels before each transfer. Use fresh sterile tips or pipettes between cultures, and never move a used transfer

tool into another line or a shared stock bottle. Close and remove the first line before opening the next. Manage used supplies, clean and disinfect the workspace, and change gloves between lines according to the laboratory's procedure.

Keep reagents clearly identified and, where appropriate, prepare separate portions for each cell line. This reduces repeated exposure of shared stock bottles and limits connections between cultures. Do not return unused material from a working portion to the stock. Record reagent identity and lot information. If a shared reagent becomes suspect, identify all cultures that received it before further use.

Maintain protection during transport and incubation. Use the correct vessel closures, readable labels, and designated storage locations. Follow the approved cleaning schedule for incubators and shared equipment, including water reservoirs where present. Keep suspect cultures closed and separate under the defined response process; moving a flask to another shelf alone does not prevent shared handling or equipment exposure.



Quarantine restricts the handling and use of incoming or suspect cultures until required checks and review are complete. Keep the culture's source, passage history, and test results linked to its identifier. **Cell authentication** checks its claimed identity. For many human cell lines, **short tandem repeat profiling**, or **STR profiling**, compares selected DNA patterns with an appropriate reference. Similar morphology or a familiar label cannot replace that evidence.

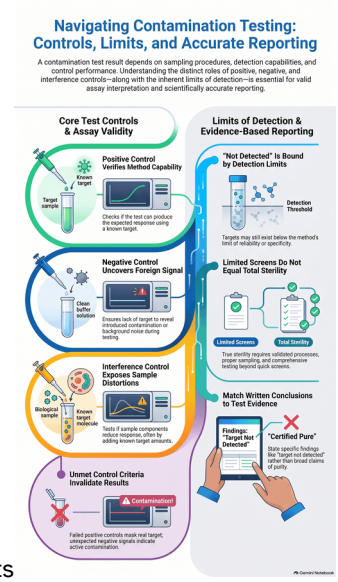
Authentication and microbial testing answer different questions. A mycoplasma-negative culture can still contain the wrong line, while a matching identity result does not establish freedom from microbes. If a handling error or transfer between lines is suspected, stop the affected work, document the vessels and shared materials involved, and follow the laboratory's investigation process before using the cultures again.

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5.11: Testing For Contamination

A contamination test examines a particular sample for a defined target. The meaning of its result



depends on the sampling procedure, the method's detection capability, and the performance of its controls.

A **positive control** contains a known target and checks whether the test can produce the expected response. A **negative control** is expected to lack the target and helps reveal contamination or unwanted signal introduced during testing. An **interference control** checks whether components of the sample reduce or distort the test's response. For example, adding a known amount of the target to a sample can help reveal interference.

Required controls must meet the method's acceptance criteria before sample results can be interpreted. If a positive control fails, a negative sample result may reflect a failed test. If a negative control produces an unexpected signal, a positive sample result may reflect contamination introduced during testing. Follow the method's instructions for evaluating and repeating an invalid test.

Different tests answer different questions. An agar growth screen detects microorganismsthat can grow on the selected medium under the incubation conditions used. It may miss organisms that require different nutrients, temperatures, or incubation times. A mycoplasma DNA test detects the genetic target included in that method; it does not necessarily show whether the organisms are alive. An endotoxin est detects certain bacterial components, rather than viable microorganisms.

The **limit of detection** is the lowest amount of a target that a method can detect with a stated level of reliability under specified conditions. "Not detected" means that the test did not detect its target in the sample tested. The target could still be present below the method's detection limit. A negative result also does not rule out contaminants that the method was not designed to detect.

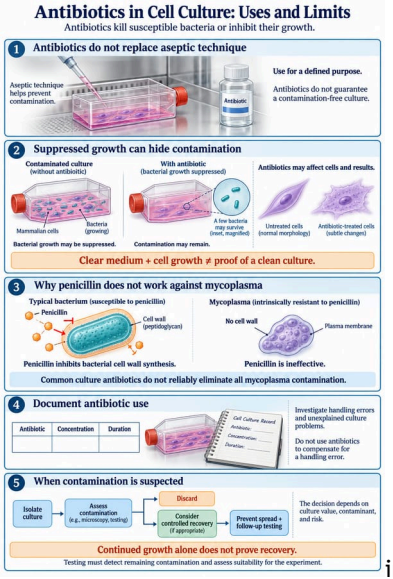
Sterility means freedom from viable microorganisms. A limited negative screen does not establish that an entire preparation is sterile. Confidence in sterility depends on suitable preparation and handling processes, appropriate sampling, and validated testing. Report conclusions that match the evidence—for example, "mycoplasma DNA was not detected by this method" rather than "the culture is free of contamination."

Sampling also affects the result. A small portion may not represent the entire preparation, especially when contaminants are unevenly distributed or present in low numbers. Record the sample's identity, the amount tested, when and how it was collected, the test method, and the control results. These details help another person judge what the result can establish.

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5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute

An **antibiotic** is a substance that kills susceptible bacteria or 

inhibits their growth. Adding antibiotics to culture medium does not replace aseptic technique or guarantee that a culture is free of contamination.

Antibiotics may suppress bacterial growth without eliminating the contamination, making it harder to recognize. They may also affect cultured cells and alter experimental results. Clear medium and continued cell growth therefore do not establish that an antibiotic-treated culture is uncontaminated.

Antibiotics commonly used in cell culture do not reliably prevent or eliminate all mycoplasma contamination. Penicillin, for example, interferes with bacterial cell wall synthesis. Mycoplasma lack a cell wall, so penicillin is ineffective against them.

Use antibiotics only for a defined purpose and under conditions appropriate to the cells and experiment. Record the antibiotic, concentration, and duration of use. Do not add antibiotics simply to compensate for a handling error or to treat an unexplained culture problem without investigating its cause.

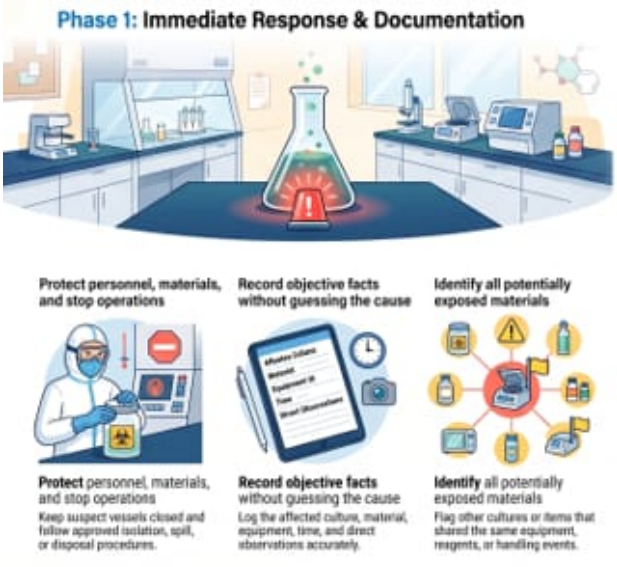
When contamination is suspected, isolate the affected culture and follow the laboratory's assessment procedure. Whether a confirmed contaminated culture is discarded or considered for recovery depends on its value, the contaminant, and the risks involved. Recovery requires a controlled treatment plan, measures to prevent spread, and follow-up testing under conditions that can reveal remaining contamination. Continued growth alone does not demonstrate that the contaminant has been eliminated or that the cells remain suitable for the intended experiment.

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5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination

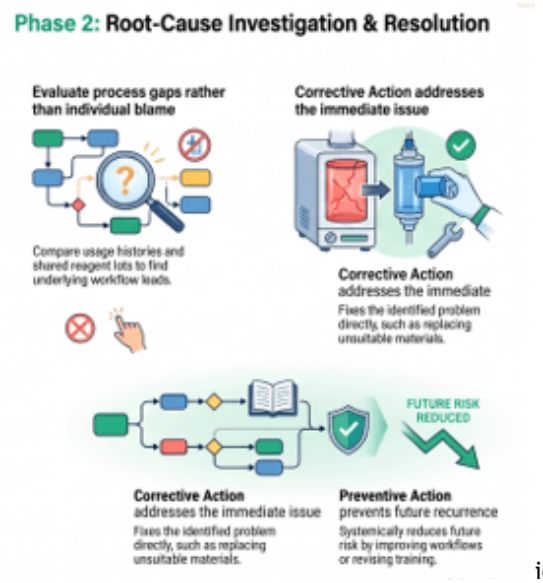
A **deviation** is a departure from an approved instruction or expected condition.



A touched tip, broken sterile barrier, failed cabinet check, or unexpected test result may require a documented response. Even when a culture looks unchanged, the event may affect confidence in its condition or the results collected from it.

First protect the people and materials involved. Stop the affected operation when appropriate, keep suspect vessels closed, and report the event. Follow the approved procedure for isolation, spill response, testing, or disposal. Avoid continuing simply to finish the task. For example, if a cabinet fails a required check, work should resume only after the problem has been addressed and the required conditions are confirmed.

Record the affected culture, material, equipment, time, and observation. State what happened without guessing at the cause. Note any immediate action and identify other materials that may share the exposure. Include relevant lot numbers and culture identifiers so reviewers can trace the event. “The pipette tip touched the bench” describes an observation; “the bench contaminated the culture” states a conclusion that requires evidence.



An investigation can compare culture histories, shared reagent lots, equipment use, and handling events. Several affected cultures that used the same reagent suggest a useful lead, but do not prove the reagent

was the source. Review when each material was used and when changes first appeared. Relevant test results and controls can help determine which explanations remain reasonable.

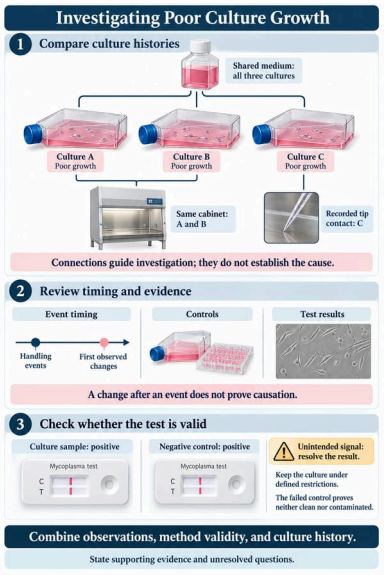
A **corrective action** addresses the identified problem. A **preventive action** reduces the chance that it will occur again. Examples may include replacing unsuitable material, improving a workflow, or revising training after the cause is assessed. The response should fit the evidence. After a change is made, follow-up checks help determine whether it solved the problem.

An **incident** is an event that may affect safety or the work. Reporting an incident provides evidence for review; it should not be treated as proof that a person was careless. A useful investigation asks how the process allowed the event and which change would address it. Clear reporting helps the laboratory learn from problems, protect cultures, and improve the reliability of future work.

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5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern



Three cultures show reduced growth during the same week. All received medium from one shared bottle, but only two were handled in the same cabinet. One culture also had a recorded incident in which a pipette tip touched a work surface before entering the vessel.

This pattern identifies possible sources to investigate; it does not establish contamination or its cause. Poor growth can also result from unsuitable medium, incubation conditions, or other stresses. The shared medium bottle deserves attention because it links all three cultures. Cabinet use connects two cultures, while the tip contact provides a possible route of contamination for one. More than one problem may have occurred.

Build a timeline of medium use, cabinet handling, the tip contact, and the first observed changes. Compare affected cultures with unaffected cultures that used the same materials or equipment. Review medium preparation and storage, incubator records, handling practices, and contamination test results. A change noticed after an event does not, by itself, show that the event caused it.

Now suppose a culture gives a positive mycoplasma test result, but the test's negative control is also positive. The unexpected control signal raises concern about contamination introduced during testing or another source of background signal. Interpret the run according to the method's acceptance criteria. If the control failure makes the run invalid, the sample result cannot establish whether the culture contains mycoplasma.

Keep the culture under the laboratory's defined restrictions while the problem is investigated and testing is repeated using an appropriate sample and valid controls. The failed control does not demonstrate that the culture is either contaminated or free of contamination.

A supported conclusion combines the pattern of affected cultures, the timing of events, culture records, and valid test results. State what the evidence establishes, which explanations remain possible, and what additional information is needed.

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5.15: Chapter Summary

Aseptic technique reduces the chance of introducing unwanted microorganisms during handling. Sterile supplies can become contaminated if protected surfaces touch a glove, work surface, or used item. Organized cabinet work and suitable airflow support careful transfers. Cleaning removes material. Disinfection reduces or inactivates microbes using suitable treatment and contact time. Sterilization eliminates viable microorganisms through a validated process. These actions have different purposes. Mycoplasma are very small bacteria without cell walls. They can affect cell behavior without making the medium cloudy. A pure culture lets the intended population be studied without unwanted organisms or another cell line changing the result. Purity does not mean that every cell is genetically identical. Microbial testing and cell identity checks answer different questions. Interpret tests only when their required controls pass. Report handling errors, restrict affected work, and preserve records for the investigation.

Key Terms

Aseptic technique	contamination	microbial contamination	cross-contamination
chemical contamination	endotoxin	critical surface	cleaning
disinfection	sterilization	decontamination	contact time
turbidity	yeast	mold	hypha
mycoplasma	PCR	LAMP	cell line authentication
STR profiling	quarantine	positive control	negative control
interference control	limit of detection	sterility	antibiotic
deviation	corrective action	preventive action	incident
pure culture			
microorganism			

Review Questions

1. Why can a clear culture still be contaminated?

2. Give an example of a critical surface and explain why it must be protected.

3. Distinguish cleaning, disinfection, and sterilization.

4. Explain why wiping a bottle exterior does not establish the sterility of its contents.

5. What does disinfectant contact time require?

6. Why is an alcohol wipe not evidence of sterilization?

7. How can a shared reagent connect contamination events in several cultures?

8. Explain why correct cabinet airflow cannot prevent contamination from a touched pipette tip.

9. Which observations might suggest bacterial, yeast, or mold contamination?

10. Why are appearance and routine light microscopy insufficient to exclude mycoplasma?

11. Distinguish cell authentication from microbial contamination testing.

12. What can a valid negative contamination test establish, and what remains uncertain?

13. Why must a result be withheld when a required control fails?

14. Explain why antibiotics cannot replace aseptic technique.

15. What details should be recorded after a handling error?

16. What is a pure culture, and why is culture purity important? Explain how unwanted microbes or cells from another line could affect a mammalian cell culture experiment.

Apply Your Understanding

A technician touches a sterile pipette tip to a glove, then uses it to transfer medium into a culture. The culture remains clear. Several days later, an agar screen shows no growth, but a mycoplasma test gives an unclear color result. The positive control does not show its expected response.

Identify the handling error and explain what the clear medium and negative agar screen can establish. Explain why the mycoplasma result is not ready for interpretation. Describe the records, restrictions, and follow-up evidence needed before the culture's suitability can be decided.

In the handling-error case above, identify the contact that broke aseptic technique. Explain why clear medium does not show that the transfer was acceptable.

The mycoplasma positive control fails. Decide whether the sample can be called negative and explain what must happen before interpretation.

Three cultures sharing one medium bottle develop similar problems. Draw a proposed route of contamination and identify records that could test it.

A fibroblast culture contains cells from a different human cell line but no detected microbes. Explain how the mixed population could affect a growth experiment and identify the type of check needed.

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6: CULTURE MEDIA AND THE CELL ENVIRONMENT

Culture medium supplies nutrients and helps control the environment around cells. Its ingredients, preparation, and storage can affect growth and treatment responses. This chapter explains major medium components and compares basal, complete, **serum**-free, and chemically defined formulations. It connects **pH**, gases, temperature, and **osmolality** to cell behavior. Worked calculations show how final volume and dilution affect the finished mixture.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Explain the roles of major nutrients, salts, buffers, and supplements in culture medium.
  2. Distinguish basal, complete, serum-free, and chemically defined media.
  3. Connect pH, carbon dioxide, temperature, and osmolality with cell behavior.
  4. Select medium using information about the cell source and intended experiment.
  5. Calculate stock additions, final concentrations, and simple serial dilutions.
  6. Evaluate medium preparation, storage, and culture observations using appropriate records and checks.

6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
6.14: Chapter Summary

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6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment

Two cultures contain the same cell line and receive the same treatment. One grows in the usual medium. The other grows in a formulation with more **glucose**, a sugar cells can use for energy, and a different serum lot. If the cultures respond differently, the treatment is only one possible explanation. Differences in the medium may affect cell growth, metabolism, or sensitivity to the treatment. Because several conditions changed together, the results cannot identify which change caused the difference.

Culture medium is a preparation that supplies nutrients and helps maintain conditions needed for cells to survive outside the body. One preparation is called a medium; more than one are called media. Mammalian cells usually grow in liquid medium, even when they attach to a solid culture surface.

A medium commonly supplies amino acids, vitamins, inorganic salts, and an energy source such as glucose. Its composition also helps maintain suitable **pH**, a measure of acidity or alkalinity, and **osmolality**, the concentration of dissolved particles that influences water movement into and out of cells. Some formulations require added **serum**, the liquid remaining after blood clots, or other supplements that provide growth factors and additional substances. Requirements differ among cell types and experimental goals.

In the body, blood flow and nearby tissues supply nutrients, remove waste, and provide signals. A culture system replaces only part of this support. Cells consume nutrients and release waste products into the medium. As cell number and activity change, nutrients may become depleted and waste may accumulate. Evaporation can concentrate dissolved substances. These changes can affect the cells between medium changes.

The medium also interacts with the culture conditions. For example, a medium that uses bicarbonate to help control pH requires an appropriate carbon dioxide concentration. The formulation, incubator conditions, cell density, and schedule of medium changes must therefore work together. A medium suitable for one cell type or culture system may be unsuitable for another.

Medium selection and handling affect both culture health and the meaning of experimental results. Rapid growth alone does not establish that cells retain the specialized function needed for a study. A formulation that supports cell multiplication may produce different results from one intended to support differentiation or a particular cellular activity.

To evaluate a treatment, keep medium conditions comparable across the treatment and control groups unless the medium itself is the variable being tested. Record the formulation, relevant supplements, serum lot when used, preparation date, storage conditions, and medium-change schedule. If different formulations are necessary, use an appropriate control for each. These records help distinguish a treatment response from a response to the culture environment.

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6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies

A **basal medium** contains the basic nutrients and salts used as the starting formulation for a culture. Depending on the product and cell type, additional supplements are needed before it becomes suitable for growth. Common ingredients include **amino acids**, **vitamins**, **inorganic salts**, and an energy source.

Glucose is a sugar that many cultured cells use for energy and as a source of carbon for making other molecules. Cells differ in how much they need and how they process it. A higher glucose concentration is not automatically better; it may alter metabolism and the response being measured.

Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins and also participate in metabolism. The term “nonessential amino acid” means that an organism can make that amino acid under suitable conditions. It does not mean that the molecule has no role in a cultured cell.

Vitamins support many enzyme reactions. Some are sensitive to light or storage conditions. **Inorganic salts** provide ions such as sodium, potassium, calcium, and magnesium. These ions help support membrane function, signaling, and other cell activities.

Water quality matters because water makes up most of a liquid medium. Unwanted ions or contaminants can change its properties. Use materials qualified for the preparation instead of assuming that any clear water is suitable.

Component group	Main role	Reason to check formulation
Glucose and other energy sources	Support metabolism	Concentration may change cell behavior
Amino acids	Support proteins and metabolism	Some supplements may already be present
Vitamins	Support enzyme reactions	Stability depends on handling and storage
Salts	Provide ions and osmotic balance	Extra salts can change osmolality
Buffers	Limit pH changes	Must fit gas and handling conditions

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6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium

A **basal medium**, sometimes called a basic medium, is the base nutrient formulation used to prepare a culture medium. It commonly contains inorganic salts, amino acids, vitamins, an energy source such as glucose, and components that help control pH. Its ingredients and concentrations vary among products. A basal medium may support some cells under defined conditions, while other cells require additional components.

A **supplement** is a component added to a base formulation for a specific purpose. A **complete growth medium** is the finished formulation containing the components needed to support growth in the selected culture system. “Complete” refers to that particular use; it does not mean suitable for every cell type. Depending on the system, preparation may involve adding serum, growth factors, or other specified supplements to a basal medium. Some products are supplied ready to use.

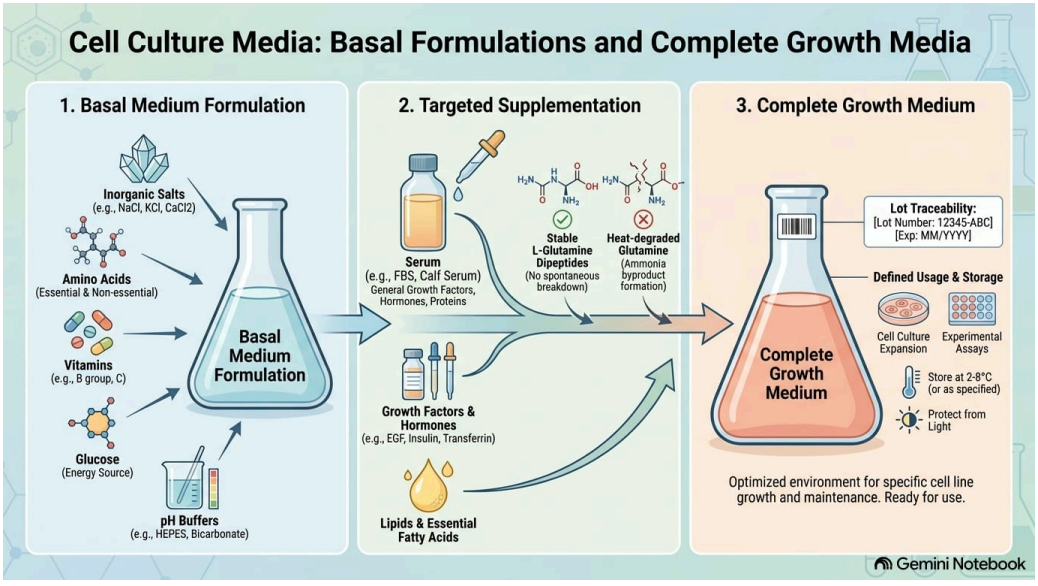
Read the formulation and preparation instructions before making additions. Products sold under similar medium names can differ in glucose, glutamine, bicarbonate, pyruvate, and other ingredients. An ingredient included in one version may be absent from another. Adding it without checking can produce an incorrect final concentration.

L-glutamine is an amino acid used to build proteins and supply carbon and nitrogen for cell metabolism. It can break down during storage in liquid medium, producing ammonia that may harm cells if it accumulates. Its stability depends on conditions such as temperature and storage time. Some formulations use a more stable **dipeptide**, a molecule made from two linked amino acids, as a glutamine source. Follow the selected formulation for the appropriate form, concentration, and storage conditions.

Growth factors are signaling proteins that can influence cell survival, division, and differentiation. Their effects depend on the cell type, its receptors, and other culture conditions. A medium intended to increase cell number may therefore differ from one intended to support differentiation or a specialized function.

Other supplements may include hormones, carrier proteins, trace elements, or specific lipids. Each addition should serve a defined purpose. Record the component, amount added, final concentration when applicable, and lot number so the finished medium has a traceable history.

Antibiotics have defined uses in some culture systems, but they do not replace aseptic technique or establish that a culture is free of contamination. They may affect cultured cells or suppress contamination enough to make it harder to recognize. Follow the selected procedure and maintain comparable antibiotic conditions across treatment and control groups unless antibiotic use is the variable being studied.



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6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations

Serum is the liquid fraction remaining after blood clots and the clot is removed. **Fetal bovine serum**, or **FBS**, is a common supplement in mammalian culture. It provides a complex mixture of proteins and other components that can support growth, attachment, and survival.

Its complexity is also a limitation. Serum composition can vary among lots, and its components may affect a treatment or interfere with a measurement. A serum lot that supports growth in one system may perform differently in another.

Evaluate a new lot using the outcomes relevant to the cells and experiment. These may include growth, viability, morphology, and the function being measured. Keep lot information in the medium record so a later change in performance can be investigated.

Serum-free medium contains no serum. It supplies needed support through other components, which may still include proteins or materials of animal origin. ATCC, for example, describes a fibroblast serum-free system that is not animal-free.

A **chemically defined medium** contains ingredients with known chemical identities and amounts. It does not rely on an undefined mixture such as serum. Suppliers may use additional rules, including how they classify proteins. Check the product definition: chemically defined does not necessarily mean protein-free.

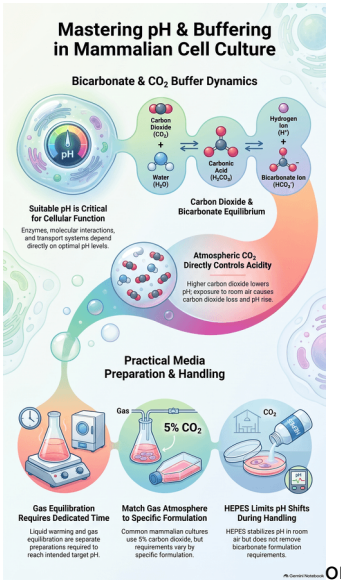
Xeno-free generally describes a system without components from species other than the species of the cultured cells. For human cells, it may still include human-derived material. Check the supplier's definition and the full system, including coatings and other reagents, before drawing conclusions about origin.

Changing from serum-containing medium to another formulation may require an evaluated adaptation process. Cells may lose viability or change behavior during the transition. Record the change and compare performance before using the new condition in a study.

Description	What it tells you	What it does not guarantee
Complete	Finished formulation for a selected use	Suitability for every cell type
Serum-free	No serum in the formulation	Absence of all animal-derived materials
Chemically defined	Specified chemical components	Identical ingredient restrictions across suppliers
Xeno-free	No components from other species under the stated definition	Absence of human-derived material in a human culture system

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6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System



pH describes how acidic or alkaline a solution is. A lower pH is more acidic. Cells depend on a suitable pH because enzymes, transport systems, and molecular interactions are affected by it.

A **buffer** is a system that resists changes in pH when limited amounts of acid or base are added. Many mammalian media use a bicarbonate buffer that works with dissolved carbon dioxide. The medium formulation and incubator atmosphere must be matched.

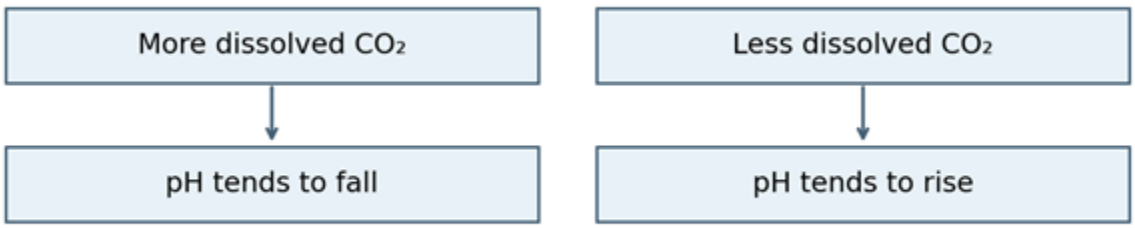
Carbon dioxide from the surrounding gas can dissolve in the medium. Its chemical relationship with bicarbonate affects acidity. At a fixed bicarbonate concentration, increasing carbon dioxide tends to lower pH. Loss of carbon dioxide during exposure to room air can cause pH to rise.

The simplified relationship is: carbon dioxide + water ⇌ carbonic acid ⇌ hydrogen ions + bicarbonate. More hydrogen ions mean greater acidity. The two-way arrows show that the reactions can shift as conditions change.

Equilibration means approaching balance with the surrounding conditions. Medium needs time in the appropriate atmosphere to approach its intended gas and pH conditions. Warming the liquid and equilibrating its carbon dioxide are different preparations, even when both are required.

A common mammalian culture uses about 5% carbon dioxide, but this is not a universal setting. Use the gas condition specified for the actual medium and cell system. Some formulations are designed for use without added carbon dioxide.

HEPES is an additional buffer used in some media. It can help limit pH change during handling, but it does not automatically remove the requirements of a bicarbonate-containing formulation.

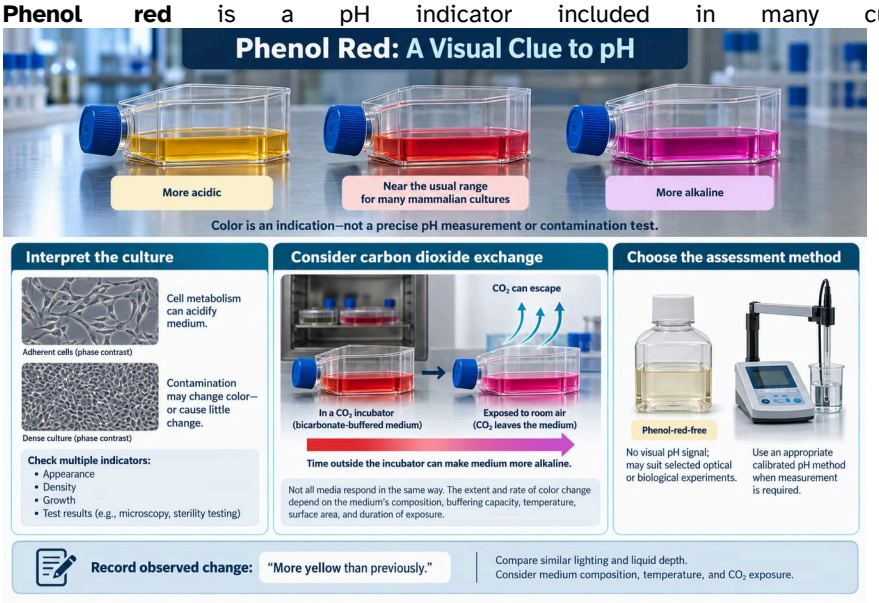


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6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You

Phenol red is a pH indicator included in many culture media. It generally appears



yellow as the medium becomes more acidic,
red near the usual pH range for many mammalian cultures, and bright pink or purple as it becomes more alkaline. The observed color also depends on indicator concentration, medium composition, lighting, and the depth of liquid being viewed.

Color provides a useful indication of environmental change, but it is not a precise pH measurement or a contamination test. A healthy, dense culture may acidify its medium as cells consume nutrients and release metabolic products. Microbial contamination can also alter pH, but some contaminants cause little visible color change. Interpret color together with cell appearance, density, growth, and contamination test results.

In media buffered with bicarbonate, carbon dioxide exchange also affects pH. Exposure to room air can allow carbon dioxide to escape, making the medium more alkaline and shifting its color toward pink or purple. This change may reflect time outside the incubator rather than a problem caused by the cells.

Some experiments use phenol-red-free formulations because the indicator can interfere with certain optical measurements or influence particular biological responses. Removing it eliminates the visual pH signal, so another assessment method is needed when pH information is required.

Compare observations under similar viewing conditions and against the culture's history. Record "medium appeared more yellow than at the previous observation" rather than assigning an exact pH from color alone. When a measured pH is required, use an appropriate calibrated method and control conditions such as temperature and carbon dioxide exposure.

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6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation

Temperature affects enzyme activity, membrane behavior, and growth. Many human cell cultures are maintained near 37°C, but the correct setting depends on the cell system. Other organisms may need very different temperatures.

Limit unnecessary time outside the controlled environment. When warming medium is required, prepare the amount needed using the approved method. Avoid repeatedly warming an entire supply bottle when smaller portions would meet the task.

Osmolality is the concentration of dissolved particles per kilogram of solvent. It is often reported in milliosmoles per kilogram, or mOsm/kg. Differences in dissolved particles cause water to move across cell membranes, so osmolality can affect cell volume and health.

Osmosis is water movement through a selectively permeable membrane. Water moves toward a higher concentration of dissolved particles that cannot freely cross the membrane. Cells may lose water in medium that is too concentrated or take up excess water in medium that is too dilute.

YouTube Video

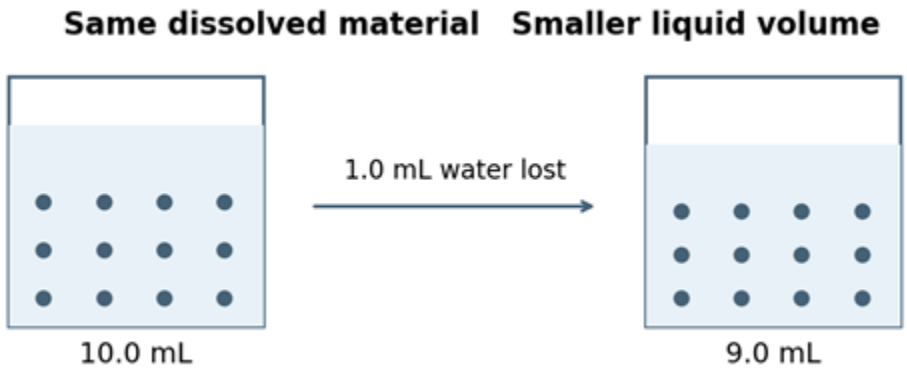
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Many mammalian media fall near the range needed by vertebrate cells, but use the cell-specific requirement and the product's information. Adding salts, buffers, drugs, or large supplement volumes can change the final osmolality.

Evaporation removes water while leaving most dissolved medium components behind. This increases their concentration. Humidity control and suitable vessel conditions help reduce this effect. Small volumes and some edge wells in plates can be especially affected.

For a simplified example, 10.0 mL of medium loses 1.0 mL of water while its dissolved material remains unchanged. The concentration factor becomes 10.0 ÷ 9.0 = 1.11, or about an 11% increase. This calculation illustrates water loss; it does not predict every chemical change in a living culture.



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6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density

Gas exchange is the movement of gases between the medium and the atmosphere around the culture. Cells consume oxygen and produce carbon dioxide, so their surroundings change as cell number and metabolic activity increase.

The oxygen condition inside a culture can differ from the nominal gas composition of the incubator. Medium depth, vessel design, cell density, and oxygen use influence how readily oxygen reaches the cells.

Use caps and vessels according to their intended design. A vented cap permits gas exchange through its filter under the specified conditions. A closed, nonvented vessel can create a different gas environment. Opening or loosening a cap without following the required procedure may create a contamination risk.

Hypoxia means low oxygen availability relative to the situation being considered. Some cell systems deliberately use reduced oxygen to study physiology or improve a particular culture outcome. Reduced oxygen is an experimental condition that needs definition and control; it is not a universal improvement.

As cultures become denser, nutrient use and waste production increase. A medium that supported a sparse culture may not maintain the same environment in a dense one. Cell number, medium volume, and time since feeding should be considered together.

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6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question

Begin with the information supplied for the exact cell source. Confirm the recommended basal formulation, supplements, gas conditions, temperature, and surface requirements. The way cells attach or grow in suspension does not by itself identify the correct medium. THP-1 cells provide one example. ATCC recommends an RPMI-1640-based complete system for its THP-1 product. That recommendation identifies a particular culture system, not a rule that all suspension cells use RPMI.

Normal human dermal fibroblasts may use a fibroblast-specific basal medium and growth supplement. A product's serum-free and low-serum options have different compositions. MSC formulations also vary with cell source and intended use. Do not transfer a recipe from one source to another solely because the cell names look similar. The experimental question may add requirements. An assay of secreted proteins can be affected by proteins already in the medium. A metabolic study can be affected by glucose concentration. A differentiation experiment needs conditions that support the intended fate rather than growth alone.

Keep medium conditions comparable between treatment groups unless the medium itself is the variable being studied. Include an appropriate **vehicle control**, which receives the solvent used to deliver a treatment without the active treatment. This helps distinguish the effect of the treatment from the effect of its solvent.

A useful medium evaluation compares more than cell number. Consider viability, morphology, identity, and the function that matters for the intended experiment. Record the full formulation so the result can be repeated.

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6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium

Medium can be supplied as ready-to-use liquid, a concentrated solution, or powder. These forms require different preparation. Follow the specific product instruction for water, mixing, component additions, final volume, and any required checks.

Preparation should preserve both composition and sterility. Verify calculations before measuring, use suitable equipment, and record actual amounts and lots. Mix as required so samples represent the finished preparation.

Sterile filtration removes microorganisms from a fluid through a suitable filter and controlled process. Filters rated at 0.2 or 0.22 µm are common in many media applications. Performance also depends on filter material, compatibility, capacity, and microbial retention, not just pore rating.

Filtration has limits. A conventional 0.22 µm filter does not establish removal of all mycoplasma, viruses, or endotoxin. It also does not correct the wrong glucose concentration or restore degraded growth factors. Do not use filtration as a general way to rescue a suspect preparation.

Choose the filter appropriate to the formulation. Some components can bind to a membrane, and an unsuitable filter can change what reaches the receiving bottle. A sterile receiving container and aseptic handling are still necessary after filtration.

Some ready-to-use sterile products do not need additional filtration. Heat treatment is also not interchangeable with filtration; many medium components are heat-sensitive. Use the preparation method specified for the product rather than applying a treatment simply because it is familiar.

YouTube Video

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6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations

Concentration is the amount of a substance in a stated quantity of mixture. Common expressions include mass per volume, molarity, percent, and a multiple of working strength such as 10× or 100×. Always check what the units mean.

A **stock solution** contains a component at a concentration used to prepare a more dilute mixture. For a simple dilution in which the amount of that component is conserved, use $C_1V_1 = C_2V_2$. C_1 is stock concentration, V_1 is stock volume, C_2 is final concentration, and V_2 is final total volume.

Keep concentration units consistent and volume units consistent. The equation does not tell you whether the component is stable, compatible, or appropriate for the cells.

Worked example 1: Prepare 100.0 mL of final medium with 2.0 mM glutamine from a 200 mM stock, assuming the starting medium contains none.

V_1 = (2.0 mM × 100.0 mL) ÷ 200 mM = 1.0 mL stock.

Use 1.0 mL stock and enough of the other components to reach 100.0 mL total. If glutamine is the only addition, that leaves 99.0 mL basal medium. If other supplements are included, subtract their volumes as well.

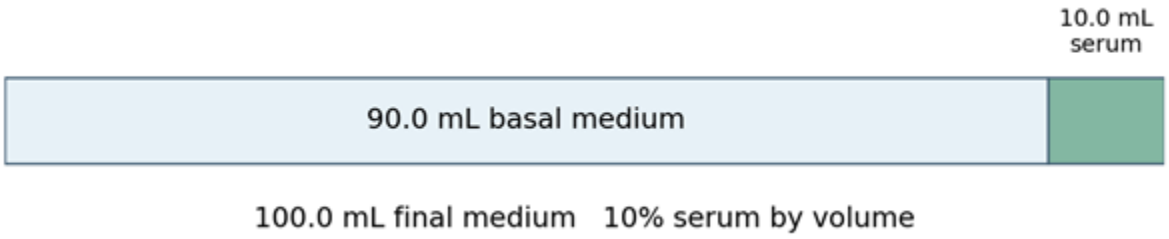
Worked example 2: Prepare 100.0 mL of final medium containing 10% FBS by volume.

Serum volume = 0.10 × 100.0 mL = 10.0 mL. If serum is the only addition, use 90.0 mL basal medium.

Adding 10.0 mL serum to 100.0 mL basal medium produces 110.0 mL total. The serum fraction is then 10.0 ÷ 110.0 × 100% = 9.09%, not 10%.

Worked example 3: A 100× supplement is needed at 1× in 50.0 mL final medium. Stock volume = 50.0 mL ÷ 100 = 0.50 mL, or 500 µL. The other components together must provide the remaining 49.50 mL.

These examples assume that volumes can be added for the preparation. Follow the formulation's method for establishing final volume, especially when preparing solutions from solids or concentrated products.



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6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions

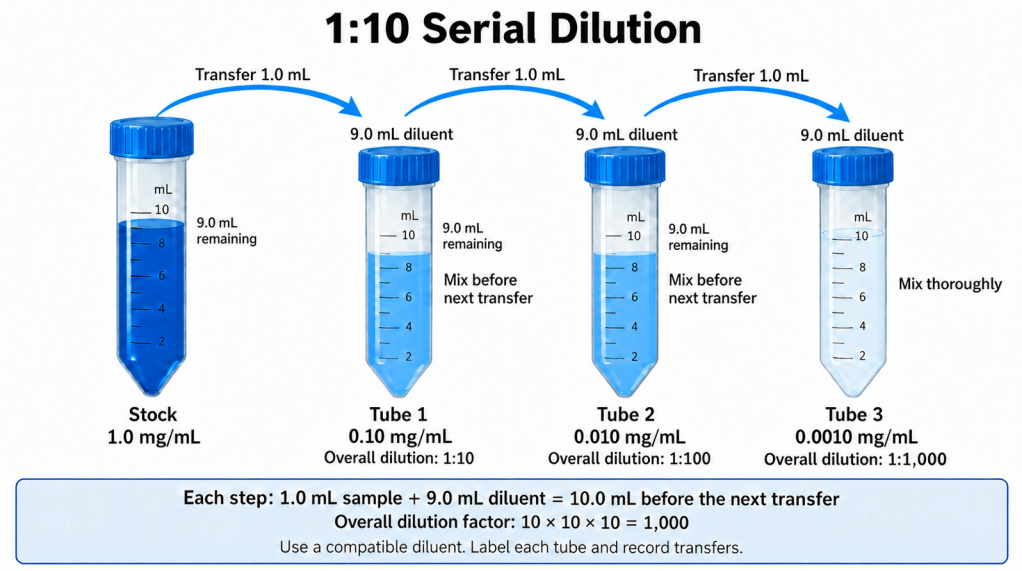
A **dilution factor** is the ratio of final volume to the volume of the starting solution placed into the mixture. Combining 1.0 mL stock with 9.0 mL compatible diluent gives 10.0 mL total, a dilution factor of 10, and one-tenth of the starting concentration.

A **serial dilution** is a sequence in which each diluted mixture supplies the sample for the next dilution. Mix each stage sufficiently before transferring. Poor mixing carries its error forward.

Suppose a 1.0 mg/mL solution is diluted tenfold three times. The resulting concentrations are 0.10 mg/mL, 0.010 mg/mL, and 0.0010 mg/mL. The overall dilution factor is 10 × 10 × 10 = 1,000.

Identify each tube and keep a record of transfers. The diluent must be suitable for the purpose. For treatment preparation, evaluate both the active compound and its vehicle in the final culture volume. Do not assume that a mathematical dilution makes a solvent harmless.

Distinguish a dilution used to prepare an experimental condition from the routine dilution of cells during subculture. Both involve volume calculations, but one defines a chemical condition and the other changes cell concentration.



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6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization

Storage requirements apply to the actual product and its supplements. Many conventional media require cold, light-protected storage, while some products have different validated conditions. A basal medium's expiration date does not automatically become the expiration date of the supplemented mixture.

Label prepared medium with its identity, preparation ID or lot, formulation reference, date, assigned use limit, storage condition, and operator as required. Record the ingredient lots and quantities in the linked preparation record.

Inspect packaging and appearance before use. Cloudiness, particles, an unexpected color, or a storage excursion needs evaluation. A clear preparation can still be unsuitable. Use required checks such as pH, osmolality, or performance testing rather than relying on appearance alone.

Medium optimization is the planned evaluation of formulation or culture conditions to improve a defined outcome. Define that outcome before testing. Higher cell yield, preserved differentiation potential, and stronger protein production are different goals.

Use a documented reference condition, appropriate controls, and independent cultures when comparing alternatives. Avoid changing several ingredients at once unless the experimental design can separate their effects. A result from one flask is a starting observation, not strong evidence of a dependable improvement.

Consider a culture whose medium turns yellow unusually quickly. Possible explanations include increased cell density, changed metabolism, incorrect buffering, or contamination. Review the medium formulation, gas settings, cell count, feeding history, and contamination evidence before selecting a cause. Changing medium may improve the immediate appearance while leaving the underlying problem unresolved.

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6.14: Chapter Summary

Culture medium provides nutrients and helps maintain suitable chemical conditions. Basal medium supplies a foundation, while required supplements produce a complete formulation. Serum-free, chemically defined, and xeno-free describe different properties and are not interchangeable. Buffers, carbon dioxide, temperature, gas exchange, and evaporation affect the environment around cells. Phenol red color can suggest a pH change, but it does not measure pH precisely or establish contamination. Match the formulation and environment to the actual cells and task. Calculate additions from final total volume. Multiply dilution factors across a serial dilution. Preparation, filtration, and storage must preserve both composition and suitable quality. Record the ingredients, lots, actual volumes, and finished mixture status so later culture results can be traced to the medium used.

Key Terms

Culture medium	basal medium	glucose	amino acids
vitamins	inorganic salts	supplement	complete growth medium
L-glutamine	growth factors	serum	fetal bovine serum
serum-free medium	chemically defined medium	xeno-free	pH
buffer	equilibration	HEPES	phenol red
osmolality	osmosis	evaporation	gas exchange
hypoxia	vehicle control	sterile filtration	concentration
stock solution	dilution factor	serial dilution	medium optimization

Review Questions

1. Explain why medium composition is part of experimental design.

2. What do glucose, amino acids, and salts contribute to a culture?

3. Distinguish basal medium from complete growth medium.

4. Why should you check a product's formulation before adding glutamine or other supplements?

5. Compare serum-free and chemically defined media.

6. Why does serum-free not necessarily mean animal-free?

7. Explain why bicarbonate concentration and carbon dioxide conditions must be matched.

8. What can phenol red color suggest, and what can it not establish?

9. How does evaporation affect dissolved component concentrations?

10. Why can cell density and medium depth affect the local culture environment?

11. Give two reasons that a 0.22 µm filtration step cannot make every unsuitable medium acceptable.

12. Calculate the volume of a 100× supplement needed for 250.0 mL of final 1× medium.

13. Calculate the serum volume needed for 50.0 mL final medium containing 5% serum by volume, assuming serum is the only addition.

14. A 2.0 mg/mL stock undergoes two consecutive tenfold dilutions. What is the final concentration and overall dilution factor?

15. What outcomes and controls would help evaluate whether a new medium is suitable for a cell line?

Apply Your Understanding

A student adds 10.0 mL of serum to 100.0 mL of basal medium and labels the bottle “10% FBS.” The student also adds a glutamine supplement without checking whether the basal medium already contains it. After several days, cultures grow slowly and the medium appears purple following a long period on the bench. The bottle has no linked preparation record.

Calculate the actual serum percentage before considering the glutamine addition. Explain how the additional supplement volume could further change that percentage. Identify the missing information needed to assess glutamine concentration and the final formulation. Explain a possible relationship between bench exposure, carbon dioxide, and color without assuming that it proves the cause of poor growth. Describe the records and checks needed to evaluate the medium and affected cultures.

In the medium case above, calculate the serum percentage after adding 10.0 mL serum to 100.0 mL basal medium. Explain how to make 100.0 mL at 10% when serum is the only addition.

A glutamine supplement is added without checking the basal formulation. Identify the information needed to calculate its actual final concentration.

The medium becomes purple after prolonged bench exposure. Explain a possible link with carbon dioxide and choose a check before assigning a cause.

A new medium increases cell number but changes an assay background signal. Plan a comparison that tests growth and suitability for the intended assay.

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7: ESTABLISHING CULTURES AND RECOVERING FROZEN CELLS

Starting a culture requires more than placing living cells into fresh medium. Cells must adapt, survive, and show the behavior needed for their intended use. This chapter compares establishing cultures from tissue with recovering cells from frozen storage. It explains how dissociation, thawing, cryoprotectant handling, and starting density affect the resulting population. Viability, attachment, growth, identity, and contamination checks provide complementary evidence for deciding whether a new culture is ready for further work.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Compare establishing a primary culture from tissue with recovering a stored cell population.
  2. Explain how tissue dissociation, medium, and surface conditions influence the cells that grow.
  3. Describe the purpose of prompt thawing and cell-specific cryoprotectant handling.
  4. Calculate starting cell concentration or seeding density from measured viable cell numbers.
  5. Evaluate recovery using viability, appearance, attachment when applicable, and growth over time.
  6. Create a traceable culture establishment record and identify evidence needed before experimental use.

7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
7.13: Chapter Summary

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7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture

A frozen vial is thawed and its cells are counted. Most exclude a viability dye, suggesting that their membranes remain intact. Two days later, however, few cells have attached or increased in number. Was the recovery successful?

The first measurement answers a limited question. It describes cell condition at the time of testing. An established culture must also survive its new environment and show the behavior needed for its intended use.

Culture establishment is the process of starting a cell population under conditions that support its maintenance and, when intended, growth. It may begin with cells isolated from tissue or with an existing population recovered from frozen storage.

These routes share a need for suitable medium, careful handling, and clear records. Their starting problems differ. Tissue isolation must release and select cells from a complex source. Frozen recovery must help a stored population survive the transition back to active culture.

This chapter explains the decisions behind both routes and the evidence used to judge early recovery. Exact operating conditions come from the procedure for the cell source and product being used.

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7.2: Two Routes Into Culture

A **primary culture** is a culture first established from cells taken directly from tissue. It may contain several cell types, especially before any enrichment or selection. Normal tissue and tumor tissue can both be sources of primary cultures.

Recovering a frozen vial begins with a population that has already been isolated or established. The vial may contain primary cells, a finite cell strain, or a continuous cell line. The fact that cells were frozen does not change which category they belong to.

The word “primary” describes origin and culture history. It does not mean recently thawed. Likewise, obtaining cells from a tumor does not automatically create a continuous cell line. Some tumor-derived populations remain difficult to maintain or stop growing under the selected conditions.

For tissue-derived cells, records should identify the source, collection and processing history, and required permissions or restrictions. Human materials need appropriate consent and oversight for their intended use. Use coded identifiers that support traceability while protecting donor information.

For a frozen vial, records should identify the cell population, supplier or bank, lot or vial ID, known passage history, and storage history. A supplied product sheet or bank record helps define the expected growth pattern and handling conditions.

Feature	**Culture from tissue**	**Recovery from a frozen vial**
Starting population	Cells within a complex tissue	Previously isolated or established cells
Main early challenge	Release desired cells and support them	Limit injury and regain culture behavior
Key source history	Tissue identity and processing	Cell identity, vial, and storage history
Population uncertainty	Several cell types may grow	Composition or identity may still need checks

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7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue

Cells in a tissue are held together by cell contacts and an **extracellular matrix**, or **ECM**, which is material outside cells that provides structural support and signals. Establishing a culture often requires separating cells from this network.

Tissue dissociation is the separation of a tissue into smaller pieces, cell groups, or individual cells. Mechanical methods physically separate material. Enzymatic methods use enzymes to break down selected connections. These approaches can be combined.

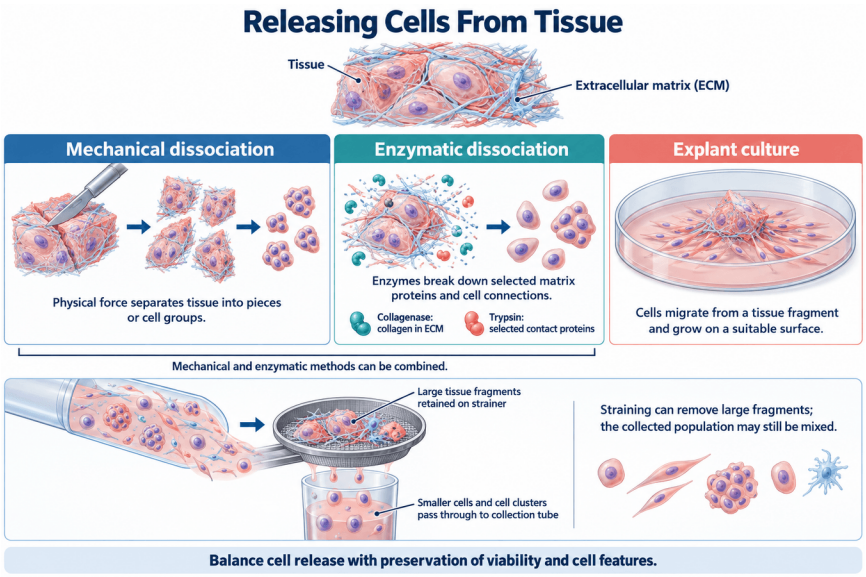
Mechanical dissociation may involve cutting tissue or applying controlled physical force. It can reduce tissue size and expose more surface to a reagent. Too much force can damage cells, while too little may leave the desired cells trapped in tissue fragments.

Enzymatic dissociation uses enzymes such as collagenase or trypsin when appropriate to the tissue and question. Collagenase acts on collagen in the matrix. Trypsin breaks down certain proteins involved in cell contacts. The enzyme system, exposure, and method for stopping or removing its activity must fit the source.

Dissociation is a balance between release and preservation. A high total cell yield may include damaged cells or an unwanted mixture. Strong treatment can also change surface proteins used for later cell identification or analysis.

Explant culture is another approach. Small tissue pieces are placed under conditions that allow cells to move out and grow. It can avoid creating a fully dispersed starting suspension, but favors cells able to migrate and grow in that setting.

Cell strainers or other separation methods may remove large fragments or enrich a population. Their effects depend on cell size, clumping, and the intended culture. The procedure should define what is kept and what is discarded so the resulting population can be interpreted.



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7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow

A tissue contains more than the cell type named in the research question. For example, a tumor specimen can include malignant cells, fibroblasts, immune cells, and blood vessel cells. The fastest-growing population in the flask may not be the population of greatest interest.

Culture selection occurs when the conditions favor some cells over others. Medium, surface, oxygen conditions, dissociation method, and timing all contribute. A culture therefore represents the cells that survived and adapted to that environment, rather than a perfect copy of the starting tissue.

Cells from normal tissue also differ in their needs. Dermal fibroblasts may grow under conditions that do not support neighboring skin cells. A cell's ability to survive isolation does not establish that its original function remains unchanged.

Enrichment increases the proportion of a desired cell population. It is different from proving purity. An enriched culture may still contain other cells, and its composition can shift during growth.

Use evidence appropriate to the identity claim. Cell shape provides useful observations, but several cell types can look alike. Marker measurements, source records, or other suitable tests may be needed. A marker result also needs interpretation because one marker may not uniquely identify a cell type.

Record the starting source and selection conditions. These details help explain why cultures from two donors or two tissue preparations may differ even when they are given the same label.

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7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery

Cryopreservation is the storage of biological material at very low temperatures to greatly slow activity and preserve it for later use. A stored vial provides a starting population, but its condition depends on the culture before freezing and the quality of freezing and storage.

Before retrieval, confirm the vial identity and the current instructions. Prepare the correct complete medium, labeled vessel, required surface treatment, and incubator conditions. Confirm whether the method calls for an immediate count and whether cryoprotectant removal requires centrifugation.

Preparation limits delays after warming begins. It also prevents the operator from discovering that the only available medium belongs to another cell type. A cabinet should be ready for aseptic transfer, with the supplies needed for one clearly identified culture operation.

Check the vessel's **growth surface area**, which is the area available for cells to attach. It is different from the amount of liquid a flask can hold. For suspension cells, medium volume and cell concentration are usually more relevant to the initial density calculation.

Some cells require a coating such as collagen or another specified matrix. Surface preparation must fit the medium and cell system. Tissue culture treated plastic does not provide every signal found in a specialized coating.

Cryogenic retrieval requires the laboratory's protective equipment and handling procedure. Damaged vials or vials that may contain trapped liquid nitrogen need special assessment because warming can create dangerous pressure. Stop and obtain trained assistance rather than handling a suspect vial as a routine thaw.

YouTube Video

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7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter

A **cryoprotectant** is a substance that helps reduce freezing injury. **Dimethyl sulfoxide**, or **DMSO**, is commonly used for mammalian cells. It provides protection during freezing, but exposure after warming can become harmful depending on its concentration, duration, temperature, and the cells.

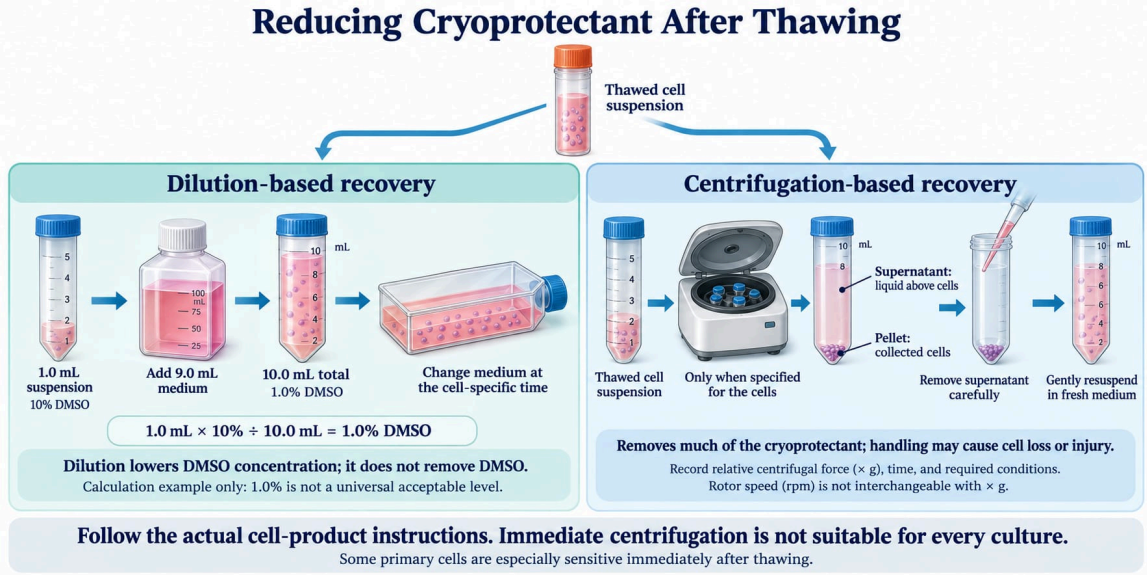
Freezing and thawing can damage membranes and alter the balance of water and dissolved substances around cells. Some injury becomes visible only after cells have returned to culture.

Many mammalian recovery methods use a prompt thaw near 37°C, followed by timely transfer into the appropriate medium. Follow the specified endpoint and device instructions rather than extending the warming period after the vial has thawed.

A water bath is a possible contamination source. When it is the approved thaw device, protect the cap and seal from bath water as directed. Disinfect the vial exterior using the required agent and contact time before opening it in the appropriate enclosure. An approved dry-thaw device may be used in systems that specify it.

Gentle transfer helps avoid unnecessary mechanical stress. The rate and sequence of adding medium should follow the cell-specific method because abrupt changes in concentration can affect water movement across cell membranes.

Do not improvise a new thaw temperature, prolonged warming step, or repeated handling sequence to make the process faster. A change that reduces handling time may also alter recovery. Record unexpected delays or departures from the approved method.



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7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific

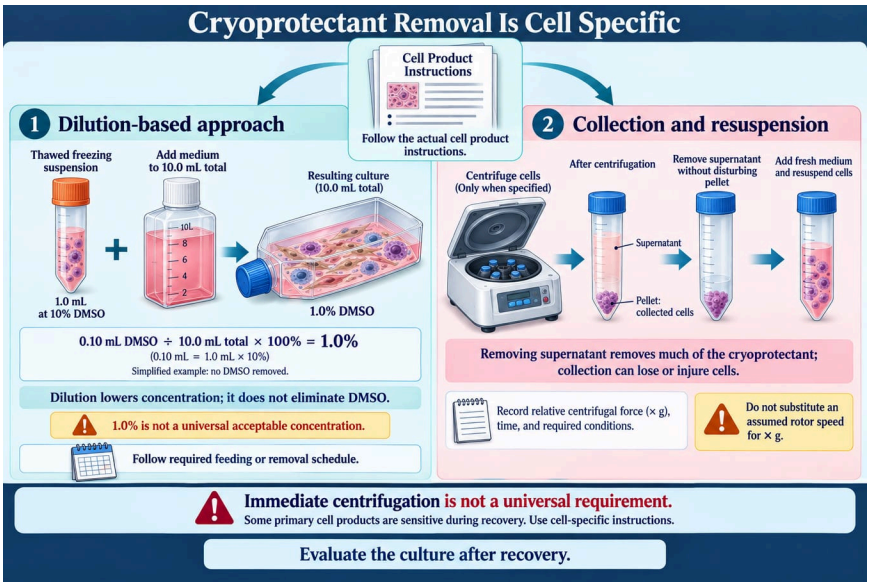
Two common approaches are dilution followed by an appropriate medium change, and collection of cells followed by resuspension in fresh medium. The choice depends on the cell source and recovery method.

In a centrifugation-based method, cells form a **pellet**, a collected mass at the bottom of the tube. The **supernatant** is the liquid above it. Removing supernatant can remove much of the cryoprotectant, but cells may also be lost or injured during collection and resuspension. Immediate centrifugation is not a universal requirement. ATCC cautions against centrifuging certain primary cell products immediately after thawing because they are sensitive during recovery. Other cell-specific methods call for that step. Use the actual product instructions rather than applying one rule to every culture.

When centrifugation is specified, record the relative centrifugal force, time, and other required conditions. Force expressed as × g cannot be replaced by an assumed rotor speed. A small or loose pellet also needs careful handling to avoid loss during liquid removal.

In a dilution-based method, adding medium lowers the DMSO concentration but does not eliminate it. For a simplified example, 1.0 mL of freezing suspension containing 10% DMSO is brought to 10.0 mL total. The resulting DMSO concentration is 1.0% by volume, assuming no DMSO is removed.

That calculation explains dilution; it does not establish that 1.0% is acceptable for a particular cell product. Follow the required feeding or removal schedule and evaluate the culture afterward.



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7.8: Choosing a Starting Density

Seeding density is the number of cells used to start a culture per unit of volume or growth surface area. The useful density depends on cell needs, vessel conditions, and the purpose of the culture.

At very low density, some populations recover slowly because nearby cells provide useful signals or because few cells attach successfully. At excessive density, cells compete for nutrients or space. A larger vessel does not automatically improve recovery if it spreads a limited number of cells too thinly.

Use measured viable cell numbers when the procedure allows a representative count. A vial's nominal cell number is useful for planning, but it may differ from the number recovered after handling. Record whether a number came from a measurement or supplier information.

For a suspension culture, starting viable cell concentration = viable cells seeded ÷ final culture volume.

Worked example 1: A recovered population contains 2.0×10^6 viable cells. If the selected procedure calls for a starting concentration of 0.50×10^6 viable cells/mL, required final volume = $2.0 \times 10^6 \div 0.50 \times 10^6 = 4.0$ mL.

The 4.0 mL includes the cell suspension and added medium. It is not 4.0 mL of fresh medium in addition to the suspension. Confirm that the resulting volume and vessel meet the recovery method's requirements.

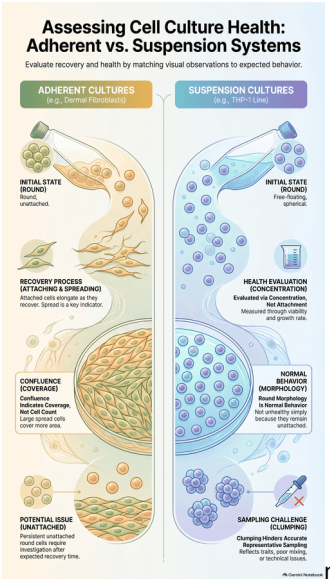
For an adherent culture, seeding density = viable cells seeded ÷ growth surface area.

Worked example 2: A population of 3.0×10^5 viable cells seeded over 25 cm^2 gives 12,000 viable cells/cm^2. The medium volume still needs to meet the vessel and cell requirements. Cells/cm^2 and cells/mL describe different features and cannot be substituted for one another.

These values illustrate calculations, not recommended densities for every cell type. Record distribution across vessels so the total cells seeded can be accounted for.

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7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently

Attachment is the association of a cell with the culture surface. Recovering adherent cells 

may first appear round, then attach and spread. Repeatedly moving the vessel can disturb the early distribution or attachment of some cultures.

Morphology is cell shape and appearance. Normal human dermal fibroblasts, or **NHDFs**, are adherent cells from the skin's dermal layer. Under suitable conditions, recovering fibroblasts attach and develop an elongated appearance. ATCC's adult dermal fibroblast product is one example of a primary adherent culture system.

Confluence is the proportion of the growth surface covered by adherent cells. It helps describe an NHDF culture but does not directly measure cell number or viability. Large spread cells can cover more surface without a proportional increase in cell count.

THP-1 cells are a human leukemia-derived cell line commonly used in studies of immune responses. In their usual undifferentiated culture condition, they grow in suspension. Recovery is assessed through cell concentration, viability, appearance, and growth rather than attachment to the flask.

Round suspension cells are not automatically unhealthy. In an adherent culture, a large population that remains round and unattached after the expected recovery period may need investigation. Interpret appearance against the expected cell behavior and observation time.

Clumps can make representative sampling and counts difficult. They may reflect the culture's normal behavior, inadequate mixing, or a problem. Record what is observed and use the method appropriate to the cell system rather than forcing every population into a single-cell suspension.

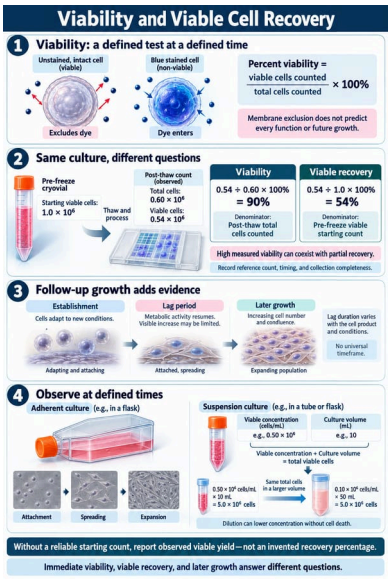
Observation	**Adherent culture such as NHDF**	**Undifferentiated THP-1 suspension**
Initial appearance	May be round before attachment	Usually round cells in medium
Early recovery	Attachment and spreading	Viability and representative concentration

Observation	Adherent culture such as NHDF	Undifferentiated THP-1 suspension
Later growth	Expansion with suitable morphology	Increase in viable yield over time
Density description	Cells per area; confluence as an observation	Viable cells per mL and culture volume

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7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures



Viability describes whether cells meet a defined measure of being alive. A membrane-exclusion dye identifies cells whose membranes exclude the dye at the time of testing. It does not directly measure future division, attachment, or every cell function.

Percent viability = viable cells counted ÷ total cells counted × 100%.

Viable cell recovery describes the number of viable cells recovered relative to a defined starting number. State the reference quantity and the time of measurement. Without a reliable starting number, report the observed viable yield rather than inventing a recovery percentage.

Suppose a vial is known to contain 1.0×10^6 viable cells before freezing. After thawing and processing, 0.60×10^6 cells are counted, of which 0.54×10^6 meet the viability criterion. Post-thaw viability is $0.54 \div 0.60 \times 100\% = 90\%$. Viable recovery relative to the stated pre-freeze count is $0.54 \div 1.0 \times 100\% = 54\%$.

The culture can therefore have high measured viability while recovering only part of the starting population. Cell loss during handling and death can both affect the outcome. The timing and completeness of collection must be recorded.

Follow-up growth adds another kind of evidence. A primary study of cryoprotectants found that post-thaw culture and total recovery measurements added information beyond the immediate viability result.

A **lag period** is a time after establishment during which there may be little net increase in cell number. Cells may be adapting, repairing injury, or beginning to attach. The expected duration varies, so avoid judging every culture by the same timetable.

Observe cultures at defined times. For adherent cells, look for attachment, spreading, and later expansion. For suspension cells, compare representative viable concentrations together with culture volume. A falling concentration after dilution does not necessarily mean cells died.

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7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use

A newly established culture should remain under the laboratory's required restrictions while its status is evaluated. **Quarantine** means controlled separation and restricted use until required checks and review are complete.

Keep cultures identified and avoid sharing materials in ways that could spread contaminants. A frozen vial from a trusted source still needs handling that preserves its quality. Freezing does not sterilize a culture.

Contamination checks and identity checks answer different questions. A clear medium cannot rule out mycoplasma. A negative mycoplasma result does not show that the culture contains the intended cells. **Authentication** evaluates whether the population matches its claimed identity using an appropriate method.

Define readiness before the experiment begins. The culture may need acceptable growth, viability, morphology, contamination results, identity evidence, and a suitable passage range. Required test controls must pass before their results can support a decision.

A culture that grows well but has unresolved identity information may still be unsuitable. Likewise, a correctly identified culture with poor recovery may not provide a stable starting point for a treatment study.

Do not apply an experimental treatment simply to see whether a struggling culture improves unless that is a separately designed and authorized investigation. Recovery problems can make later treatment comparisons difficult to interpret.

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7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery

Create the culture record before important history can be lost. Include the source, vial or tissue ID, lot, known passage, procedure version, operator, dates, medium and supplement lots, vessel, surface treatment, and incubation conditions.

Record thaw and transfer timing, any cryoprotectant handling, centrifugation when used, viable counts, seeding calculations, and follow-up observations. Preserve raw counts and images with links to the culture ID.

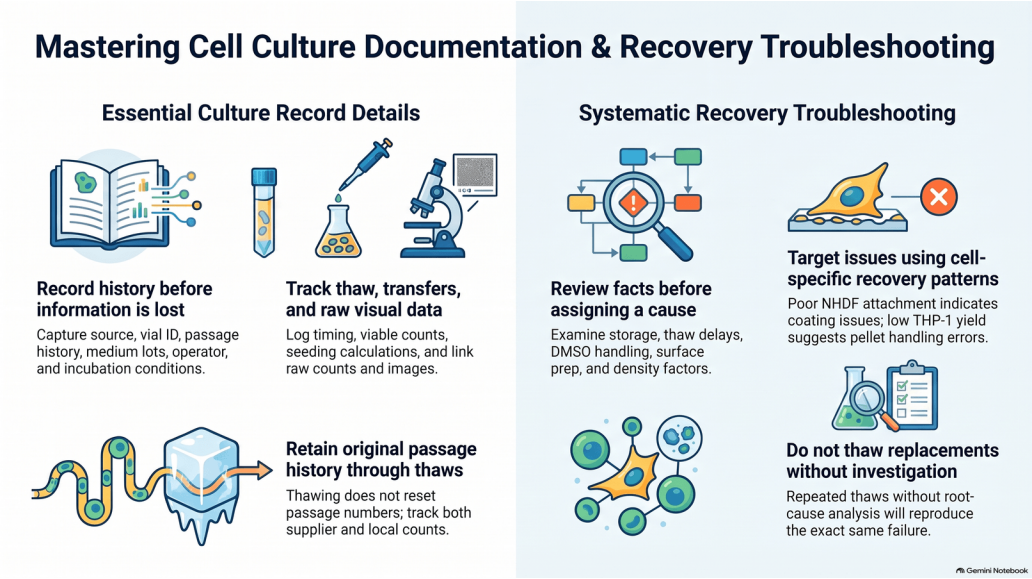
A **passage number** tracks transfers through successive subcultures under the laboratory's counting convention. Thawing does not erase earlier passage history. Retain the supplier's information and explain how the local system records establishment and later transfers.

For tissue-derived cultures, include the dissociation approach and any selection or enrichment. A change in cell composition may reflect isolation conditions rather than a later treatment.

If recovery is poor, compare facts before choosing a cause. Review storage excursions, thaw delays, medium identity, DMSO handling, mechanical stress, cell loss, density, surface preparation, and environmental settings. Several factors may contribute.

For example, an NHDF culture with high initial viability but poor attachment may need review of its coating, medium, density, and observation time. A THP-1 culture with low viable yield after a collection step may need review of pellet handling and cell counts. Neither pattern proves a single cause.

Document concerns and follow the laboratory's response procedure. Do not repeatedly thaw replacement vials without examining why the first recovery failed. A replacement can reproduce the same problem if the underlying condition remains.



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7.13: Chapter Summary

Cultures can begin with tissue isolation or recovery of an existing frozen population. Tissue isolation releases cells and selects those able to grow under the chosen conditions. Tumor origin does not automatically establish continuous growth or purity. Frozen recovery requires preparation before retrieval, prompt thawing under the selected method, and gentle transfer. DMSO reduction and immediate centrifugation must follow cell-specific instructions.

Starting density depends on viable cell number and either culture volume or attachment area. Use the final total volume in suspension calculations and keep cells/mL separate from cells/cm^2. NHDF recovery includes attachment and spreading. Undifferentiated THP-1 recovery is assessed in suspension. Interpret appearance in relation to the cell type and time since establishment.

Immediate viability, viable recovery, and later growth measure different outcomes. Follow-up observations are needed to judge whether the population has established successfully. Traceable records, appropriate restrictions, and required quality checks support decisions about experimental use. Poor recovery should prompt a documented investigation based on the culture's history.

Establishment is a process that continues after cells enter the vessel. Assess the population over time using the growth pattern expected for that model. A high initial viability does not guarantee successful attachment, later division, or suitability for an assay. Keep the source and recovery conditions connected to each observation. When performance is poor, compare the handling record with the expected response before deciding whether the cause was preparation, transfer, or the condition of the starting cells.

Key Terms

Culture establishment	primary culture	extracellular matrix	tissue dissociation
mechanical dissociation	enzymatic dissociation	explant culture	culture selection
enrichment	cryopreservation	growth surface area	cryoprotectant
dimethyl sulfoxide	pellet	supernatant	seeding density
attachment	morphology	normal human dermal fibroblasts	confluence
THP-1 cells	viability	viable cell recovery	lag period
quarantine	authentication	passage number	

Review Questions

1. How does establishing cells from tissue differ from recovering a frozen population?

2. Why can a frozen vial contain primary cells?

3. Explain why a tumor-derived culture may include cells other than malignant cells.

4. Compare mechanical dissociation, enzymatic dissociation, and explant culture.

5. How can isolation and culture conditions change the population that grows?

6. What should be prepared before retrieving a frozen vial, and why?

7. Explain why DMSO is useful during freezing but needs appropriate handling after thawing.

8. Why is immediate centrifugation inappropriate as a rule for every cell product?

9. A 1.0 mL suspension contains 10% DMSO and is diluted to 20.0 mL total without removing DMSO. Calculate its final DMSO percentage.

10. A suspension culture contains 1.8×10^6 viable cells. What final volume gives 0.30×10^6 viable cells/mL?

11. Calculate the starting density when 4.5×10^5 viable adherent cells are seeded over 75 cm^2.

12. Compare the early recovery observations appropriate for NHDF and undifferentiated THP-1 cultures.

13. Explain how post-thaw viability can be high while viable cell recovery is low.

14. Why do contamination and authentication checks need separate evidence?

15. What records would help investigate an adherent culture that remains round and unattached?

Apply Your Understanding

Two frozen populations are recovered on the same day. Culture A contains undifferentiated THP-1 cells, while Culture B contains NHDFs. Both show 90% viability immediately after processing. A student centrifuged both populations using a method remembered from another cell line. Culture A was diluted into a large volume, and Culture B was placed on a surface whose preparation was not recorded. Later, both show little apparent growth.

Explain why the initial viability results do not establish successful recovery. Identify the cell-specific instructions and records needed to assess centrifugation, starting density, and the attachment surface. Describe suitable follow-up observations for each population. Explain why several causes should remain under consideration before deciding whether another vial should be thawed.

A culture established from a tumor sample grows rapidly. Most cells have an elongated shape, so a student concludes that the culture contains only cancer cells. Explain why the source, growth rate, and cell shape do not establish this conclusion. How might the isolation method and culture conditions influence which cells grow? Describe additional evidence needed to identify the population.

A vial contained 1.0×10^6 viable cells before freezing. Immediately after thawing and processing, a student recovers 5.0×10^5 total cells, of which 4.5×10^5 are viable. Calculate percent viability and viable cell recovery relative to the pre-freeze count. Explain why the percentages differ and what additional observations are needed to evaluate recovery.

A recovered culture grows as expected and has a negative mycoplasma test with acceptable controls. However, its vial label does not match the cell identity listed in the storage record. A student wants to use it immediately in a treatment experiment. Explain why growth and the mycoplasma result do not resolve the identity problem. Describe the records and identity checks needed before deciding whether the culture is ready for use.

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8: CULTURE MAINTENANCE PASSAGING AND PLATING

Maintaining a culture means providing conditions that support cell survival and, when intended, growth while preserving the behavior needed for the work. As cells use nutrients and release waste, their environment changes. Adherent cells may fill the available growth surface, while suspension cells may reach concentrations that limit growth. Regular observation helps you decide when to replace medium, transfer cells, or investigate a problem. This chapter explains how to choose the appropriate maintenance task, handle adherent and suspension cells, and calculate transfers and starting densities. It also shows how follow-up observations and records help you assess the resulting cultures. Completing a transfer does not by itself establish success: the cells must recover and meet the conditions needed for continued maintenance or the planned experiment.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

  1. Distinguish a medium change, culture dilution, passaging, and experimental plating.
  2. Use density, morphology, viability, and culture history to justify a maintenance decision.
  3. Explain the roles of dissociation reagents and identify handling choices that can reduce recovery.
  4. Calculate suspension transfer volumes and interpret a split ratio in relation to cell number and vessel size.
  5. Plan multiwell plating with defined viable cell numbers, final volumes, controls, and well locations.
  6. Evaluate post-passage growth and document the relationship between source cultures and their descendants.

8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task

8.2: Inspecting Before You Act

8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing

8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells

8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage

8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells

8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer

8.8: What a Split Ratio Means

8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map

8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture

8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment

8.12: Passage History and Culture Records

8.13: Chapter Summary

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8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task

Routine culture care maintains a population for continued use. Feeding renews the growth liquid. Passaging moves cells into fresh growth conditions. Plating places a planned population into vessels or wells for a particular experiment. These tasks can happen together, but they have different goals.

In an adherent culture, many cells remain on the surface when liquid is removed. In a suspension culture, cells are in that liquid. Before discarding medium, determine where the cells are and how the procedure will retain them.

Culture maintenance is the routine work needed to keep cells under suitable conditions. It includes observation, feeding, density management, and records. A **medium change** replaces some or all of the nutrient liquid around cells. It does not automatically move cells to a new vessel or reduce their number.

Passaging, also called subculturing, transfers cells into fresh growth conditions to maintain a culture. **Plating** places a measured cell population in a vessel or well for growth or an experiment. One harvest can supply both a maintenance culture and an experimental plate. Each destination may need a different starting density and follow-up checks.

A **culture dilution** lowers cells per milliliter by adding medium or transferring a measured portion into a larger final volume. It is a common part of suspension-culture maintenance. Whether a dilution counts as a passage in the record depends on the documented convention, especially when cells remain in the same vessel. Record the actual operation as well as the passage designation.

Task	What changes	Main planning question
Adherent medium change	Nutrient liquid around the attached layer	Does the culture need feeding?
Suspension dilution	Cell concentration and medium composition	What volume gives the target density?
Passaging	Culture destination and starting conditions	How much population should continue?
Experimental plating	Cell allocation among assay vessels or wells	What population is needed for the assay?

Feeding and passaging address different needs. An adherent culture may need nutrients while still having open surface for growth. A crowded culture may need more surface even after a feed. A suspension may need both fresh medium and a lower cell concentration. Choose the task using measurements and the cell-specific procedure, not a calendar alone.

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8.2: Inspecting Before You Act

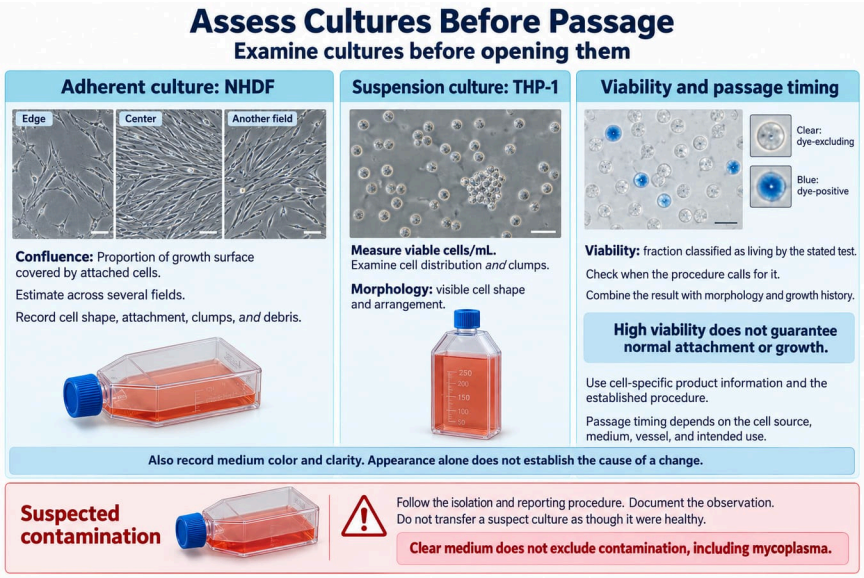
Examine cultures before opening them. **Morphology** is the visible shape and arrangement of cells. Record whether cells match their expected appearance, whether they are attached or floating, and whether clumps or debris are present. Also note medium color and clarity. These observations help identify change but do not establish its cause.

For adherent cultures, estimate **confluence**, the proportion of growth surface covered by attached cells. Look at several fields because the center and edges may differ. Normal human dermal fibroblasts, or NHDFs, usually attach and spread with an elongated appearance. For undifferentiated THP-1 cells, which normally grow in suspension, measure viable cells/mL and examine the distribution of cells in the liquid.

Check **viability**, the fraction of cells classified as living by the stated test, when the procedure calls for it. A membrane-integrity test such as dye exclusion helps identify a poor source population. Pair it with morphology and growth history. A high viability percentage does not guarantee that cells will attach or grow normally after transfer.

The appropriate passage point depends on the cell source, medium, vessel, and intended use. Use the relevant product information and established procedure. Do not apply one confluence percentage or one suspension-density limit to every cell type. Cells needed for routine expansion may be managed differently from cells intentionally brought to a nearly continuous layer for an assay.

Suspected contamination changes the decision. Avoid moving the affected culture into new vessels as though it were healthy. Follow the isolation and reporting procedure and document the observation. Clear medium alone does not exclude contamination, including mycoplasma.



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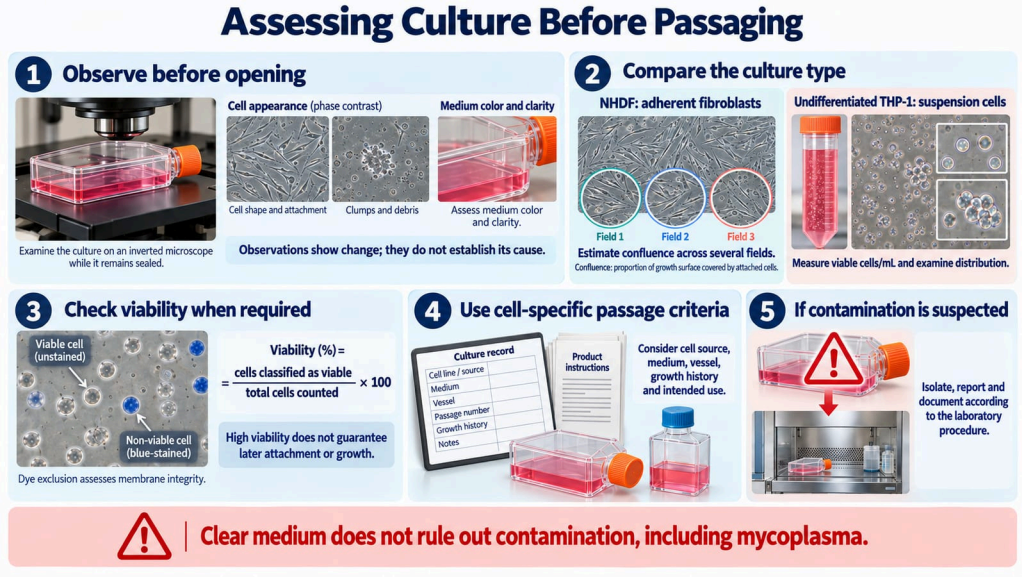
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing

A **growth phase** is a stage in the population's growth pattern. After transfer, cells may grow slowly while recovering. During the **exponential phase**, the population increases rapidly under conditions that support division. Growth slows as space, nutrients, or other conditions become limiting. Maintenance commonly aims to transfer cells before prolonged crowding or loss of health develops.

For an adherent culture, prolonged crowding can change growth behavior and make **dissociation** more difficult. For a suspension culture, density rises as cells divide and can exceed the capacity of the medium. At the other extreme, seeding too few cells may delay useful growth. The goal is a suitable starting population, not the lowest possible density.

Schedule observation with the next task in mind. If a culture must supply an experiment on Thursday, consider its current viable yield, expected growth, and recovery time after passage. A population that looks large today may not provide suitable cells immediately after a stressful harvest. Use actual observations to update the plan.

A **pilot test** is a small preliminary study used to choose conditions before the full experiment. It can help determine which starting density and culture interval produce the required population. Keep the source, vessel, medium, and timing consistent with the planned work. Do not assume that a density used successfully for another cell lot will give the same result.



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8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells

Adherent cells remain on the surface while spent medium is removed. Remove the liquid gently without scraping the layer, and add the specified fresh medium along the vessel wall. Keep the layer covered. A routine feed does not require a rinse unless the cell-specific procedure calls for one; unnecessary rinsing can dislodge cells.

Suspension cells occupy the liquid being handled. Discarding their medium without first collecting the cells can discard the population. The procedure may call for adding medium, transferring an aliquot into fresh medium, or collecting cells before a complete medium replacement. These operations have different effects on density and on the amount of spent medium carried forward.

Spent-medium carryover is the portion of old medium transferred into a new culture. If 5 mL of source culture is combined with 15 mL of fresh medium, one-quarter of the final 20 mL is source liquid. Dilution reduces the concentration of substances in that old medium but does not fully remove them.

For THP-1, repeated dilution should not be assumed to replace every required complete fluid change. The ATCC TIB-202 guidance includes periodic centrifugation and resuspension for full fluid changes. Use the schedule and collection method applicable to the actual stock and procedure. Routine dilution and complete replacement are separate decisions.

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8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage

Adherent cells form contacts with their growth surface and often with neighboring cells. **Dissociation** separates cells from these contacts so they can be transferred. The selected method should release the cells while preserving their ability to survive and reattach.

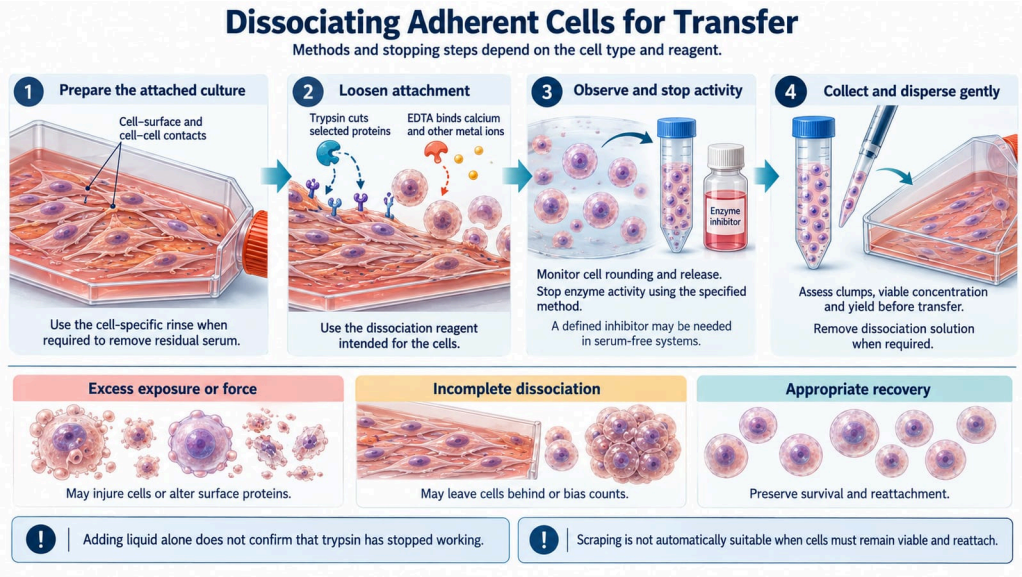
Trypsin is an enzyme that cuts proteins and is often used to weaken cell attachment. **EDTA** is a chemical that binds certain metal ions, including calcium; it can weaken attachments that depend on those ions. Trypsin and EDTA are often used together, but some cells require other enzymes or a nonenzymatic method. Use the reagent intended for the actual cells.

When a trypsin-based procedure calls for removing residual serum, a specified rinse helps prevent serum components from inhibiting the enzyme. This dissociation rinse serves a different purpose from routine feeding. The solution, number of rinses, temperature, and exposure time come from the cell-specific procedure.

Observe the response rather than waiting blindly for a timer. Cells may become round and separate as their contacts loosen. Excessive exposure or force can injure cells or damage surface proteins important for attachment. Incomplete dissociation can leave many cells behind or produce clumps that affect counting and plating.

Enzyme neutralization stops enzyme activity. The stopping method must suit the reagent and culture system. A defined trypsin inhibitor may be needed when the growth medium lacks suitable serum components. Adding liquid alone does not show that trypsin has stopped working. Some methods also require collecting the cells and removing the dissociation solution.

Collect and disperse the cells using gentle, appropriate handling. Avoid substituting scraping or vigorous pipetting for an established recovery method. Scraping may suit some collection tasks but is not automatically suitable when viable cells must reattach. After collection, assess clumping, viable concentration, and yield before calculating transfer volumes.



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8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells

A routine THP-1 suspension does not need a detachment enzyme merely because it is being passaged. Mix the source gently before taking a counting sample and again before withdrawing the transfer volume. Settling can make a valid earlier count a poor description of the portion actually transferred.

Use the measured viable concentration to plan the new culture. Confirm that the receiving vessel supports the final volume and required gas exchange. A suspension cell line does not automatically require a shaker or spinner vessel. Use the vessel and incubation conditions established for that culture.

If complete medium replacement is required, **centrifugation** collects cells by spinning the suspension. The collected mass is the **pellet**, and the liquid above it is the **supernatant**. Removing supernatant and adding fresh medium changes the culture environment, but handling can also cause cell loss. Use the specified relative centrifugal force, expressed as × g, and time. Revolutions per minute alone do not define force across different rotors.

Resuspension disperses collected cells back into liquid. A poorly dispersed pellet creates uneven samples and uneven seeding. Recount when the procedure or observed loss makes a new concentration necessary. Do not assume that every cell counted before collection remains available afterward.

THP-1 behavior can change after an experimental treatment. For example, **PMA**, phorbol 12-myristate 13-acetate, is a chemical used in some differentiation protocols that can make THP-1 cells attach. The handling plan for those cells must reflect their treated state. Unexpected attachment in an untreated culture should be documented and investigated rather than accepted as routine.

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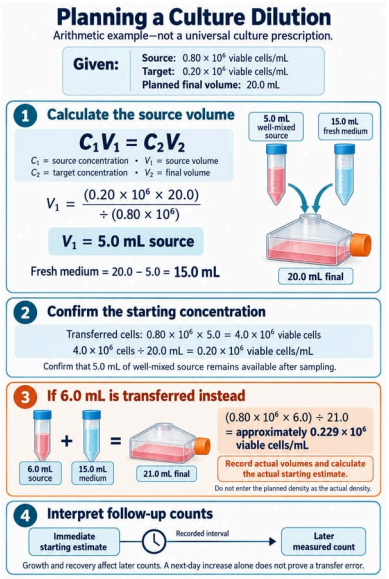
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8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer



The following example illustrates dilution arithmetic. It is not a universal culture prescription. Suppose the measured source concentration is 0.80×10^6 viable cells/mL. The selected starting target is 0.20×10^6 viable cells/mL in a final volume of 20.0 mL.

Use $C_1V_1 = C_2V_2$, where C_1 is source concentration, V_1 is source volume transferred, C_2 is the target concentration, and V_2 is the final culture volume.

$V_1 = C_2 \times V_2 \div C_1 = (0.20 \times 10^6$ cells/mL $\times$ 20.0 mL$) \div (0.80 \times 10^6$ cells/mL$) = 5.0$ mL.

Fresh-medium volume = 20.0 mL − 5.0 mL = 15.0 mL.

The transferred population is 0.80×10^6 cells/mL $\times$ 5.0 mL $= 4.0 \times 10^6$ viable cells. Dividing that number by 20.0 mL confirms the intended starting concentration. Check that 5.0 mL of well-mixed source culture remains available after sampling.

Now consider a transfer error. If 6.0 mL of source culture is added to the planned 15.0 mL of medium, the final volume is 21.0 mL, not 20.0 mL. The estimated starting concentration becomes $(0.80 \times 10^6 \times 6.0) \div 21.0$ = about 0.229×10^6 viable cells/mL. Record actual volumes and calculate from what happened. Do not silently enter the planned density as the actual one.

A later count will also reflect the time spent growing or recovering. Compare an immediate starting estimate with a follow-up measurement using the recorded interval. An increase by the next day is not automatically evidence of a transfer error.

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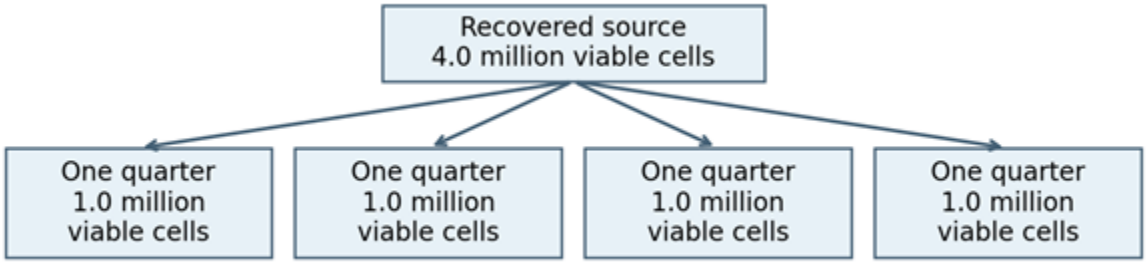
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8.8: What a Split Ratio Means

A **split ratio** describes the fraction of a source population assigned during passage. In a 1 to 4 split, each equal share contains one-quarter of the well-mixed population. A laboratory may keep all four shares or only some. Record the actual fraction kept and its destination, because laboratories may use ratio notation differently.

Suppose a recovered suspension contains 4.0×10^6 viable cells in 8.0 mL. Each quarter contains 1.0×10^6 viable cells in 2.0 mL. The split describes a fraction of the source, not the final culture volume. Each destination still needs its own medium volume and suitability check.

An equal cell fraction does not ensure equal density when growth areas differ. Placing 1.0×10^6 viable cells into 25 cm^2 gives 40,000 cells/cm^2. Placing the same number into 75 cm^2 gives about 13,300 cells/cm^2. These numbers illustrate the effect of area and are not recommended NHDF densities.



For experiments that need comparable starting populations, a measured viable-cell target can provide clearer control than a split ratio alone. Two source cultures at the same passage may have different yields. Dividing each into four shares will preserve that difference in their descendants.

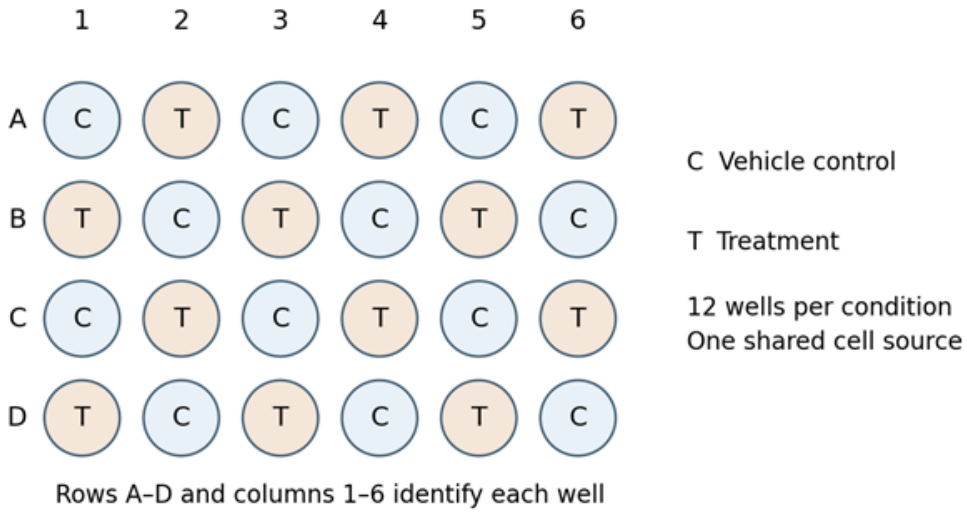
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8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map

A **tissue-culture-treated surface** is plastic modified to support attachment of suitable cells. Adherent cultures may also require a defined coating. Confirm the surface instead of assuming that any sterile plastic plate will work. Well shape, working volume, and optical properties also affect suitability. Flat surfaces support observation of a monolayer; other well shapes may suit suspension collection or particular assays.

A **plate map** identifies the contents and purpose of each well by row and column. Create it before dispensing. Include treatments, matched controls, replicate wells, cell identity, and planned collection time. Mark unused wells explicitly. Keep the plate orientation consistent with the map and label the lid and plate according to the identification procedure.

A **vehicle control** receives the solvent or delivery solution used with a treatment, at the same relevant amount, without the active treatment. It helps distinguish an effect of that solution from an effect of the treatment. A medium-only well contains no cells and may measure background when the assay plan requires it. These controls answer different questions and cannot automatically replace each other.



An **edge effect** is a difference linked to a well's position near the plate perimeter. Evaporation can contribute by changing volume and concentrations. Use the established approach for the plate and assay. Distribute controls and treatments across the plate so location does not become another explanation for a difference. No single layout solves every position effect.

Several wells filled from one source are useful repeated experimental units, but they do not create several independently derived cultures. Record the source structure so later analysis does not mistake many wells from one preparation for many independent biological samples.

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8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture

Plan viable cells per well together with final volume. For a suspension target of 2.0×10^5 viable cells/mL in 150 µL, convert the volume to 0.150 mL. Each well receives $2.0 \times 10^5 \times 0.150 = 30{,}000$ viable cells. If the stock contains 1.0×10^6 viable cells/mL, 0.030 mL, or 30 µL, supplies those cells. With no other additions, 120 µL of appropriate medium gives 150 µL total.

For 12 wells, the exact dispensing requirement is 12 × 150 µL = 1.800 mL and 12 × 30,000 = 360,000 viable cells. If the plan specifies a 10% allowance for liquid left in tips or a reservoir, prepare 1.980 mL at the same concentration. That mixture uses 0.396 mL of the stated stock and 1.584 mL of medium. Each well still receives 150 µL; the allowance is extra preparation volume, not extra volume in each well.

If a treatment or another reagent will be added later, include its volume in the final-volume plan. For example, 10 µL of treatment added to an existing 150 µL culture produces 160 µL total. Both cell concentration and treatment concentration must reflect that final volume. Specify whether a stated density refers to the plating time or the time after all additions.

For NHDF plating, choose a starting cell number that can produce the required layer at the assay time. Use an established condition or a small preliminary test for the actual cells, passage, surface, and medium. A broad cells-per-well range does not predict a suitable layer. Once the target is chosen, divide the required viable cells by measured viable stock concentration to find the transfer volume.

A well-mixed preparation can reduce differences among wells, but cells may settle during dispensing. Mix gently at suitable intervals and use pipettes suited to the volumes. Keep the final volumes consistent. Record the dispensing order if time or settling could affect the comparison.

For adherent cells, distribute the plated suspension using the established gentle movement method. Front-to-back and side-to-side motion is commonly used; uncontrolled swirling can leave uneven patterns. Place the plate level in its specified incubator and allow attachment without unnecessary disturbance.

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8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment

Successful transfer is more than delivery into a labeled vessel. At the scheduled follow-up, evaluate recovery. NHDF checks include attachment, spreading, expected morphology, and distribution. THP-1 suspension checks include viable concentration, viability, clumping, and change in yield over time.

For a secreted-protein experiment, **conditioned medium** is culture medium collected after exposure to cells. An **ELISA**, enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, measures a specified analyte using antibody-based detection. The plate used to grow THP-1 cells is not necessarily the plate used for the ELISA. Growth-vessel choice should support culture and sample collection; the analytical plate and volumes must suit the assay.

Differences in viable cell number, culture duration, or medium volume can affect a secreted-protein result. More protein per milliliter may reflect more cells, a smaller volume, or altered secretion. Collect the relevant growth and viability information and use the comparison or normalization approach established in the experiment plan. Do not choose a new correction only after seeing the desired result.

A **scratch assay** measures how a gap in an attached cell layer changes over time. Begin with a suitable, nearly continuous layer. A sparse NHDF well already has empty areas, making its apparent closure difficult to compare with a uniform layer. Both cell movement and cell division can close a gap. Poor viability can affect either process. Record the starting condition before interpreting closure.

The planned start time does not override a readiness criterion. If a well has patchy growth or poor recovery, record it and follow the experiment's predefined decision rule. Any delay, exclusion, or changed condition should remain visible in the record.

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8.12: Passage History and Culture Records

Passage number counts subculture events under the stated convention. Feeding alone generally does not increase it. Under a one-transfer-one-passage convention, cells transferred from passage 6 into several vessels are at passage 7. Filling three vessels does not create passages 7, 8, and 9.

Population doubling is a twofold increase in cell number. Passage count and accumulated doublings are different measures. A population that grows from 1 million to 4 million cells has undergone two net doublings, whether that growth occurred between one pair of passage events or another schedule. Cell death and handling losses can complicate a doubling estimate.

Primary cells, including NHDFs, have a limited capacity for repeated growth and can change with continued culture. **Senescence** is a state in which cells remain alive but stop dividing persistently. Passage history helps explain changes, but an unusual shape or slow growth alone does not prove senescence. Preserve source information and compare experiments within the defined passage or growth-history limits.

Link each new vessel to its source. Record cell identity, source and destination IDs, passage designations, date and time, operator, medium and reagent lots, vessel surface, and relevant incubation conditions. Keep counts, transfer calculations, actual volumes, and collection settings. For plates, retain the map, planned and actual treatment times, and readiness observations.

When growth differs from expectations, review possible causes using that record. Consider the source population, counting quality, density, dissociation exposure, pellet recovery, surface, medium, and incubation conditions. Change one justified factor at a time when evaluating a new condition. Keep the original observation and the reason for any repeat or revision.

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8.13: Chapter Summary

Choose feeding, dilution, passaging, or plating according to the culture's condition and the goal. Adherent cells may need release from a surface before passage. Suspension cells can often be diluted, while full medium replacement requires a way to retain them.

Calculate transfers from measured viable concentration. A split ratio describes a fraction of the source, but final density also depends on culture volume or growth area. For multiwell plates, plan cells per well, final volumes, dispensing allowances, controls, and well identities before starting.

After transfer, check the cells rather than assuming that a correct calculation ensured recovery. A patchy NHDF layer may be unsuitable for a scratch assay. A THP-1 suspension needs appropriate viable concentration and condition. Keep passage history, actual handling details, and follow-up observations linked to each vessel.

Key Terms

Culture maintenance	Medium change	Passaging	Plating
Culture dilution	Dissociation	Trypsin	EDTA
Enzyme neutralization	Split ratio	Plate map	Vehicle control
Edge effect	Conditioned medium	Passage number	Population doubling
Senescence			

Review Questions

1. Explain why a medium change may be appropriate for one NHDF culture while another needs passaging, even if both have consumed nutrients.

2. Why should THP-1 medium not be discarded during routine maintenance without a plan to retain the cells?

3. Explain what trypsin and EDTA contribute to dissociation. Why must the stopping method match the reagent and medium?

4. A source suspension contains 1.2×10^6 viable cells/mL. Calculate the source and fresh-medium volumes needed for 18.0 mL at 0.30×10^6 viable cells/mL. Assume no other additions or cell losses.

5. In Question 4, the operator actually transfers 5.0 mL of source and adds 13.5 mL of medium. Calculate the resulting starting concentration and explain what must be recorded.

6. A recovered adherent-cell suspension contains 3.2×10^6 viable cells in 8.0 mL. Calculate the viable cells and suspension volume in one quarter. Explain why its seeding density depends on the destination area.

7. An experiment uses 150 µL per well at 3.0×10^5 viable cells/mL. Calculate viable cells per well and stock volume per well from a stock of 1.5×10^6 viable cells/mL.

8. For 16 wells at 150 µL each, calculate the exact total volume and the volume to prepare with a stated 10% dispensing allowance. Explain why the allowance does not change the volume placed in each well.

9. A student dispenses a THP-1 suspension without remixing it. Why might the first and last wells receive different cell numbers despite equal volumes?

10. An NHDF plate reaches the scheduled scratch time but has patchy growth. What evidence should guide the decision to proceed, delay, or repeat?

11. A treatment well has more secreted protein per milliliter than its control but also contains more viable cells. Identify information needed before interpreting this as increased secretion per cell.

12. A passage 5 source is divided into four maintenance vessels. Explain how to label their passage and source relationships under a one-transfer-one-passage convention.

13. Describe two reasons a count taken the next day may differ from a calculated starting concentration. Which records help distinguish them?

14. Explain why twelve wells from one cell preparation do not represent twelve cell cultures obtained independently.

Apply Your Understanding

A student removes all spent liquid from a THP-1 culture as if it were an NHDF flask. Explain what happens to the cells and propose an appropriate way to renew the medium.

A stock contains 1.2 million viable cells/mL. Calculate the stock and medium volumes for 18.0 mL at 0.30 million viable cells/mL, assuming no other additions or losses.

Sixteen wells require 150 µL each. Calculate the preparation volume with a specified 10% dispensing allowance. Explain why each well still receives 150 µL.

An NHDF plate has patchy growth at the planned scratch time. Explain how this affects interpretation and identify the evidence needed to proceed, delay, or repeat.

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9: CRYOPRESERVATION AND CELL BANKING

Freezing cells creates a reserve that can help a laboratory restart work from a documented source. Successful preservation depends on cell condition, cryoprotectants, cooling, storage, and recovery rather than temperature alone. This chapter explains how to select cells for banking, calculate a freezing batch, and organize vial labels and inventory. It also distinguishes post-thaw viability from viable-cell recovery and later growth. A useful bank contains cells that can be located, traced, and recovered for their intended purpose.

Learning Objectives

- After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Explain how ice formation, water movement, and cryoprotectants affect cell survival during freezing.

  2. Evaluate whether a culture is suitable for a cell bank using its identity, history, growth, viability, and contamination status.

  3. Calculate viable cells per vial, final suspension volume, and the number of complete vials in a freezing batch.

  4. Distinguish controlled cooling, intermediate storage, and long-term cryogenic storage.

  5. Design a traceable vial label and inventory record and explain the roles of master and working banks.

  6. Interpret post-thaw viability, viable-cell recovery, and later growth as separate measures of bank quality.

9.1: Why Preserve Cells?

9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?

9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking

9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest

9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume

9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View

9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer

9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety

9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure

9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing

9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery

9.12: Chapter Summary

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9.1: Why Preserve Cells?

A culture can be useful today and difficult to replace next month. An incubator may fail, a culture may become contaminated, or repeated passage may change how cells behave. Keeping every culture growing also consumes time, medium, and supplies. A stored reserve gives the laboratory a way to restart work from a documented source.

Cryopreservation is the preservation of living material at very low temperature for later recovery. A **cell bank** is an organized collection of stored cell samples with records that identify their source, preparation, quality, and location. The purpose is to recover cells that remain useful for the intended work, rather than simply to keep vials cold.

Consider two student teams studying the same fibroblast population. One team grows its culture continuously for many weeks. The other begins each study from a tested bank and uses a defined passage range. Their starting conditions may differ even if both use the same cell name. Banking can help control culture history, but each recovered culture still needs evaluation before an experiment.

Freezing does not reverse aging, remove an unwanted mutation, or repair a damaged population. It also does not sterilize cells. A contaminated culture can carry its contamination into storage and spread it when the bank is used. Banking begins with a suitable source culture and continues through a successful thaw.

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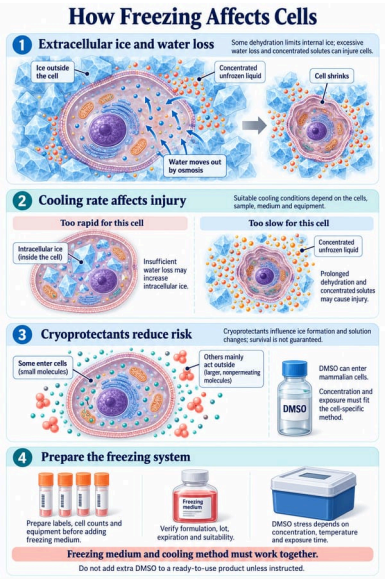
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9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?



A cell contains water, dissolved substances, membranes, and organized structures. Cooling changes the physical conditions around and within it. Ice formation and water movement create stresses that are different from the stresses of ordinary culture.

Extracellular ice is ice that forms outside cells. As water joins ice crystals, many dissolved substances remain in the unfrozen liquid. That liquid becomes more concentrated. Water can then move out of the cell by osmosis, shrinking the cell. Some water loss can reduce the amount available to freeze inside the cell, but excessive shrinkage and concentrated solutes can cause injury.

Intracellular ice is ice that forms inside cells. It can damage membranes and other structures. If cooling is too rapid for enough water to leave, the risk of internal ice can rise. If cooling is too slow, cells may experience prolonged exposure to concentrated liquid and dehydration. The useful cooling conditions depend on cell properties, sample size, medium, and freezing equipment.

A **cryoprotectant** is a substance that reduces freezing injury. Some cryoprotectants enter cells; others mainly act outside them. Their effects can include changing ice formation and reducing damaging changes in the remaining liquid. They reduce risk, but they do not guarantee survival. The freezing medium and the cooling method must work together.

Dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) is a commonly used cryoprotectant that can enter mammalian cells. Many formulations contain about 5–10% DMSO by volume, although the optimum is cell-specific. For example, ATCC lists complete growth medium with 5% DMSO for THP-1 cells. That example is not a recipe for fibroblasts, stem cells, or every other culture. DMSO exposure can itself stress cells, depending on concentration, temperature, and exposure time. Treat the interval between adding freezing medium and starting cooling as part of the process. Prepare labels, counting calculations, and equipment first so cells do not wait unnecessarily in the cryoprotectant-containing suspension.

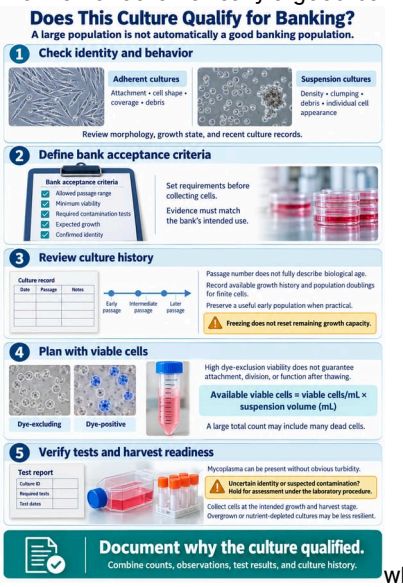
Freezing media may contain serum, defined proteins, or other protective components. Some are serum-free or DMSO-free. A commercial medium may already contain its full cryoprotectant formulation. Adding extra DMSO without directions changes that formulation and may harm recovery. Verify product identity, lot, expiration, preparation requirements, and suitability for the cells before use.

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9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking

A large cell population is not automatically a good banking population.



Start by asking whether the cells have the expected identity and behavior. Examine morphology, growth state, and recent culture records. For an adherent culture, look at attachment, cell shape, coverage, and debris. For a suspension culture, evaluate density, clumping, debris, and the expected appearance of individual cells.

Bank acceptance criteria are the requirements a culture or prepared bank must meet before it is accepted for its intended use. Define them before collecting the cells. Criteria may include an allowed passage range, a minimum viability, satisfactory contamination tests, expected growth, and confirmed identity. A classroom research bank and a bank intended for a different use may require different evidence.

Passage number helps describe culture history, but it does not fully describe biological age. Two cultures at the same passage may have undergone different numbers of population doublings. For finite cells, record available growth history as well as passage. Preserve a useful early population when practical; do not expect freezing to reset its remaining growth capacity.

A high dye-exclusion viability is encouraging, but it does not prove that every living cell can attach, divide, or perform its expected function after thawing. Conversely, a large total count with many dead cells gives fewer viable cells to distribute among vials. Use both the viable concentration and the total available suspension volume in planning.

Contamination assessment needs more than a quick look through the microscope. Mycoplasma may be present without obvious turbidity or visible organisms. Link the culture to required test results and their dates. If identity is uncertain or contamination is suspected, hold the culture for assessment under the laboratory procedure rather than banking it as an acceptable source.

Bank cells in an appropriate growth state. A heavily overgrown, nutrient-depleted culture may be less resilient than a healthy population collected at its intended harvest stage. The decision should combine counts with observations and history. A useful record explains why a culture qualified, rather than merely stating that it looked fine.

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9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest

A **freezing batch** is a group of vials prepared from a defined cell source during one documented freezing operation. Decide how many vials are needed for future use, quality checks, and reserve storage. A planned test thaw consumes a vial, so include it in the batch calculation.

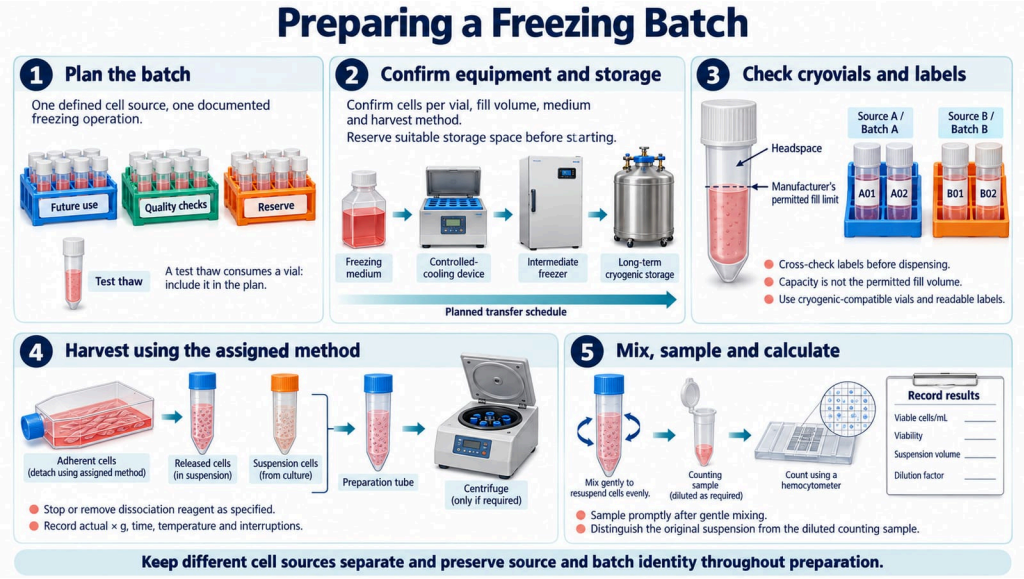
Confirm the target viable cells per vial, the final fill volume, freezing medium, harvest method, and any centrifugation requirements. Check the cooling device, intermediate freezer, long-term storage space, and transfer schedule. Missing storage space can become a biological problem if a completed batch remains in an unsuitable location.

A **cryovial** is a vial designed for cryogenic sample storage. Its permitted fill volume may be lower than its stated container capacity. **Headspace** is the unfilled space above the sample. Use the manufacturer's fill limit and the storage system's compatibility requirements rather than filling to the top. Verify that labels remain attached and readable at the intended temperatures.

Prepare and cross-check labels before dispensing. Arrange vials in a clear order and keep different cell sources separated. If two cell lines are frozen on the same day, each needs an unmistakable source and batch identity. A shared date and operator initials do not distinguish their contents.

Harvest adherent cells using an appropriate release method and stop or remove the dissociation reagent as required. Collect suspension cells using their assigned procedure. If centrifugation is needed, use the specified relative centrifugal force, time, and temperature. A generic setting copied from another culture can change recovery. Record actual settings, including any interruption.

Mix the suspension gently before taking a representative counting sample. Settling and clumping can make a sample unrepresentative. Apply the dilution factor from the counting method, then record viable cells/mL, viability, and suspension volume. Make clear whether a number describes the original suspension or a diluted counting sample.

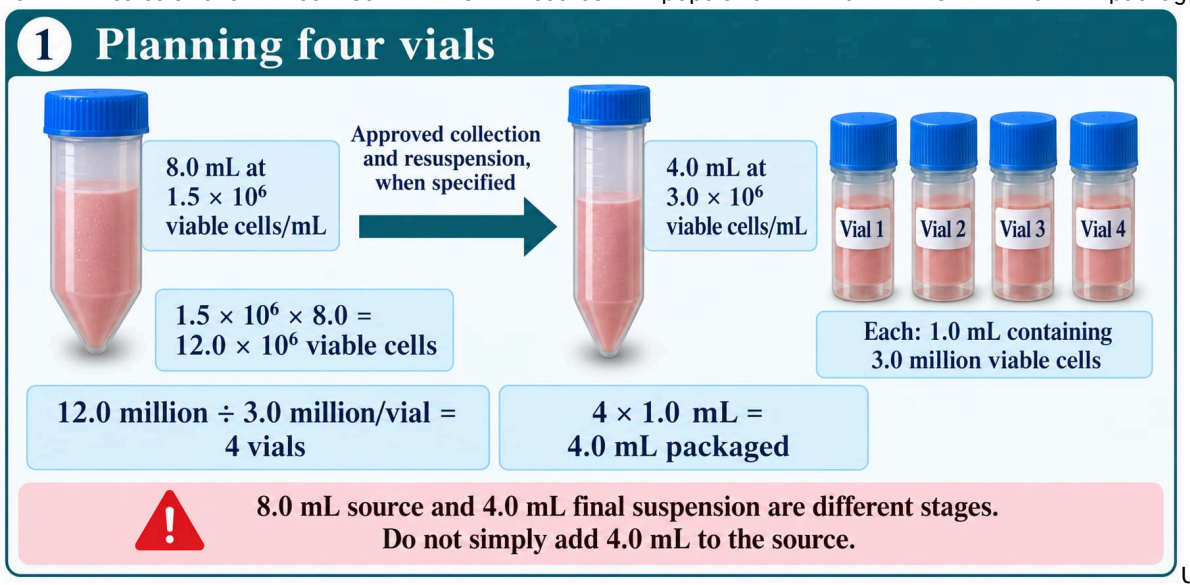


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9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume

Bank calculations connect the source population to the final packaged population.



Use viable-cell numbers when the assigned target is viable cells per vial. Keep units visible throughout the calculation.

Total viable cells available = viable cells/mL × suspension volume in mL

Target viable concentration = target viable cells per vial ÷ fill volume per vial

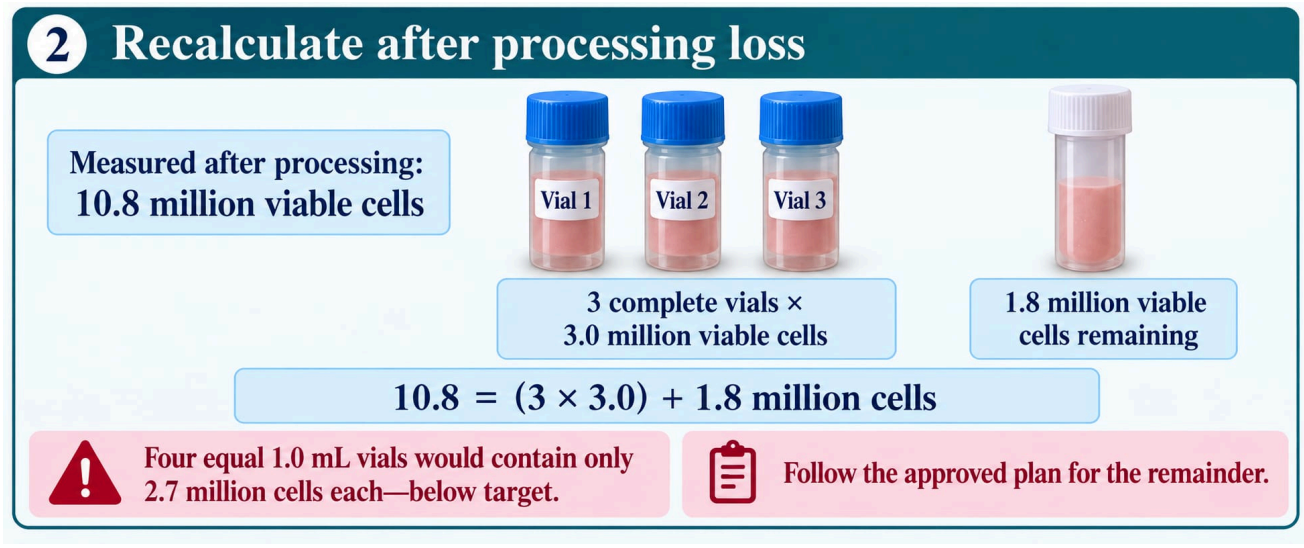
Number of complete target vials = total viable cells available ÷ target viable cells per vial, rounded down

Final packaged suspension volume = number of vials × fill volume per vial

Rounding down answers how many complete target vials the counted population can supply. It does not mean that every calculated cell will survive processing or that every microliter can be recovered from the preparation tube. Plan any allowed processing allowance separately and document how it affects the cell allocation.

Worked Example 10.1: Planning Four Vials

A well-mixed harvested suspension contains 1.5 × 10^6 viable cells/mL in 8.0 mL.



The assigned target is 3.0 × 10⁶ viable cells in each 1.0 mL vial. These values are hypothetical teaching values, not universal banking specifications.

Available viable cells = 1.5 × 10⁶ cells/mL × 8.0 mL = 12.0 × 10⁶ cells

Complete target vials = 12.0 × 10⁶ cells ÷ 3.0 × 10⁶ cells/vial = 4 vials

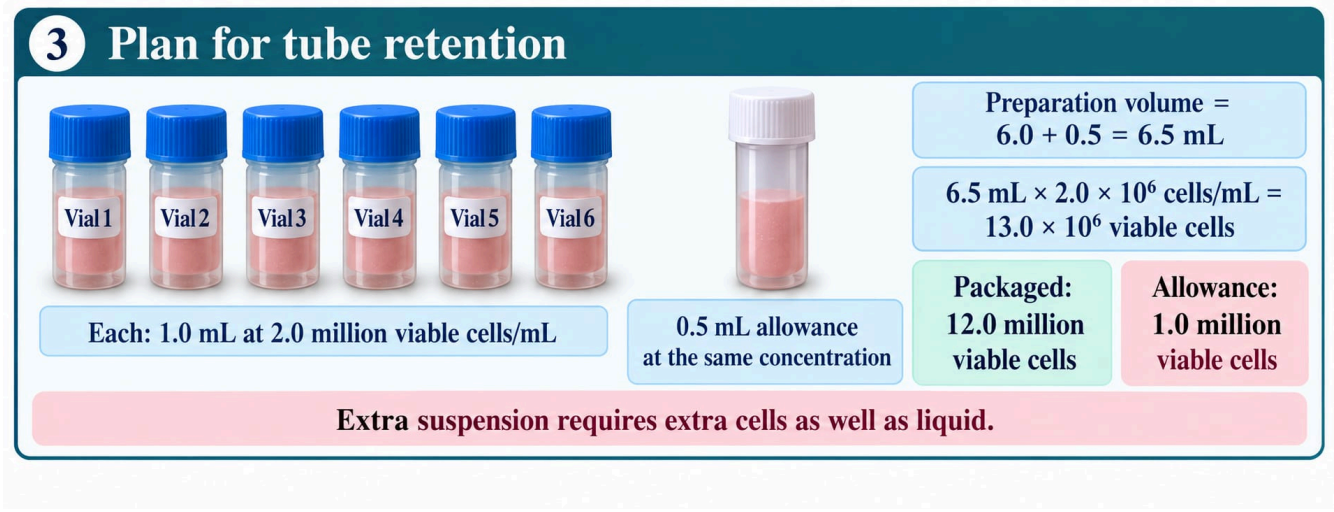
Target final concentration = 3.0 × 10⁶ cells/vial ÷ 1.0 mL/vial = 3.0 × 10⁶ cells/mL

Packaged volume = 4 vials × 1.0 mL/vial = 4.0 mL

The source liquid volume is 8.0 mL, while the planned final freezing suspension is 4.0 mL. They describe different stages. If the procedure includes collecting the cells into a pellet, the cells are resuspended at the final target concentration in freezing medium. Simply adding 4.0 mL of freezing medium to all 8.0 mL of source suspension would not give the calculated final concentration or formulation.

This arithmetic assumes all 12.0 million counted viable cells remain available. Suppose a measurement after processing shows only 10.8 million. That amount supports three complete target vials with 1.8 million viable cells remaining. Follow the approved plan for the remainder. Filling four equal 1.0 mL vials would give 2.7 million viable cells per vial, which is below the stated target and must not be recorded as 3.0 million.

Worked Example 10.2: Allowing for Tube Retention



A batch needs six filled vials, each containing 1.0 mL at 2.0×10^6 viable cells/mL. The planned preparation includes 0.5 mL of extra suspension at the same concentration to allow for liquid that remains in the tube and pipette.

Preparation volume = (6 × 1.0 mL) + 0.5 mL = 6.5 mL

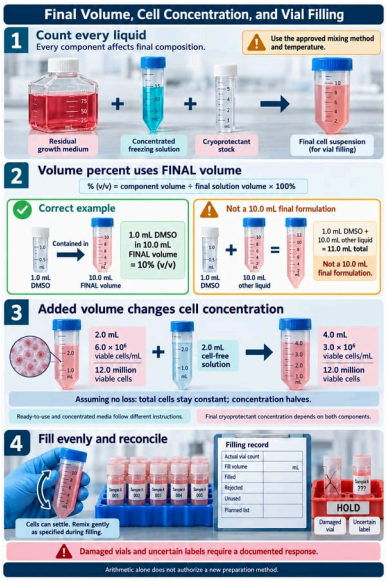
Viable cells required = 6.5 mL × 2.0×10^6 cells/mL = 13.0×10^6 cells

Six packaged vials contain 12.0 million viable cells. The remaining planned 0.5 mL contains another 1.0 million. An allowance needs additional cells as well as additional liquid. Adding extra medium to only 12.0 million cells would lower the concentration. The allowance size should reflect the approved process, not a fixed rule applied to all batches.

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9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View



Calculations must account for every liquid that contributes to the final suspension. Residual growth medium, a concentrated freezing solution, and an added cryoprotectant stock can all change final composition. Use the approved mixing method and temperature; an arithmetic exercise does not authorize a new preparation method.

Volume percent, written % (v/v), expresses the volume of one component per 100 units of final solution volume. For example, 10% DMSO by volume corresponds to 1.0 mL of DMSO in a final volume of 10.0 mL. Adding 1.0 mL to 10.0 mL of other liquid creates 11.0 mL, not a 10.0 mL final formulation.

A ready-to-use medium is used as directed. A concentrated medium must be diluted according to its instructions. If a procedure specifies equal volumes of a cell suspension and a twofold concentrated freezing solution, the cell concentration in the starting suspension must account for that added volume.

For example, 2.0 mL at 6.0×10^6 viable cells/mL contains 12.0 million viable cells. Mixing it with 2.0 mL of a cell-free solution creates 4.0 mL at 3.0×10^6 viable cells/mL, assuming no loss. The total cell number stays constant; the concentration halves. The final cryoprotectant concentration also depends on what each component already contains.

Dispense an even suspension. Gently remix as needed because cells can settle while a batch is filled. Record actual vial count and fill volume. Reconcile filled, rejected, and unused vials with the planned list. A damaged vial or uncertain label should not quietly become part of an accepted inventory.

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9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer

Cooling rate is the change in sample temperature per unit time. Many mammalian-cell procedures use a rate near 1 °C per minute, but the selected rate and cooling program must suit the cells and medium. A freezer's set temperature does not tell you the rate at which a vial cools.

A **controlled-rate freezing device** is equipment designed to produce a specified cooling process. A programmable freezer uses an active program. A passive freezing container moderates heat transfer when used in its specified environment. Its performance depends on following its instructions, which may cover starting temperature, vial arrangement, container maintenance, and freezer conditions.

Placing an unprotected vial directly on a −80 °C shelf does not establish the intended cooling rate. Likewise, improvising insulation is not equivalent to a qualified device. Record the equipment identity and program or container method so a later reviewer can understand how the batch was cooled.

Intermediate storage is a temporary stage between the initial cooling process and the final storage destination. Some procedures use a −80 °C freezer during that stage. The permitted duration and transfer timing belong to the cell-specific procedure. A temporary freezer location should remain visible in the record until the batch reaches its assigned long-term position.

Plan the transfer route and destination before retrieving the batch. Avoid unplanned warming during movement or a long search through open storage racks. Use the approved transfer equipment and trained handling procedure. Record the actual date and time, destination, and any delay or temperature concern.

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9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety

Cryogenic storage is storage at extremely low temperature. Many mammalian-cell banks use liquid-nitrogen systems with sample temperatures below approximately –130 °C. Vapor-phase storage places vials in the very cold gas above the liquid. The actual temperature at the vial location matters; the phrase “in a nitrogen tank” alone does not establish suitable storage.

A **temperature excursion** is a departure from an allowed temperature range. A warming event can affect a bank even if the vials later become cold again. Monitoring records, alarms, and transfer records help determine which vials may have been affected. Record excursions and hold affected material for assessment rather than assuming an unchanged appearance proves unchanged quality.

Low temperatures can injure skin and eyes, and nitrogen gas can displace oxygen. Handle cryogenic systems only with required training, ventilation, suitable equipment, and the laboratory’s protective measures. Cryogenic gloves, eye protection, a face shield, and clothing selected for the task protect against cold and splash hazards; they do not make immersion in liquid nitrogen safe.

If an oxygen alarm sounds, leave the area and follow the emergency procedure. Do not enter an alarmed room to retrieve cells or attempt an untrained rescue. Nitrogen does not provide a reliable smell or sensation to warn of low oxygen. Never seal a vessel that must vent evaporating nitrogen or block its pressure-relief system.

A vial exposed to liquid nitrogen can be hazardous if nitrogen enters it and then expands during warming. Use approved vials and storage arrangements. Treat a damaged vial or suspected liquid ingress as a safety issue for trained staff; do not warm or open it casually. The planned recovery procedure must include safe retrieval as well as aseptic culture handling.

Assign responsibility for storage checks, alarm response, and backup arrangements. For important banks, consider reserve vials in separate qualified storage locations under the laboratory plan. Several boxes in one tank share the same tank-failure risk. Good storage planning also makes routine retrieval efficient and reduces unnecessary exposure of neighboring samples.

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9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure

A vial label connects a physical sample to a complete record. Include enough durable information to identify the cells and distinguish that vial from every other vial. A unique vial ID can connect a compact label to detailed preparation information. Never depend on a storage coordinate alone: a vial can move.

For a teaching example, batch FB-26-04 could identify one fibroblast freezing operation, while FB-26-04-03 identifies vial 03 from that batch. The label can also show the cell name, passage, and freeze date. The linked record holds the source vessel, count data, medium lot, operator, timing, equipment, and quality results.

Traceability is the ability to connect a sample to its documented origin and handling history. It requires both identifiers and records of changes. An inventory should distinguish available, reserved, removed, tested, rejected, and discarded vials. Update movements when they happen so another worker can locate the sample without reconstructing events from memory.

Vial ID	Cell / passage	Storage coordinate	Status
FB-26-04-01	Fibroblasts / P6	Tank 2 / rack 1 / box 3 / A1	Reserved
FB-26-04-02	Fibroblasts / P6	Removed from A2	Consumed in test thaw
FB-26-04-03	Fibroblasts / P6	Tank 2 / rack 1 / box 3 / A3	Available

The locations above are hypothetical. Each row uses both a stable vial ID and a storage position. If vial 02 is consumed in a test thaw, its preparation history remains in the record even though the position becomes available. Preserve old locations as movement history instead of overwriting the only evidence of where the vial has been.

A **master cell bank** is a stored reserve prepared from a selected, characterized source population. A **working cell bank** is a bank prepared by expanding material from that reserve for routine use. This arrangement can reduce repeated use of the original reserve and make culture ancestry easier to follow. A simple research bank may use different names while applying the same principle of separating a protected source from routine stock.

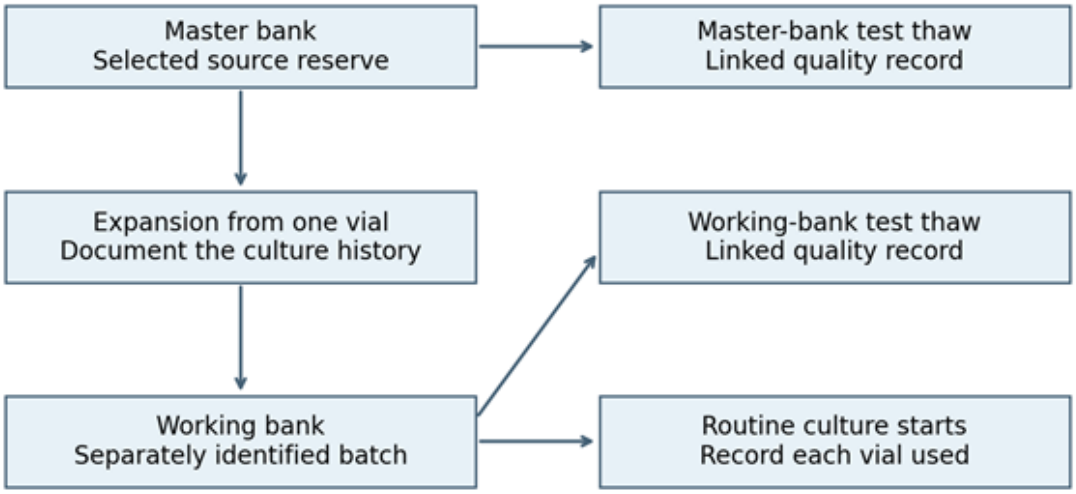


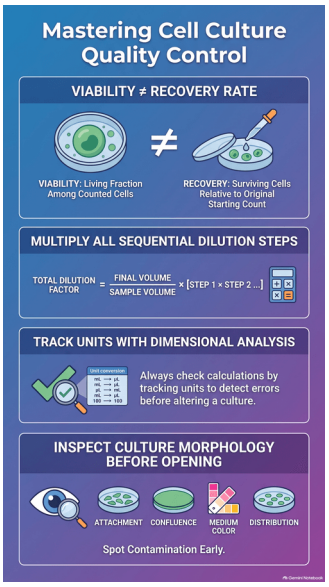
Figure 10.2. Example bank ancestry. A selected master-bank vial supplies an expansion that produces a working bank. Individual working-bank vials start routine cultures. Test-thaw results are linked to the bank tested. Separate descendants retain their own batch and passage histories.

Bank status should reflect evidence. **Quarantine** is a defined hold that prevents routine use while required information is pending or a concern is investigated. **Bank release** is the documented decision that a bank meets its defined requirements for its intended use. These terms describe laboratory decisions; using the words does not establish compliance with a particular manufacturing standard.

A freezing batch, a cell line, and a bank are related but different. One cell line can have several separately prepared banks. Vials from a shared batch have common ancestry and preparation conditions. They are useful for repeated culture starts, but their separate containers do not make them independent biological source populations.

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9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing



A bank is intended for later use, so quality evaluation should include the return to culture. A **test thaw** is the recovery and evaluation of a selected stored vial. Choose the sampling plan before release and record which vial was used. One tested vial provides evidence about that vial and its shared preparation, but it cannot prove that every vial experienced identical handling.

Retrieve and thaw cells using the appropriate cell-specific procedure. Manage cryoprotectant dilution or removal as directed; immediate centrifugation is useful for some cells but can add losses or stress for others. Evaluate the recovered culture at stated times using the same measurement definitions when comparing batches.

Post-thaw viability is the percentage of counted cells classified as living after thawing at a specified measurement time. **Viable-cell recovery** is the number of viable cells recovered relative to a defined starting number. They answer different questions. A sample may have a high fraction of living cells among those counted while many original cells were lost.

Worked Example 10.3: Viability Versus Recovery

A vial was prepared with 3.0×10^6 viable cells. Immediately after thawing and processing, the measured suspension contains 1.8×10^6 viable cells and 0.2×10^6 dead cells. Assume the count and volume represent the entire recovered suspension.

Post-thaw viability = 1.8 million ÷ (1.8 million + 0.2 million) × 100 = 90%

Immediate viable-cell recovery = 1.8 million ÷ 3.0 million × 100 = 60%

Both results can be correct. The 90% describes the living fraction among recovered counted cells. The 60% compares recovered living cells with the viable number originally loaded. Losses can occur during thawing, collection, or measurement; missing cells do not automatically appear as dead cells in the final count.

The recovery calculation uses a defined baseline and a measurement before substantial growth. A count taken after several days reflects survival plus proliferation and other culture losses. Label such a result with its timing and purpose rather than treating it as immediate recovery.

Continue evaluation after the initial count. For adherent cells, assess attachment and expected morphology. For suspension cells, assess distribution, clumping, and density changes. Record later viability and growth as required. A living membrane at the first measurement does not guarantee sustained growth or the intended response in an assay.

A useful test-thaw conclusion states the observations, acceptance criteria, and outcome. For example: “Vial FB-26-04-02 met

the defined viability criterion at the recorded time, showed expected attachment, and resumed growth during the observation interval.” Keep the measured values in the supporting record. Avoid a broad claim such as “the entire bank is perfect.”

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9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery

Poor recovery can begin before freezing, during preparation, in storage, or during thawing. Use the timeline and records to narrow the possibilities. A missing record limits interpretation: an unknown cryoprotectant exposure interval cannot be reconstructed from a later cell count.

Concern	Possible contributors	Useful evidence
Low viable-cell recovery	Poor source quality; handling losses; freezing injury	Pre-freeze count, harvest record, cooling and thaw records
Uneven cells per vial	Settling, clumps, dispensing variation	Mixing notes, counts, fill-volume checks
Poor attachment or growth	Cell injury; unsuitable recovery conditions	Timed images, medium identity, seeding conditions
Unexpected cell appearance	Stress, contamination, identity error	Source history, identity and contamination tests
Batch-wide storage concern	Delayed transfer or warming excursion	Transfer timeline, storage monitoring, affected positions

Separate an observation from its possible cause. “Few cells attached at 24 hours” is an observation. “The cooling rate was wrong” is a hypothesis unless equipment records or a controlled comparison support it. Several faults can produce similar outcomes, and a single fault can affect more than one measurement.

Document the concern, affected vial IDs, relevant records, and action taken. If a labeling mix-up is possible, further growth does not resolve identity by itself. If a storage excursion occurred, good recovery of one vial may be reassuring but should be interpreted within the sampling plan. Resume routine use only after the appropriate assessment.

Do not refreeze a thawed vial to erase an unsatisfactory result. A thawed and refrozen population has a different handling history and may have a different surviving composition. Any specifically authorized re-banking operation needs its own source assessment, identifiers, preparation record, and quality evaluation.

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9.12: Chapter Summary

Cryopreservation preserves cells for later use. Ice formation, water movement, concentrated solutes, and cryoprotectant exposure can affect survival. Select a suitable source culture and follow its approved formulation, cooling method, and storage instructions. Plan viable cells per vial and fill volume together. Extra preparation volume needs enough cells to maintain the target concentration. An intermediate freezer step differs from long-term cryogenic storage. Cooling records, transfer times, and safe cryogenic handling matter throughout the process. Cell-bank labels and inventory must connect every vial to its source, status, and storage location. Post-thaw viability measures a fraction of recovered cells. Viable recovery compares recovered viable cells with the number loaded. Later attachment and growth provide further evidence about the usefulness of the bank.

Key Terms

Cryopreservation	Cell bank	Extracellular ice	intracellular ice
Cryoprotectant	DMSO	Bank acceptance criteria	Freezing batch
Cryovial	headspace	Cooling rate	Intermediate storage
Temperature excursion	Traceability	Master cell bank	working cell bank
Quarantine	bank release	Post-thaw viability	viable-cell recovery

Review Questions

1. Explain how cooling too quickly and cooling too slowly can create different kinds of freezing stress.

2. Why can a contaminated culture remain a problem after it has been frozen?

3. A culture has a large total cell count but low viability and unusually slow growth. What evidence would you review before deciding whether to bank it?

4. A suspension contains 2.4×10^6 viable cells/mL in 5.0 mL. The target is 2.0×10^6 viable cells in each 0.8 mL vial. Calculate the total viable cells, complete vial number, final concentration, and packaged volume.

5. A plan calls for five 1.0 mL vials at 3.0×10^6 viable cells/mL plus 0.4 mL of extra suspension at that concentration. How many viable cells are needed? Explain why an extra liquid allowance alone is insufficient.

6. Equal volumes of a cell suspension and a cell-free freezing solution are mixed. What happens to cell concentration and total cell number? What further information is needed to calculate final DMSO concentration?

7. Explain why a −80 °C freezer setting is not evidence that vials cooled at 1 °C per minute.

8. Design a label and inventory entry for one vial. Include stable identification, culture history, storage coordinates, and current status.

9. Why might a laboratory keep a protected master bank and a separate working bank? How should records connect them?

10. A vial loaded with 2.0 million viable cells yields 1.2 million viable and 0.3 million dead cells immediately after thawing. Calculate post-thaw viability and immediate viable-cell recovery. Explain the different denominators.

11. A thawed culture has high initial viability but poor attachment and little growth. Propose three possible explanations and identify records or measurements that could help evaluate them.

12. An oxygen alarm sounds while a colleague is preparing to retrieve a vial. State the appropriate immediate response and explain why sample recovery cannot take priority.

Apply Your Understanding

You have 12 million viable cells and need 2 million per vial at 0.8 mL per vial. Calculate the complete vial number, final concentration, and packaged volume before allowing for losses.

A frozen vial was loaded with 2.0 million viable cells. After thawing, 1.2 million viable and 0.3 million dead cells are recovered. Calculate viability and viable recovery, then explain their difference.

The cooling record is complete, but the long-term transfer time is missing. Identify the uncertainty and the records that could help investigate it.

A banked culture has high initial post-thaw viability but little later growth. Propose two possible causes and one relevant check for each.

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10: CELL COUNTING VIABILITY AND CULTURE CALCULATIONS

Cell counts turn a culture observation into numbers that guide the next step. Concentration, viable yield, and **percent viability** describe different properties. This chapter explains representative sampling, **hemocytometer** counting, **dye exclusion**, and dilution corrections. Worked examples show how to calculate available cells and seeding volumes. You will also learn to check count quality and record enough detail for another person to follow the calculation. A cell count estimates a population from a small measured sample. The estimate works only when the sample reflects the full suspension. Mixing, sampling, loading, and identifying cells all matter before any arithmetic begins. Keep three questions separate: how many cells are in each milliliter, how many cells are available in total, and what fraction pass the viability test. One milliliter equals 1,000 microliters. One million cells can also be written as 1.0×10^6 cells. Write units at each step to keep these quantities distinct.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

  1. Distinguish cell concentration, total cell yield, percent viability, and confluence.
  2. Explain how a standard hemocytometer uses a known volume to estimate cells per milliliter.
  3. Apply a consistent boundary rule and identify sampling or loading problems that can bias a count.
  4. Calculate viable and total cell concentrations, percent viability, and viable cell yield from raw counts.
  5. Calculate sample dilution factors and the volumes needed to reach a specified seeding target.
  6. Evaluate repeated counts and document the evidence needed to support a culture decision.

10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
10.10: Checking Count Quality
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
10.13: Chapter Summary

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10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You

Cell concentration is the number of cells in a stated volume, usually cells per milliliter, or cells/mL. **Cell yield** is the total number of cells in the suspension being evaluated. Concentration describes how crowded the suspension is; yield describes how many cells it contains. A suspension with 1 million cells/mL contains 2 million cells if its volume is 2 mL and 10 million cells if its volume is 10 mL.

Percent viability is the percentage of evaluated cells classified as living by a specified test. It does not tell you the total number of living cells available. A small sample can have high percent viability and still provide too few cells for the planned work. **Viable cell concentration** counts only cells classified as living per unit volume. Multiplying that concentration by the suspension volume gives the viable cell yield.

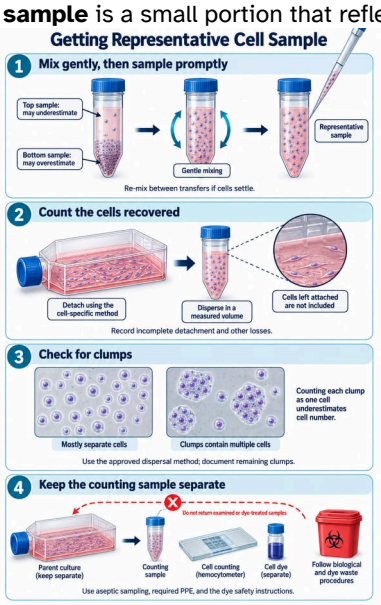
Confluence is the proportion of a growth surface covered by attached cells. It describes an adherent culture such as normal human dermal fibroblasts, or NHDFs. Confluence is not an exact cell count. Large, spread cells can cover the same area as a greater number of small cells. Undifferentiated THP-1 cells usually grow in suspension, so cells/mL is more useful than confluence for describing their density.

Measure	Typical unit	Question answered
Viable concentration	Viable cells/mL	How many living cells are in each mL?
Viable yield	Viable cells	How many living cells are available?
Percent viability	Percent	What fraction passes the viability test?
Confluence	Percent of area	How much surface do attached cells cover?

Keep the question in view before calculating. Are you asking whether cells survived, how many are available, or how much suspension to transfer? A complete record may need all three answers. These measures support culture decisions, but none alone establishes cell identity, freedom from contamination, or readiness for every experiment.

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10.2: Getting a Representative Sample

A **representative sample** is a small portion that reflects the population being measured. 

If cells have settled at the bottom of a tube, a sample from the top may underestimateconcentration. A sample from the bottom may overestimate it. Mix the suspension gently using the method appropriate for those cells, then sample promptly. Re-mix between transfers when settling could affect the next portion.

For adherent cultures, a count generally requires detaching cells and dispersing them in a measured volume. Use the cell-specific detachment procedure. A count of that suspension describes the cells recovered into it. Cells left attached to the original surface are not included. Record incomplete detachment or other losses instead of assuming that every cell in the original vessel was recovered.

A **single-cell suspension** contains mostly separate cells instead of large groups. Clumps make a count difficult because one visible object may contain several cells. Use the approved handling method to reduce clumps without excessive force. If clumps remain, document them and determine whether the counting method is suitable. Counting every clump as one cell will generally underestimate cell number.

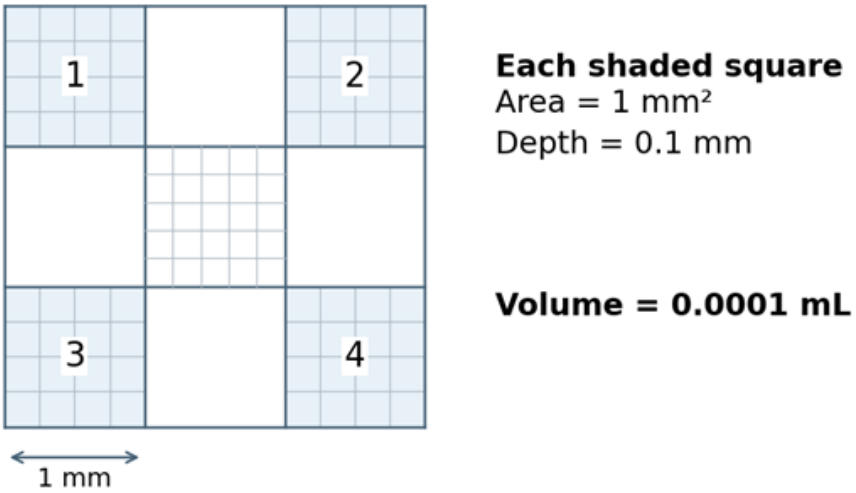
Remove the counting sample aseptically and keep it separate from the parent culture. Do not return a dye-treated or previously examined sample to the culture. Use the required protective equipment and follow the dye safety information and waste procedure. Dye-treated waste may require handling for both biological material and the chemical dye.

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10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works

A **hemocytometer** is a counting chamber with an engraved grid and a defined chamber depth. The correct coverslip establishes that depth. In a standard Improved Neubauer chamber, one large square has an area of 1 mm^2 and the chamber is 0.1 mm deep.



The liquid abo ve one large square therefore occupies 0.1 mm^3, which equals 0.0001 mL.

Counting cells in this small volume estimates how many would be present in 1 mL. Because 1 mL contains 10,000 volumes of 0.0001 mL, multiply the average count per large square by 10,000. This is a volume conversion, not a factor chosen to make the answer larger. A sample dilution must be corrected separately.

Figure 8.1 A simplified standard counting grid. The four shaded corner squares are each 1 mm by 1 mm. The center square has a different subdivision pattern. Always identify the area actually counted.

The chamber contains squares of different sizes, so each type represents a different volume. In this chapter's four-corner-square method, count four large squares and divide the combined count by four. Multiply that average by 10,000. Applying 10,000 directly to the combined four-square count would ignore the larger volume counted.

A more general relationship is concentration = cells counted ÷ volume counted. This works for any known counting volume. Use the device dimensions and counting plan provided for the actual chamber. Disposable slides and automated instruments may use different volumes or perform the conversion internally.

YouTube Video

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10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability

Trypan blue enters cells with damaged membranes. Cells that exclude it remain clear and are classified as viable by this method. Blue cells are classified as nonviable. D**ye exclusion** therefore tests whether cells keep the dye outside their membranes. Count clear and blue cells separately.

Dye exclusion measures membrane integrity at the time of examination. An unstained cell may still be stressed or unable to grow well later. A blue cell does not reveal why its membrane became damaged. The test alone does not identify the cause of cell death. Recovery after thawing also requires observation over time.

The dye mixture has its own concentration and exposure time. Prepare and examine it within the timing specified for the reagent and method. Long or inconsistent delays can change the result. Use the same timing when comparing samples, and record unusual delays. Distinguish cells from debris or dye particles rather than treating every visible object as a cell.

When equal volumes of cell suspension and dye are mixed, cells occupy half the final volume. For example, 10 µL of cells plus 10 µL of dye produces 20 µL of mixture. The concentration in that mixture is half the concentration in the original sample. Correcting the result requires a **dilution factor** of 2. The microscope count describes the mixture until that correction is applied.

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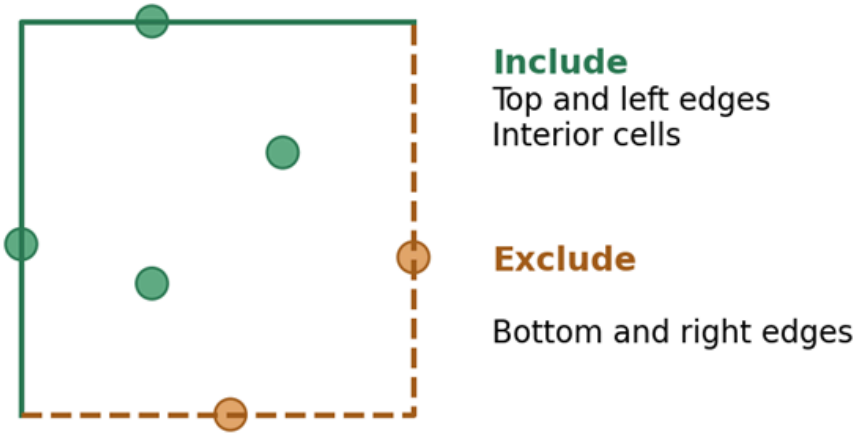
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10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently

Place the correct coverslip on a clean chamber as instructed. **Capillary action** draws liquid into the narrow space beneath it. Load the sample at the chamber entrance. Bubbles, incomplete filling, or overflow can change the counting volume or distribution. Reload a faulty chamber before calculating a result.

Use enough magnification and suitable illumination to distinguish cells, dye staining, and grid lines. Scan each chosen square in an organized pattern so that cells are not missed or counted twice. Record clear and blue counts for each square. A total without the individual square counts hides uneven distribution.

A **boundary rule** specifies how to count cells touching grid lines. One consistent rule is to include cells touching the top or left boundary and exclude cells touching the bottom or right boundary. It prevents shared edges from being counted twice. Apply the same convention to all squares and both cell categories. For a cell touching an excluded edge at a corner, exclude it. If cells overlap heavily, make an appropriate additional sample dilution and recount. If very few cells are present, count more defined areas or use an approved method to improve the measurement. Record all changes. A calculation cannot correct uncertainty caused by guessing how many cells are hidden in a crowded region.



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10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations

The following example uses four large corner squares, each holding 0.0001 mL. The counting sample was mixed with an equal volume of dye and had no other dilution. These are instructional numbers, not acceptance criteria for a particular cell line.

Large square	Clear cells	Blue cells	Total cells
1	48	4	52
2	52	6	58
3	46	5	51
4	54	5	59
Sum	200	20	220

First find the average count per large square. There are 200 clear cells and 20 blue cells across four squares. The clear average is 200 ÷ 4 = 50 cells/square. The blue average is 20 ÷ 4 = 5 cells/square. The total average is 220 ÷ 4 = 55 cells/square.

Viable cell concentration = average clear count × 10,000 × sample dilution factor.

Viable cell concentration = 50 × 10,000 × 2 = 1,000,000 viable cells/mL.

Total cell concentration = average clear plus blue count × 10,000 × sample dilution factor.

Total cell concentration = 55 × 10,000 × 2 = 1,100,000 total cells/mL.

The blue-cell concentration is 5 × 10,000 × 2 = 100,000 nonviable cells/mL. As a check, viable plus nonviable concentrations should equal total concentration when the same areas and dilutions are used.

Percent viability = clear count ÷ (clear count + blue count) × 100.

Percent viability = 200 ÷ 220 × 100 = 90.9%.

The dilution factor and chamber conversion cancel in the viability ratio because both cell categories were counted in the same volume. Do not multiply 90.9% by 2. Applying the dye correction to the percentage would produce an impossible result above 100%.

Scientific notation expresses a number as a value multiplied by a power of ten. For example, 1,000,000 is 1.0×10^6 and 1,100,000 is 1.1×10^6. Keep enough digits during the calculation, then report a sensible rounded answer. A manual estimate does not justify a long string of decimal places.

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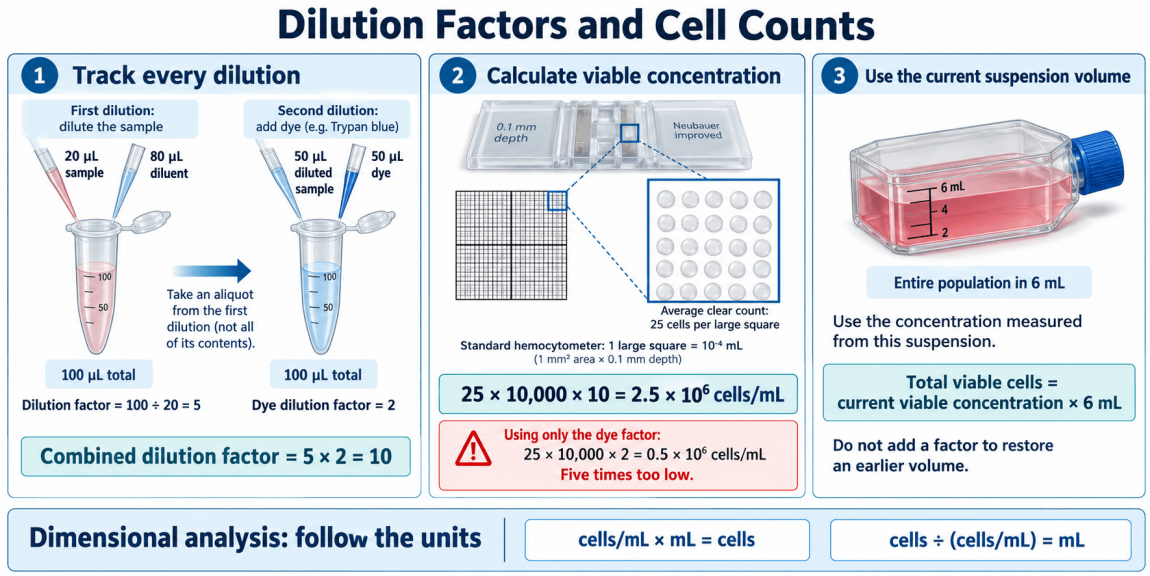
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors

A **dilution factor** is the final mixture volume divided by the volume of original sample in that mixture. Write the actual volumes rather than relying on an ambiguous ratio. Mixing 20 µL of sample with 80 µL of diluent makes 100 µL total, so the factor is 100 ÷ 20 = 5. This is one part sample in five parts final mixture.

If that diluted sample is then mixed with an equal volume of dye, the combined factor is 5 × 2 = 10. Suppose its average clear count is 25 cells per large square. The original viable concentration is 25 × 10,000 × 10 = 2.5 × 10^6 cells/mL. Using only the dye factor would give 0.5 × 10^6 cells/mL, five times too low.

Dilution factors multiply when each step further dilutes the counting sample. Resuspending the entire population in a new culture volume is a different operation. A count from that suspension already measures its new concentration. If the whole population is in 6 mL, use that concentration and 6 mL to find yield. Do not add a factor to restore an earlier volume.

Dimensional analysis is checking a calculation by following its units. Cells/mL multiplied by mL gives cells. Cells divided by cells/mL gives mL. Writing units makes it easier to detect an incorrect operation before it affects a culture.



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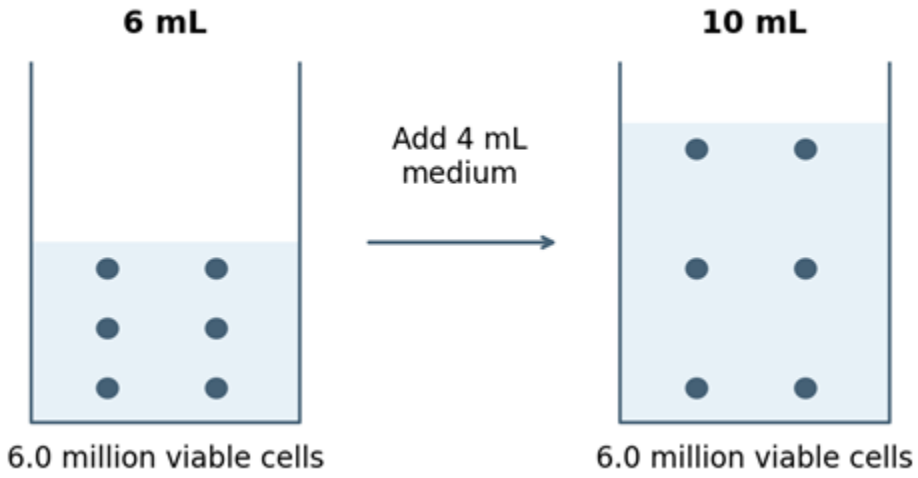
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10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield

Use the concentration that corresponds to the suspension whose volume you know. In the worked count above, the viable concentration is 1.0×10^6 cells/mL. If the remaining well-mixed suspension contains 6.0 mL, then viable yield = 1.0×10^6 cells/mL × 6.0 mL = 6.0×10^6 viable cells.

This is the yield in that remaining suspension. If counting samples or other portions have already been removed, use the current remaining volume when planning what is available. Label any separate estimate of the original pre-sampling yield clearly. Do not silently switch between original and remaining volumes.

Adding 4.0 mL of medium to those 6.0 mL produces a final volume of 10.0 mL. Assuming no growth, death, or cell loss during the operation, viable yield remains 6.0×10^6 cells. The new viable concentration is 6.0×10^6 cells ÷ 10.0 mL = 0.60×10^6 cells/mL. Adding medium changes concentration immediately; it does not create more cells.



The same reasoning helps interpret culture growth. A culture with a lower concentration after feeding has not necessarily lost cells. Compare concentration together with volume, viability, and time. Only then decide whether the total viable population increased or decreased.

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10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume

A **seeding target** specifies the number or density of cells intended at the start of a culture or experiment. Identify whether it is based on viable cells, total cells, cells/mL, or cells per surface area. Use the cell-specific target for the actual procedure. The examples below illustrate arithmetic; they do not prescribe growth conditions.

To obtain a stated number of viable cells, use: suspension volume needed = target viable cells ÷ viable stock concentration.

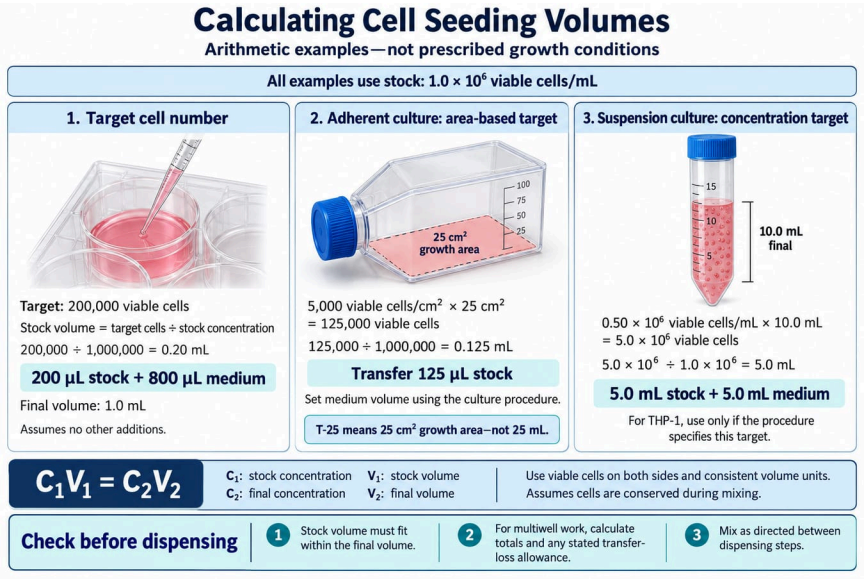
Suppose an experiment needs 200,000 viable cells and the stock contains 1.0×10^6 viable cells/mL. The required stock volume is 200,000 cells ÷ 1,000,000 cells/mL = 0.20 mL, or 200 µL. If the specified final volume is 1.0 mL, add 0.80 mL of the appropriate medium, assuming no other additions.

For an adherent culture, convert an area-based target to a cell number first. If a stated target is 5,000 viable cells/cm^2 in a vessel with 25 cm^2 growth area, the required number is 5,000 × 25 = 125,000 viable cells. With the same stock, use 0.125 mL, or 125 µL. The medium volume is set separately by the vessel and culture procedure. A T-25 name refers to growth area; it does not mean that the working volume is 25 mL.

For suspension cultures, multiply the target concentration by the final culture volume. A stated target of 0.50×10^6 viable cells/mL in 10.0 mL requires 5.0×10^6 viable cells. From a stock containing 1.0×10^6 viable cells/mL, transfer 5.0 mL and add 5.0 mL medium. This arithmetic is suitable for planning a THP-1 suspension only when the actual cell-specific procedure calls for that target.

The dilution equation $\mathbf{C_1V_1 = C_2V_2}$ means that starting concentration times transferred stock volume equals final concentration times final volume. Use the same cell category on both sides and consistent volume units. The equation assumes that cells are conserved during mixing.

Check that the stock volume you calculated fits inside the planned final volume. If it does not, the stock is too dilute to reach the target by adding medium. Review cell availability and the allowed method for concentrating or replanning the suspension. For multiwell work, calculate cells and final mixture volume for all wells. Include any stated allowance for transfer loss. Mix as directed between dispensing steps.



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10.10: Checking Count Quality

Technical repeats are repeated measurements of the same sample. Loading two chambers can help reveal poor mixing or loading differences. They do not represent two independent cultures. Follow the counting plan and review the separate results before averaging them.

For example, chamber averages of 49 and 51 clear cells per large square are close. Their mean is 50. With a factor of 2, that mean gives 1.0×10^6 viable cells/mL. In contrast, averages of 42 and 85 deserve investigation. An average of those two numbers may look reasonable while hiding a sampling problem.

Check for settling, clumps, bubbles, incorrect chamber filling, different areas counted, or a transcription error. If justified, prepare and load a fresh sample according to the procedure. Keep the original results and explain the repeat. Do not erase an inconvenient count or keep repeating until the desired answer appears.

Measurement uncertainty is the doubt associated with a measurement. A count based on very few cells is less reliable than a larger count under suitable conditions. Counting more areas can reduce random sampling variation. It cannot fix a repeated dilution mistake. Use the method's limits for repeat agreement rather than choosing a percentage after seeing the data.

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10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests

An **automated cell counter** uses an instrument to estimate cell number, often through imaging or an electrical measurement. Review the method, counted cell size range, and sample limits. For an imaging counter, inspect the stored image when possible. Clumps or debris can still confuse the analysis. Check whether the instrument already corrects for dye dilution. Some systems apply a twofold correction when an equal-volume trypan blue setting is selected. Multiplying that reported concentration by 2 again would double the result incorrectly. Record relevant settings, dilution corrections, and the original output.

Other viability assays measure different cell properties. ATP tests and metabolic assays can estimate viable populations under suitable conditions. Their signals also depend on cell activity and assay conditions. A lower signal may mean fewer viable cells, lower activity per cell, or measurement interference. Appropriate controls help distinguish these causes. Choose the test that fits the question. A routine membrane-integrity count helps plan a seeding volume. A treatment study may need additional evidence of growth, survival, or biological function. Report the method with the result so that “90% viable” has a clear meaning.

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10.12: Documenting and Using the Result

A useful record links the count to the cell identity, vessel, passage when known, date, and operator. Preserve the sampling volume and time, dye details, actual dilution volumes, chamber or instrument identity, counting areas, raw counts, formulas, and units. Include the suspension volume used for yield and the seeding target used for planning.

Keep observations separate from interpretations. “Large clumps in three squares” is an observation. “Clumps may have caused an underestimate” is an interpretation. Both can matter, but they provide different kinds of evidence. Record handling problems and how they were addressed.

Use the result together with morphology, culture history, and the planned task. Low viability may warrant investigation rather than routine use. A high viable yield may still be unsuitable if cells are contaminated or incorrectly identified. When the evidence does not support a decision, pause the affected work and obtain the needed check.

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10.13: Chapter Summary

Cell concentration describes cells per volume. Cell yield describes the number in the full suspension. Percent viability describes the fraction classified as living by the test used. Confluence describes surface coverage in an adherent culture and is not an exact cell count. A standard hemocytometer provides a known counting volume. For the large-square method described here, multiply the average count per square by 10,000 and the actual sample dilution factor. Count clear and blue cells separately. Do not apply the dilution correction again to percent viability. Multiply viable cells/mL by suspension volume to find viable yield. Divide the target viable cell number by viable stock concentration to find the transfer volume. Poor mixing, clumps, faulty loading, or double correction can distort the result. Keep raw counts, units, timing, and device settings so another person can check the estimate.

Key Terms

Cell concentration	Cell yield	Percent viability	Viable cell concentration
Confluence	Representative sample	Single-cell suspension	Hemocytometer
Trypan blue	Dye exclusion	Boundary rule	Dilution factor
Seeding target	Technical repeats	Measurement uncertainty	

Review Questions

1. Explain how concentration, viable yield, and percent viability differ. Why can 95% viability occur in a culture with too few cells for an experiment?

2. Explain the 10,000 factor using the dimensions of a standard large hemocytometer square. Why should you check the counting device before using this factor?

3. Four large squares contain clear counts of 44, 50, 48, and 58, and blue counts of 6, 4, 5, and 5. The only sample dilution is equal-volume dye mixing. Calculate viable cells/mL, total cells/mL, and percent viability. Show units.

4. The suspension in Question 3 has a remaining volume of 4.0 mL. Calculate its available viable yield.

5. A counting sample contains 20 µL of original suspension and 80 µL of medium. It is then mixed with an equal volume of dye. What combined dilution factor restores the original concentration?

6. A stock has 1.5×10^6 viable cells/mL. What stock volume supplies 300,000 viable cells? How much medium is needed for a final volume of 1.0 mL with no other additions?

7. A hypothetical adherent-cell target is 8,000 viable cells/cm^2 in a 25 cm^2 vessel. Calculate the target cell number and the volume needed from a stock of 1.0×10^6 viable cells/mL.

8. A suspension contains 4.0×10^6 viable cells in 5.0 mL. Predict concentration and viable yield immediately after adding 5.0 mL of medium, assuming no cell loss or growth.

9. Two chamber counts differ greatly. Identify three checks to make before reporting their mean. Explain why technical repeats are not independent biological cultures.

10. An automated counter reports a concentration after applying the dye correction. A student multiplies the result by 2 again. Describe the error and its likely effect on a planned seeding volume.

11. A target requires 1.0×10^6 viable cells in a final volume of 1.0 mL, but the stock contains 0.50×10^6 viable cells/mL. Explain why simple dilution cannot meet this target.

12. An NHDF suspension has many clumps after incomplete detachment. A THP-1 sample was taken after cells settled. Explain how each problem could affect the count and what should be documented.

Apply Your Understanding

Four large squares contain 160 clear cells and 40 blue cells. The sample was mixed with an equal volume of dye and had no other dilution. Calculate viable cells/mL and percent viability. Explain the two different denominators.

A suspension contains 1.0 million viable cells/mL in 4.0 mL. Calculate its yield and the volume needed to transfer 200,000 viable cells.

Two chamber counts differ greatly, and one contains visible clumps. Explain why averaging immediately could hide a problem. Plan a repeat and state which original records to retain.

An automated counter already corrects for the dye dilution. A student multiplies its concentration by two again. Predict the effect on the reported concentration and the seeding volume calculated from it.

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11: MICROSCOPY STAINING AND CELL CHARACTERIZATION

Microscopy helps scientists examine cell shape, distribution, and selected cellular features. Understanding an image requires knowing how the sample was prepared, which imaging method was used, and how the instrument was set. Three properties influence what you can see. **Magnification** makes the image appear larger. **Resolution** is the ability to distinguish nearby features as separate. **Contrast** makes features stand out through differences in brightness or color. Increasing magnification alone does not improve resolution, and enlarging a captured image cannot recover detail that was not recorded.

Stains and labels provide additional ways to distinguish cellular features. A **stain** makes selected cells or components easier to see. A **fluorescent label** absorbs light at suitable wavelengths and emits light, usually at longer wavelengths. Depending on the label, the signal may reveal a structure, a particular molecule, or a feature associated with cell condition. Its meaning must match what the method measures. Detecting a labeled protein, for example, does not by itself establish that the protein is functioning.

This chapter compares imaging and staining methods, explains controls and calibration, and shows how images become measurements. You will learn to connect each image to its sample identity, culture history, preparation, and imaging settings. Together, this information helps you interpret observations, compare samples fairly, and use images as evidence for cell characterization.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Distinguish magnification, resolution, and contrast and select an imaging method for a specific question.
  2. Describe adherent and suspension cultures using specific observations rather than unsupported conclusions.
  3. Explain the purposes and limitations of live-cell dyes, fixation, permeabilization, and immunofluorescence.
  4. Select controls that help separate target signal from background and imaging artifacts.
  5. Calculate image dimensions from a calibrated pixel size and interpret simple cell-labeling measurements.
  6. Design an imaging record and explain how microscopy contributes to a broader cell-characterization plan.

11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence

11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
11.15: Chapter Summary

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11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells

A microscope provides an early view of culture condition and a way to measure selected cell features. An attached layer may become crowded, a suspension may develop unusual clumps, or a treated population may change shape. These observations help guide culture decisions, but they need context. The image reflects the cells, the sample preparation, and the imaging system together.

Cell characterization is the description and measurement of features that establish what a cell population is like under stated conditions. Features can include shape, growth, viability, molecular markers, and function. Microscopy contributes to this work by showing where cells and labeled structures are located and how their appearance changes.

Imagine that an NHDF culture contains more rounded cells after treatment. Possible explanations include cell injury, detachment, division, or a handling difference. An image alone does not choose among them. A useful investigation compares treated and control cultures at the same time, checks the culture history, and adds measurements suited to the question.

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11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast

Magnification is the enlargement of an image. In a microscope viewed through 

an eyepiece, nominal total magnification is the objective magnification multiplied by the eyepiece magnification. A 10× objective and a 10× eyepiece give 100× total magnification. A digital image can be resized on a screen, so its displayed size depends on more than the objective label.

Resolution is the ability to distinguish nearby features as separate. Enlarging a blurry image cannot restore detail the optics did not resolve. Resolution depends on illumination wavelength, the objective, alignment, and sample preparation. **Numerical aperture (NA)** describes how well an objective collects light. It helps determine the detail the optical system can resolve.

Contrast is the difference that makes a feature distinguishable from its surroundings. A transparent cell can be difficult to see even when the microscope has adequate resolution. Stains and specialized illumination increase selected kinds of contrast. They can also change which features are most visible.

A **field of view** is the area visible in one microscope image or through the eyepiece. Increasing objective magnification usually reduces that area. A high-power image may show a nucleus clearly while hiding the uneven distribution of cells across the vessel. Survey at suitable low power before choosing fields for closer examination.

Working distance is the distance between the objective's front lens and the specimen when it is in focus. Vessel thickness, coverslip thickness, and objective design affect whether a sample can be imaged properly. Use objectives compatible with the vessel. Never force the lens against a flask or use immersion oil on an objective that is not designed for it.

An inverted microscope places objectives below the sample and is useful for viewing cells near a culture vessel's lower surface. An upright instrument places objectives above the sample and often supports prepared slides. The arrangement alone does not specify the contrast method: an instrument may provide brightfield, **phase contrast**, fluorescence, or several modes.

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11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method

Brightfield microscopy forms an image using transmitted light. Colored stains are often easy to distinguish by this method. Unstained living cells can have weak contrast, although their outline, distribution, and some internal features may still be visible.

Phase-contrast microscopy converts differences in the way a specimen affects light into visible intensity differences. It is useful for many unstained living cultures. Thin, attached cell layers often show cell borders and internal variation more clearly than in ordinary bright field.

A phase-contrast **halo** is a bright or dark optical border that can appear around specimen features. It is an imaging artifact rather than a separate biological structure. Phase objectives need matching, correctly aligned condenser components. An incorrect configuration can produce poor contrast even when the culture is healthy.

Fluorescence microscopy detects light emitted by fluorescent molecules after illumination. A **fluorophore** absorbs light and emits light, usually at a longer wavelength. The excitation and emission filters must match the label. To interpret a signal, consider the label, optical channel, and sample controls together.

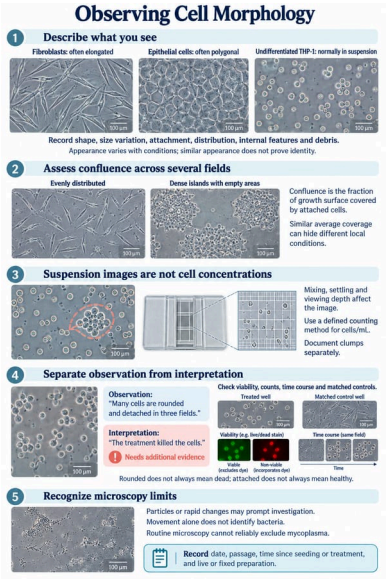
Method	Useful observation	Main limitation
Brightfield	Colored stains and overall distribution	Unstained cells may have weak contrast
Phase contrast	Shape and attachment in living cultures	Halos and alignment affect appearance
Fluorescence	Location of selected labels	Background and specificity need controls

A confocal microscope can reduce out-of-focus signal and collect optical sections, which are images from selected depths. This can help with thick samples or the distribution of labels through a cell. It does not automatically make a label specific or a measurement unbiased. Many routine culture questions can be answered with a properly configured widefield instrument.

Choose the method from the question. Phase contrast may suit a daily check of fibroblast attachment. Fluorescence may suit a question about a labeled nuclear protein. A stained bright field preparation may suit a question about overall cell shape. The most complex instrument is not required for every observation.

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11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically



Morphology is the observable form and structure of cells. Describe shape, size variation, attachment, distribution, visible internal features, and debris. Compare with documented expectations for the same cells under similar conditions. Record the date, passage, time since seeding or treatment, and whether the image shows living or fixed cells.

Many fibroblast cultures show elongated cells, while many epithelial cultures form more closely packed groups of polygonal cells. Undifferentiated THP-1 cells normally grow in suspension. These descriptions are useful starting points, but appearance varies with density, environment, treatment, and culture history. Cells that look similar can have different identities.

For an adherent culture, **confluence** is the fraction of growth surface covered by cells. Estimate it across several fields rather than from one crowded patch. A culture can be evenly sparse or contain dense islands separated by large empty areas. Both may have a similar average coverage but different local conditions.

For a suspension culture, a field image depends on how cells were mixed, where they settled, and the depth being viewed. It is not automatically a concentration measurement. Use a defined counting method when cells/mL is needed. Describe clumps separately from the count, because a cluster may be mistaken for one cell or excluded by an automated system.

Separate observation from interpretation. “Many cells are rounded and detached in three sampled fields” states what was seen. “The treatment killed the cells” proposes a cause and a biological outcome. Additional evidence might include dye exclusion, cell counts, a time course, and a matched control. Rounded cells are not always dead, and attached cells are not always healthy.

Visible particles, filaments, or rapid changes can prompt a contamination investigation. Their absence does not establish that a culture is contamination-free. Routine microscopy cannot reliably exclude mycoplasma. Do not identify every moving particle as a bacterium: fluid movement and random motion can move nonliving debris.

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11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias

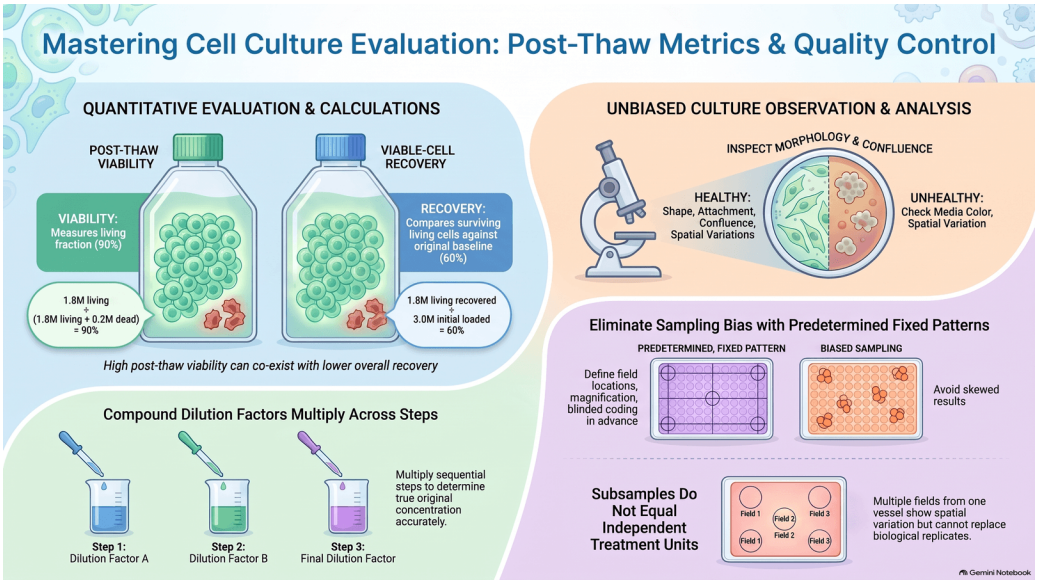
Sampling bias occurs when the selected observations do not fairly represent the population being studied. Choosing only clean, evenly spread cells can hide damaged areas. Choosing only the worst field can overstate a problem. Plan field selection before examining which images look most convincing.

For a routine survey, examine multiple locations across the vessel. For a quantitative study, define the locations, number of fields, magnification, and exclusion rules in advance. A fixed pattern can support consistent sampling, although the chosen pattern still needs to suit the vessel and biological question. Edge and center areas may differ.

When possible, use coded sample names during analysis so the observer does not know the treatment group. This is **blinded analysis**, a way to reduce the influence of expectations on counting and classification. Coding does not correct poor images or an unsuitable measurement rule, but it can reduce subjective differences in scoring.

Several fields from one well are subsamples. They show spatial variation but do not create independent treatment units. Record how cells, fields, wells, vessels, and cell sources are related. Counting many cells from one culture cannot replace independently prepared cultures when the question requires them.

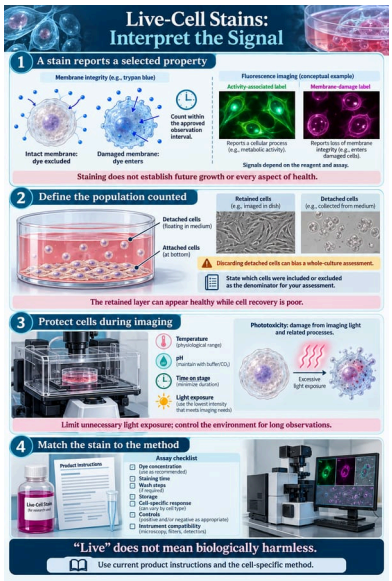
Keep observation time consistent. An image at two hours after seeding may show attachment in progress; one at two days may show a spread layer. If a treatment alters growth, the same time point can contain different cell numbers. Record timing and consider whether density differences might explain part of an apparent morphology or fluorescence difference.



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11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure



A **live-cell stain** is a labeling reagent used with living cells to reveal a selected feature. It may report membrane integrity, enzyme activity, organelle distribution, or another property. Its meaning depends on the reagent and assay design. The word “live” describes the sample or intended method; it does not mean the dye has no biological effect.

Trypan blue is a membrane-integrity dye commonly used during cell counting. Cells with damaged membranes take up the dye, while intact cells generally exclude it during the specified observation interval. Count promptly using the approved timing. A delayed measurement can change staining and weaken comparisons.

Some fluorescent viability assays combine a label linked to live-cell activity with a dye that enters damaged cells. Defined signals allow the assay to classify cells. These classifications describe the properties tested. They do not directly establish future growth, differentiation, or every aspect of cell health.

Define the denominator. A percentage of labeled cells among cells retained on the culture surface describes that retained population. If treatment causes many cells to detach and those cells are discarded before imaging, the remaining layer can look healthy while overall culture recovery is poor. Include detached cells or document their exclusion when the question requires the whole population.

Live imaging can place cells outside their usual incubator conditions. Temperature, pH, time on the stage, and light exposure can change their behavior. **Phototoxicity** is cell damage caused by imaging light and related processes. Limit unnecessary light exposure. For long observations, use suitable control of the cell environment.

Choose dye concentration, staining time, wash steps, and storage conditions from the current product instructions and the cell-specific method. A dye that works well in one population may enter, stain, or affect another differently. Include appropriate controls and verify that the label can be detected by the available instrument.

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11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining

Fixation is a treatment that preserves selected cell structures for later examination. Chemical fixation generally ends the sample's ability to continue as a living culture. A fixed image records a prepared state at a particular time. It cannot show what the same cells would do later in culture.

Different fixation methods preserve different features. Crosslinking fixatives stabilize structures by forming chemical links, while some alcohol-based methods precipitate material and can extract components. A method suitable for cell shape may reduce antibody recognition of a target. Follow a method that has been evaluated for the intended specimen and label.

Permeabilization makes membranes accessible to reagents that do not readily enter intact cells. It is often needed for antibodies directed at intracellular targets. Excessive treatment can remove material or change structure. A surface-labeling experiment may have different requirements from a nuclear-labeling experiment.

Blocking is a treatment intended to reduce unwanted binding of labeling reagents. It reduces background under suitable conditions but does not prove target specificity. Washing removes unbound or loosely retained reagent. Gentle handling matters because cells can be lost during aspiration, rinsing, and mounting.

Record the fixative, concentration, exposure time, temperature, and the order of preparation steps. Also record permeabilization and blocking conditions. Two samples stained with the same antibody can look different because they were prepared differently. Sample preparation is part of the measurement rather than a neutral step outside it.

For adherent samples, avoid disturbing the layer. For suspension samples, the preparation may require retaining cells on a suitable surface or collecting them during washes. Cell loss during this process can select which cells remain visible. Do not assume an adherent-cell wash method will preserve a suspension population.

Use the required controls and chemical-handling measures for each reagent. A biological safety cabinet is not a general substitute for chemical fume control. Follow the safety data sheet and laboratory procedure for fixatives and solvents, including waste collection. Preserve biological containment requirements where they still apply.

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11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers

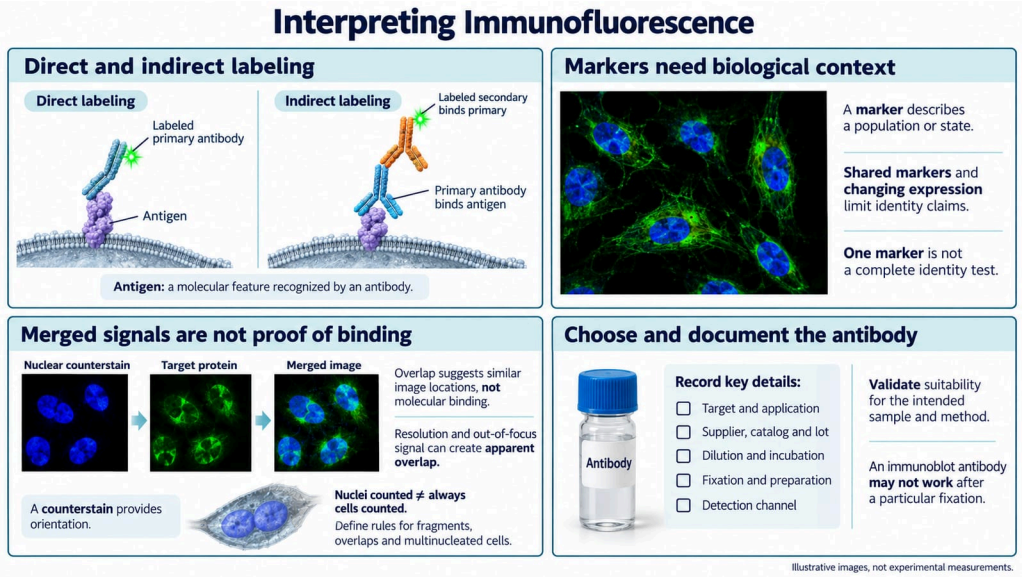
Immunofluorescence uses antibodies and fluorescent labels to detect selected targets. An **antigen** is a molecule or feature recognized by an antibody. A **primary antibody** binds the intended antigen. In indirect labeling, a fluorescent **secondary antibody** binds the primary antibody. In direct labeling, the primary antibody already carries the label.

A **cell marker** is a measurable feature used to describe a population or state. It may be a protein, nucleic acid, or another property. Different cell types can share markers, and expression can change during culture or treatment. Interpret each marker in its biological context. One marker alone is not a complete identity test.

For example, a nuclear stain can help locate nuclei, while a second label can show the distribution of a selected protein. A colored overlap in a merged image suggests that signals occupy similar image locations. It does not prove that the molecules bind one another. Limited resolution and out-of-focus signal can make distinct structures appear to overlap.

A **counterstain** labels an additional feature that helps orient the main signal, such as nuclei in a protein-labeling experiment. Nuclear dyes can support counts, but a count of labeled objects requires rules for fragments, overlapping nuclei, and multinucleated cells. A nucleus count is not always identical to a cell count.

Select an antibody tested for the intended application and sample. A reagent suitable for an immunoblot may not recognize a target after a particular fixation treatment. Record target, supplier, catalog identity, lot, dilution, incubation, and detection channel. An antibody name alone is insufficient to reproduce the preparation.



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11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation

An experimental image cannot reveal all sources of background on its own. Use controls selected for the labeling scheme and question. Process comparison samples consistently and image them using appropriate matching settings. Controls help identify specific problems; no single control answers every question.

Control	Question it helps answer	Important limit
Unstained prepared sample	Is there signal without added label?	Does not test antibody specificity
Secondary antibody only	Is signal present without the primary?	Does not validate primary binding
Known positive sample	Can the method detect the target?	Does not establish experimental identity
Negative biological sample	Is signal present without expected target?	Must be appropriate for the target
Single-label samples	Does a label appear in another channel?	Does not assess all background sources

An unstained control should undergo the relevant preparation steps when the purpose is to evaluate preparation-related background. A secondary-only control applies to indirect antibody labeling. It can reveal signal that appears without the primary antibody, but it cannot demonstrate that the primary antibody recognizes only the intended target. [5]

Autofluorescence comes from the specimen without an added label. **Bleed-through** occurs when one label's signal appears in another label's channel. Single-label controls help reveal that overlap. Colors in a merged image are assigned for display; they do not provide separate evidence that the labels are specific.

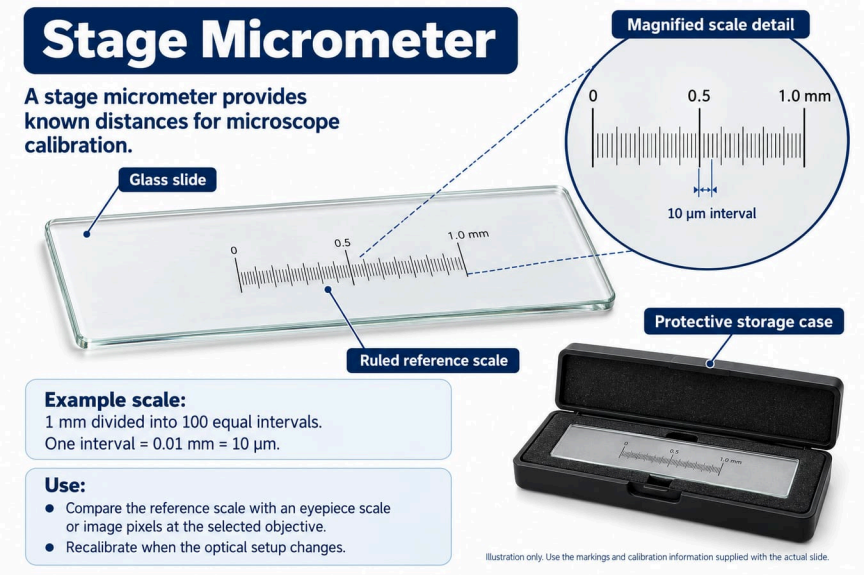
A positive control helps determine whether a method can detect the target under the selected conditions. A negative biological control helps assess signal when target expression is absent or reduced. Where appropriate, target knockdown can provide evidence, but incomplete reduction or altered cell health can complicate interpretation. Explain the control's role and limits.

If the controls fail, an attractive experimental image does not rescue the result. A bright secondary-only control, for example, calls for investigation of background before interpreting experimental brightness as target expression. Preserve failed control images and record what was changed during troubleshooting.

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11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size

Image calibration establishes the relationship between image pixels and physical



dimensions. A **pixel** is one element in a digital image. A **scale bar** is a graphic representing a known specimen distance. A correct bar depends on calibration for the objective, camera, optical path, and acquisition settings used.

A **stage micrometer** is a reference slide with known distance markings used to calibrate an imaging system. Measure a known distance in image pixels under the selected configuration. Recheck calibration when a relevant optical or acquisition setting changes. Software can store calibration, but it must be linked to the correct image rather than selected by memory.

Micrometers per pixel = known distance in micrometers ÷ measured distance in pixels

Feature length in micrometers = feature length in pixels × micrometers per pixel

Scale-bar length in pixels = desired bar length in micrometers ÷ micrometers per pixel

Worked Example 11.1 Calibrating a Scale Bar

Under one imaging configuration, a 100 µm reference distance spans 400 pixels. The image calibration is 100 ÷ 400 = 0.25 µm/pixel. A cell outline measured as 120 pixels along its defined long axis therefore spans 120 × 0.25 = 30 µm.

A 50 µm scale bar needs 50 ÷ 0.25 = 200 pixels in the original image. If the entire image and its bar are resized together for display, their relative relationship remains correct. Resizing the image separately from the bar makes the displayed scale misleading.

The calculation does not eliminate measurement uncertainty. The cell boundary may be unclear, a phase halo may affect the outline, or the cell may not lie entirely in the focal plane. Define which boundary and axis are used, measure several cells according to the sampling plan, and report the variability rather than implying that every cell is exactly 30 µm long.

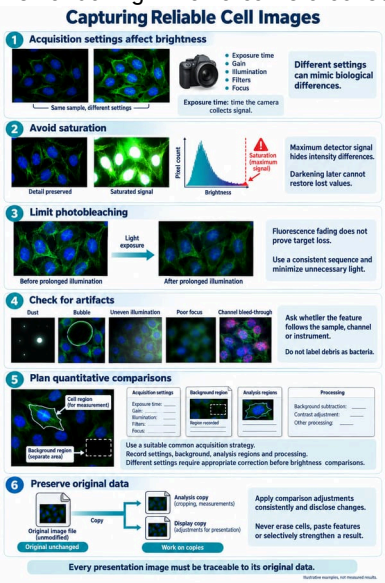
Digital zoom enlarges pixels; it does not increase optical resolution. A large screen image without calibration cannot establish cell size. Likewise, a magnification label such as “200×” becomes ambiguous when an image is copied, cropped, or displayed at a different size. Preserve calibrated metadata and include an accurate scale bar when showing dimensions.

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11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images

Exposure time is the interval during which a camera collects



signal for one image. Camera gain, illumination, filters, focus, and processing also affect recorded intensity. Comparing images acquired with different settings can make an unchanged sample appear brighter or dimmer.

Saturation occurs when a detector reaches its maximum recorded signal. Additional signal can no longer be distinguished, so differences between samples may be hidden. Check the display or histogram and choose settings that preserve useful detail. Reducing brightness afterward cannot recover the lost intensity values.

Photobleaching is the loss of fluorescence during light exposure. If one sample is examined for several minutes before capture and another is captured immediately, the signals may differ because of exposure history. Use a consistent acquisition sequence and minimize unnecessary illumination. Distinguish fading fluorescence from biological loss of the labeled target.

For quantitative comparisons, use an appropriate common acquisition strategy and preserve raw images. Document background measurement, analysis regions, and any processing. If settings must differ to capture useful images, retain those differences in the record and avoid a direct brightness comparison unless the analysis properly accounts for them.

An **image artifact** is a feature caused by preparation, imaging, or processing rather than the cell feature being studied. Dust, bubbles, uneven light, poor focus, and fixation damage can create artifacts. Fluorescence from one channel can also appear in another. Check whether the unexpected feature follows the sample, the imaging channel, or the instrument before explaining it as a biological change.

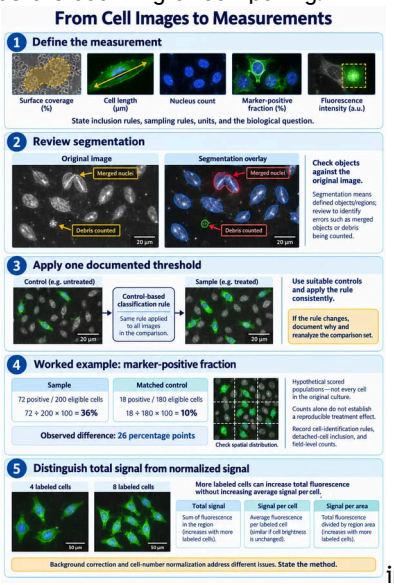
Keep original images unchanged and perform analysis or display adjustments on copies. Apply comparison adjustments consistently, disclose relevant changes, and preserve the steps used. Do not erase inconvenient cells, paste features between samples, or selectively alter a region to strengthen a result. A presentation image should remain traceable to its original data.

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11.12: Turning Images into Measurements

Define the measurement before counting or comparing.



Possible measurements include percent surface coverage, cell length, nucleus number, marker-positive fraction, and fluorescence intensity within a selected region. Each needs inclusion rules, sampling rules, units, and a clear relationship to the biological question.

Segmentation is the separation of image features into defined objects or regions for analysis. Software may identify nuclei by brightness or cell outlines by contrast. Review the result against the original image. Two touching nuclei may be merged into one object, while debris may be counted as a nucleus. A numerical output is not automatically a correct count.

A **threshold** is a cutoff used to classify pixels or objects. For marker scoring, select and document the rule using suitable controls, then apply it consistently. Changing a threshold separately for each treatment can manufacture differences. If the rule needs revision, record the reason and reanalyze the comparison set appropriately.

Worked Example: Reporting a Marker-Positive Fraction

A hypothetical sample contains 200 eligible cells across predefined fields. Using one control-based classification rule, 72 cells are marker-positive. The positive fraction is 72 ÷ 200 × 100 = 36%. This describes the scored population under that rule, not every cell in the original culture.

A matched control sample has 18 positive cells among 180 eligible cells: 18 ÷ 180 × 100 = 10%. The observed difference is 26 percentage points. These values alone do not establish that the treatment caused a reproducible change. Independent experimental units, control performance, sampling, and variability still matter.

Specify how cells were identified and whether detached cells were included. Also preserve field-level counts. If one field contains almost all positive cells, the spatial distribution deserves attention even when the pooled fraction is mathematically correct.

For fluorescence intensity, distinguish total signal from signal per cell or per area. A field containing twice as many labeled cells can have more total fluorescence without an increase in average cellular expression. Background correction and cell-number normalization address different issues; neither should be applied without a stated method.

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11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence

Cell authentication checks a population's claimed identity using suitable methods and references. Morphology and markers help describe cells, but they cannot fully establish human cell-line identity. **Short tandem repeat (STR) profiling** compares selected repeated DNA regions to create a genetic profile for that purpose.

The appropriate identity method depends on species, source, and purpose. Primary donor material also needs records connecting it to its source. An identity test does not establish contamination status, and a negative contamination test does not establish identity. These questions require complementary evidence.

A characterization plan can combine identity, contamination results, viable counts, growth history, morphology, selected markers, and a functional assay. The chosen measurements should support the intended use. A population intended for a scratch assay needs suitable attachment and growth conditions in addition to a correct cell name.

Use a time course when a changing cell state matters. A single fixed image is a snapshot. Multiple independently prepared samples collected at defined times can describe a trend, while live imaging can follow selected cells if environmental and illumination effects are controlled. Explain whether the same cells or separate samples were observed.

A sound conclusion stays within the evidence. "The treated sample had a higher marker-positive fraction under the defined scoring rule" is narrower than "the cells became a new cell type." Stronger claims need appropriate identity, marker-panel, growth, or functional evidence. Microscopy is most useful when its visible detail is connected to a well-designed measurement plan.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

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"What are tandem repeats in DNA" Biologyexams4u https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVRcsw_SPT4 Standard YouTube License No changes made

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11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record

Connect every image to the source culture, vessel or well, sample preparation, and acquisition conditions. Use stable sample IDs and file names that distinguish treatment, time, field, and channel. Avoid relying on a folder name or a hand-written note that can become separated from the image.

Record cell identity and passage, treatment and timing, sample state, stain or antibody details, microscope ID, objective and NA, channel or filter, exposure, and calibration. Include field-selection rules, operator, analysis method, and any excluded image with its reason. Preserve links to culture counts and quality results when they affect interpretation.

An image caption should say what is shown and how it was obtained. For example: “Fixed NHDF culture at the recorded time after seeding; nuclear counterstain and target-protein channel shown separately; images collected with matched acquisition settings; scale bar based on the recorded calibration.” Add actual sample values when preparing the final figure rather than leaving the caption generic.

If an unexpected result appears, revisit the chain from source culture to final analysis. Check sample identity, preparation, controls, acquisition settings, calibration, and scoring. A bright image with missing metadata can be difficult to interpret. A modest image with a complete record can provide useful, repeatable evidence.

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11.15: Chapter Summary

Microscopy supports observation and measurement when the method fits the question. Magnification, resolution, and contrast describe different image properties. Cell appearance should be described separately from the explanation proposed for it.

Stains and fluorescent labels reveal selected features. Fixation, antibody binding, background, exposure, and image processing can affect the signal. Use suitable controls and comparable settings. Select fields using a stated plan so attractive or unusual regions do not dominate the result.

Calibrate images before reporting physical dimensions. Retain original files and record sample preparation, acquisition, and analysis choices. A marker-positive cell, expected shape, or bright image does not establish every aspect of cell identity, health, or function. Combine relevant evidence to support the claim.

Key Terms

Cell characterization	Magnification	resolution	contrast
Numerical aperture	Field of view	working distance	Phase contrast
Fluorophore	fluorescence microscopy	Morphology	confluence
Sampling bias	blinded analysis	Fixation	permeabilization
blocking	Immunofluorescence	antigen	Counterstain
Autofluorescence	bleed-through	Image calibration	scale bar
Saturation	photobleaching	phototoxicity	Segmentation
threshold	Cell authentication	STR profiling	

Review Questions

1. Explain why enlarging an image does not necessarily improve its resolution. How does contrast differ from these two properties?

2. Select an imaging method for observing living fibroblast attachment, a colored fixed-cell stain, and the location of a labeled protein. Explain each choice.

3. A phase-contrast image shows a bright ring around each cell. Why should the ring not automatically be interpreted as a cell structure?

4. Write an observation statement and a separate interpretation for a culture with many rounded, detached cells. Name two additional measurements that could help investigate the change.

5. Design a field-selection plan for comparing two adherent cultures. Explain how you would handle edge effects and excluded images.

6. Why are six fields from one treated well not equivalent to six independently treated wells?

7. Compare the questions answered by a membrane-integrity stain, a nuclear counterstain, and a target-protein antibody.

8. Explain how fixation or permeabilization could produce a difference between samples even if their original target expression was similar.

9. What does a secondary-only control reveal? What does it leave unresolved about primary-antibody specificity?

10. A 200 µm reference distance spans 800 pixels. Calculate µm/pixel, the length of a 140-pixel feature, and the pixel length required for a 25 µm scale bar.

11. A sample has 45 positive cells among 150 eligible cells. A control has 12 among 120. Calculate each percentage and their difference in percentage points. Identify two limits on interpretation.

12. Explain how exposure time, saturation, cell number, and photobleaching can affect a fluorescence comparison.

13. A culture has expected fibroblast morphology and one positive marker. Why is this insufficient to establish its identity and intended function?

14. List the source, preparation, acquisition, and analysis information needed to interpret a microscope image collected by another student.

Apply Your Understanding

Two groups image the same labeled cells using different exposure times. One reports a stronger treatment signal. Explain the comparison problem and propose a fair imaging plan.

A 200 µm reference spans 800 pixels. Calculate µm per pixel and the length of a cell feature spanning 140 pixels. Explain how calibration supports the result.

A student selects only the most crowded fields in a treated well. Predict how this choice could affect the result and design a field-selection plan.

NHDF cells look rounded and detached after treatment. Write an observation and a separate interpretation. Choose two additional measurements to investigate the change.

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12: PLASMID DNA AND RNA TRANSFECTION

DNA stores genetic information that cells use to produce RNA and proteins. During **transcription**, a cell uses a DNA sequence as a template to make RNA. During **translation**, it uses the instructions in **messenger RNA**, or **mRNA**, to build a protein. Together, these processes help explain **gene expression**, the use of genetic information to produce a functional RNA or protein.

Introducing DNA or RNA into cells allows scientists to study gene expression and cell behavior. **Plasmid DNA** can carry a gene that is transcribed into RNA and, if it encodes a protein, translated into protein. Delivered mRNA can serve directly as a template for protein production once it reaches the cytoplasm. **Small interfering RNA**, or **siRNA**, can guide cellular machinery to reduce a selected RNA message. These materials act at different steps, so their delivery requirements and expected effects differ.

Delivery alone does not establish that the material reached the required location or produced the intended change. Scientists must evaluate delivery, changes in the target RNA or protein, and effects on cell health and function using appropriate measurements and controls.

This chapter explains delivery methods, controls, preparation calculations, and performance checks. Examples include **knockdown**, a reduction in target gene expression, of **hTERT**, the gene encoding the catalytic component of telomerase, and increased expression of **NAMPT**, an enzyme involved in a pathway that helps cells replenish NAD. These examples show why a molecular change and its effect on cell behavior require separate evidence.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Compare plasmid DNA, messenger RNA, and small interfering RNA as tools for changing gene expression.
  2. Explain why successful delivery does not automatically establish expression, knockdown, or a functional effect.
  3. Select matched controls for plasmid, mRNA, and siRNA experiments.
  4. Calculate nucleic-acid amounts, final concentrations, and preparation allowances with correct units.
  5. Evaluate transfection efficiency together with viable-cell recovery and target-specific measurements.
  6. Explain how culture condition, reagent choice, timing, and documentation affect reproducibility.

12.1: Changing What Cells Make

12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid

12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes

12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message

12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method

12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents

12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions

12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration

12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning

12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health

12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment

12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment

12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
12.14: Chapter Summary

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12.1: Changing What Cells Make

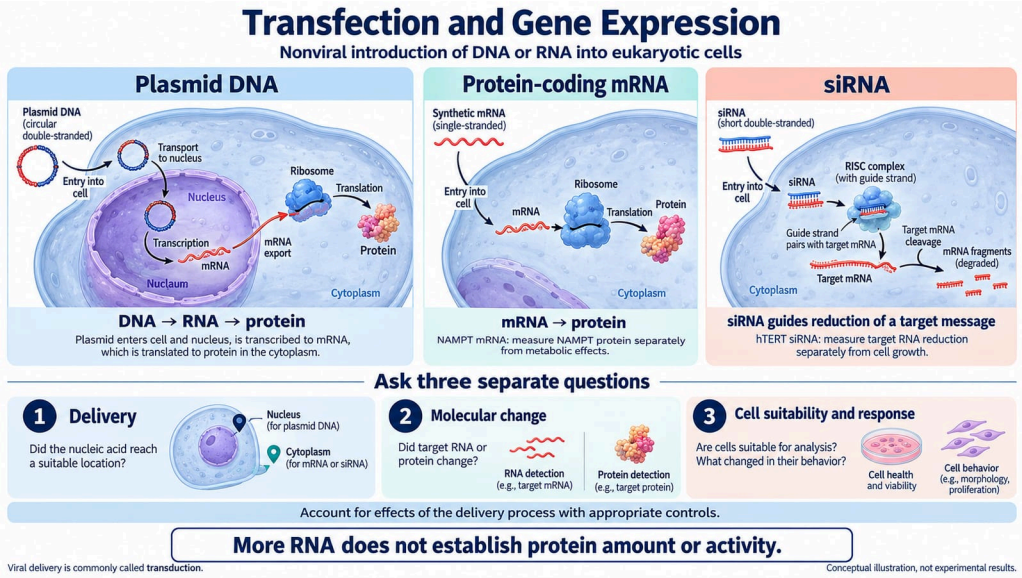
Cell culture makes it possible to ask how a selected gene or protein affects cell behavior. One approach supplies genetic instructions for making a protein. Another reduces the amount of an existing message. These approaches can support studies of growth, metabolism, signaling, and responses to treatment.

Transfection is the introduction of nucleic acids into eukaryotic cells by a nonviral method. The introduced material may be DNA or RNA. In this chapter, the main examples are plasmid expression, delivery of protein-coding **mRNA**, and **siRNA**-mediated reduction of a target message. Viral delivery is commonly called transduction and requires its own methods and assessment.

Gene expression is the use of genetic information to produce RNA and, for protein-coding genes, protein. **Transcription** makes RNA from a DNA template. **Translation** uses mRNA instructions to build protein. The steps are related, but they are not interchangeable measurements. Finding more RNA does not establish how much protein was made or how active that protein is.

Before beginning, state the experimental question. “Does supplying NAMPT mRNA increase NAMPT protein?” is different from “Does it change a metabolic measurement?” Likewise, “Does an hTERT siRNA reduce its target RNA?” is different from “Does it change cell growth?” Define the immediate target measurement and any later biological outcome separately.

A useful experiment asks whether the intended nucleic acid reached a suitable cellular location, whether it produced the intended molecular change, and whether the cells remained suitable for analysis. Each question needs evidence. Strong results connect these stages while accounting for the delivery process itself.



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12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid

Plasmid DNA is a usually circular DNA molecule that can carry a selected gene and supporting sequences. A mammalian expression plasmid must contain elements that allow the receiving cell to express the intended sequence. A **promoter** is a DNA region that helps direct transcription. The promoter must work in the experimental system.

For ordinary mammalian plasmid expression, DNA needs access to the nucleus so it can be transcribed. The resulting mRNA is then translated in the cytoplasm. Delivery across the cell membrane is only one barrier. DNA that enters a cell but does not become available for transcription may produce little or no protein.

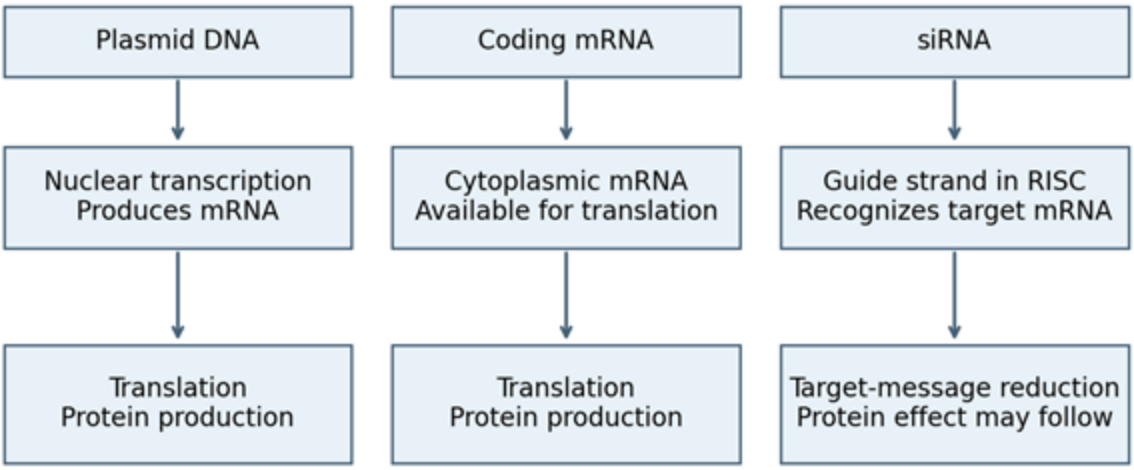
Messenger RNA (mRNA) is an RNA molecule that carries instructions for making a protein. Introduced protein-coding mRNA can be translated after reaching the cytoplasm, without first undergoing transcription from a plasmid. Its preparation must support useful translation and stability.

A **5′ cap** is a chemical structure at the beginning of many mature mRNAs. A **poly(A) tail** is a chain of adenine-containing nucleotides at the other end. Both can support stability and translation. Cap structure, tail design, purity, and other RNA properties affect performance. Two preparations with the same protein-coding sequence may therefore behave differently.

Small interfering RNA (siRNA) is a short RNA duplex used to reduce expression of a matching target RNA. It is commonly about 21 nucleotides long, though designs vary. It does not serve as an ordinary template for making the target protein. Its purpose is to guide an RNA-silencing process.

Cargo	Main intended use	Key requirement
Expression plasmid	Produce a selected protein	Nuclear access and suitable expression elements
Protein-coding mRNA	Provide a translation template	Intact functional RNA in the cytoplasm
siRNA	Reduce a matching target message	Sequence match and effective silencing machinery

The nucleic-acid type changes the experiment's logic. Plasmid DNA and protein-coding mRNA can support increased production of a selected protein. siRNA aims to reduce a selected message. These are intended effects, not outcomes guaranteed by adding the reagent.



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12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes

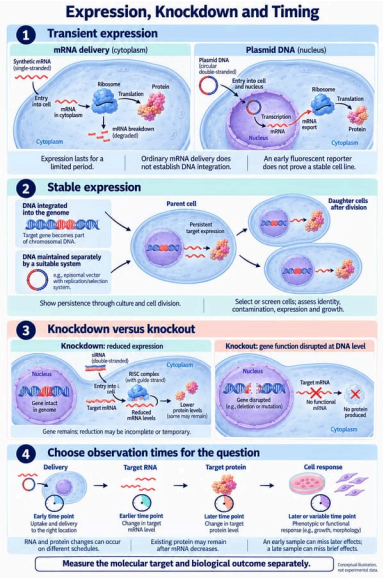
Transient expression is expression that lasts for a limited period after delivery. Introduced mRNA is gradually degraded, and the resulting protein also has its own lifetime. Ordinary mRNA delivery does not establish incorporation of the sequence into the cell's DNA. A temporary rise in protein should be interpreted within the measurement interval.

Plasmid expression can also be transient. DNA may be lost, degraded, or diluted as cells divide. A fluorescent **reporter** observed shortly after plasmid transfection does not show that a stable cell line has been created. Do not describe plasmid delivery alone as genomic integration.

Stable expression continues through culture and cell division under the defined system. Introduced DNA may become part of the cell's DNA, or a suitable system may maintain it separately. Establishing stable expression requires selecting or screening cells and showing that expression persists. The population still needs checks of identity, contamination, expression, and growth suited to its use.

Knockdown is a reduction in gene expression. It differs from a **knockout**, which disrupts or removes gene function at the DNA level. siRNA-mediated knockdown usually leaves the gene itself present. The reduction can be incomplete and temporary, and existing protein may remain after its mRNA decreases.

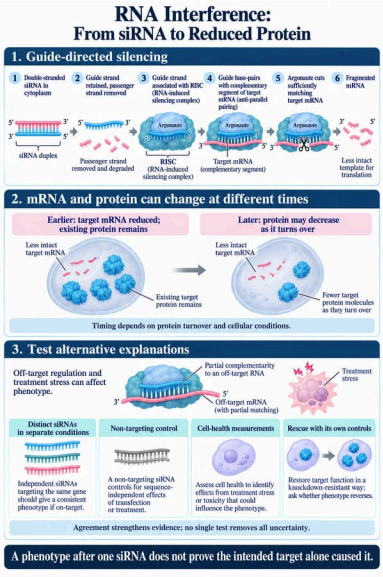
Timing therefore matters at several levels. Delivery, RNA abundance, protein abundance, and cellular responses may change on different schedules. A single early sample can miss a later protein change. A late sample can miss a short RNA effect. Choose observation times from the biological question and available evidence rather than assuming one interval fits every cargo.



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12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message



RNA interference (RNAi) is a process in which small RNAs guide regulation of other RNAs. After an siRNA enters a suitable intracellular location, one strand can act as the **guide strand**, which recognizes a complementary sequence in a target message.

The guide associates with the **RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC)**. This protein complex uses small RNA to recognize a target RNA. An **Argonaute** protein can cut a sufficiently matching target mRNA. Losing intact message leaves less template for translation.

The amount of protein may fall later because protein already present must be lost or degraded. The delay depends on protein turnover and other cellular conditions. Strong mRNA reduction with little immediate protein change is therefore possible. It should prompt consideration of timing, not an automatic conclusion that one assay must be wrong.

An **off-target effect** is an unintended change caused by the treatment, such as regulation of another RNA. Partial sequence matches and treatment-related stress can complicate interpretation. A phenotype after one siRNA treatment does not prove that the intended target alone caused it.

Testing distinct siRNAs against the same target in separate conditions can strengthen the evidence when their molecular and functional results agree. A non-targeting control and cell-health measurements remain necessary. A more advanced **rescue experiment** restores target function in a way designed to resist the knockdown and asks whether the phenotype is reversed. Rescue also requires its own controls and does not eliminate every possible uncertainty.

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12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method

Nucleic acids are large, charged molecules that do not readily cross an intact cell membrane on their own. **Lipid-mediated transfection**, often called **lipofection**, uses lipid-containing reagents to help deliver them. A **nucleic-acid complex** is a preparation in which the cargo is associated with its delivery reagent.

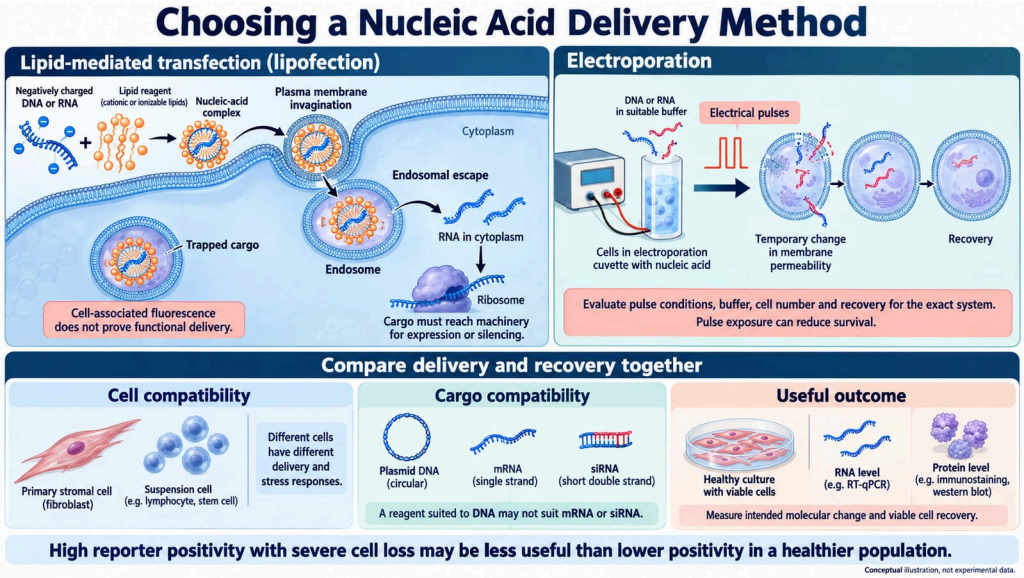
Many lipid formulations help cells take up cargo through membrane trafficking pathways. An **endosome** is a membrane-bound compartment formed during uptake. Cargo trapped there may not reach the machinery for expression or silencing. **Endosomal escape** releases it into a useful location inside the cell.

Seeing a fluorescently labeled RNA inside the outline of a cell is evidence of cell-associated signal, but it does not necessarily show effective cytoplasmic delivery. The label can remain in compartments or be associated with degraded material. Functional delivery needs an expression or silencing measurement suited to the cargo.

Electroporation uses electrical pulses to promote nucleic-acid delivery by temporarily changing membrane permeability. It can be useful for some cells that respond poorly to lipid reagents, but the pulse conditions, buffer, cell number, and recovery method require evaluation for the exact system. Pulse exposure can reduce survival.

No delivery method is best for every cell. Primary stromal cells, fibroblasts, and suspension cell lines can differ in delivery and stress responses. A method optimized in one population does not automatically transfer to another. Likewise, a reagent suited to plasmid DNA may not be suitable for protein-coding mRNA or siRNA.

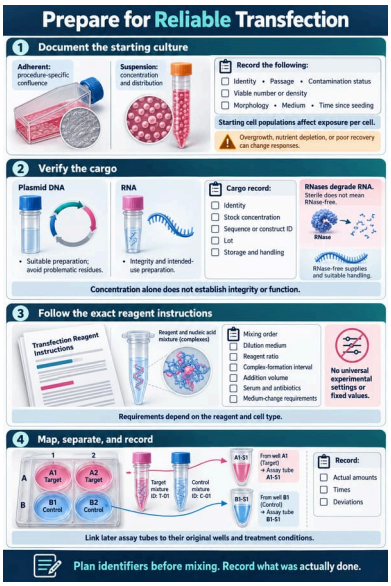
Choose a method compatible with the cells, cargo, assay, and equipment. Compare useful molecular change and cell recovery together. High reporter positivity accompanied by severe cell loss may be less useful than a slightly lower positive fraction in a healthier population.



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12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents



Start with a documented culture that meets identity, passage, and contamination requirements. Record viable cell number or density, morphology, medium, and time since seeding. For adherent cultures, the required confluence at delivery depends on the selected procedure. For suspension cultures, a suitable concentration and distribution are more relevant than surface coverage.

A culture that is overgrown, nutrient-depleted, or recovering poorly after thawing can respond differently from a healthy growing culture. Equal reagent amounts do not produce equal exposure per cell when the cell populations differ. Record the starting state so changes in delivery can be interpreted.

Verify cargo identity, stock concentration, sequence or construct ID, lot, storage, and handling history. Plasmid quality includes suitability for mammalian delivery and the absence of problematic preparation residues. RNA quality includes integrity and appropriate preparation for the intended use. A concentration measurement alone does not prove that the material is intact or functional.

Ribonucleases (RNases) are enzymes that degrade RNA. Use suitable **RNase**-free supplies, clean handling, and the reagent's storage instructions. Protecting RNA from degradation is different from preventing microbial contamination: both are needed. Sterile technique alone does not establish that a reagent or surface is RNase-free.

Follow the exact delivery-reagent instructions for mixing order, dilution medium, reagent ratio, complex-formation interval, and addition volume. Also verify serum, antibiotic, and medium-change requirements. Do not impose a universal serum-free exposure, PBS wash, or six-hour medium change on every reagent and cell type.

Prepare a plate map and sample identifiers before mixing. Keep target and control preparations separate. Document actual amounts and times, including any deviation from the plan. A transfection record should make it possible to connect later assay tubes to their original wells and treatment conditions.

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12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions

An **untreated control** receives routine culture handling without the transfection treatment. It shows the starting comparison condition but does not isolate the effects of the delivery reagent or cargo. A **reagent-only control** receives the delivery reagent without nucleic acid under the defined preparation conditions.

The phrase **mock transfection** can mean different things in different laboratories. Define what the mock sample receives rather than relying on the name. Record dilution medium, reagent amount, handling, and final volume. A control that differs in several unrecorded ways is difficult to interpret.

Condition	Main comparison question	What it cannot establish alone
Untreated cells	What is the culture baseline?	Effects of reagent or cargo separately
Reagent only	Does delivery reagent affect cells?	Target sequence specificity
Matched cargo control	Does target treatment differ from control cargo?	Absence of every unintended effect
Positive delivery control	Can delivery and its readout work?	Success of a different experimental cargo
Distinct target siRNAs	Do separate targeting sequences agree?	Complete exclusion of unintended effects

An **empty-vector control** is a plasmid comparison lacking the experimental insert, ideally with a comparable backbone. It helps assess effects related to the plasmid and delivery context. Differences in size, sequence, expression burden, or formulation can still matter, so describe how the comparison is matched.

A **control mRNA** is an mRNA selected to evaluate the delivery and RNA-treatment context without encoding the experimental protein. It should be appropriate to the comparison and does not necessarily have no biological effects. A reporter mRNA may help assess expression, while a different matched control may be needed for interpreting a functional endpoint.

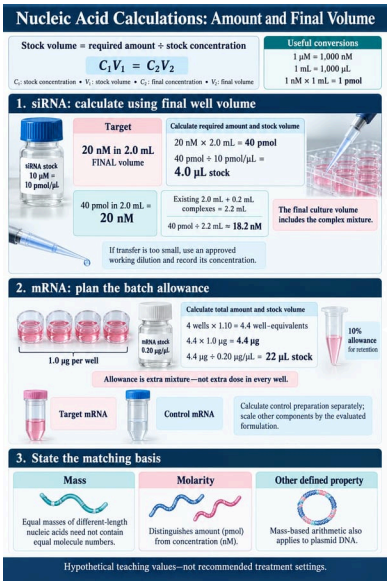
A **non-targeting siRNA** is designed not to silence the intended target. Use suitable chemistry and a matching amount. Check its behavior in the actual cells; a scrambled sequence is not automatically harmless. A **positive-control siRNA** produces a known reduction in a suitable expressed gene. It helps evaluate delivery and measurement.

The controls answer complementary questions. If both target and non-targeting siRNA reduce viable cell recovery, a target-specific interpretation of cell loss is weak. If the positive control works but the experimental target does not decrease, check target expression, sequence match, timing, and target assay performance.

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12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration

Use the final culture volume when calculating exposure. The volume of the complex preparation



is only one part of that volume. Keep mass-based amounts, such as micrograms of DNA, separate from molar concentrations, such as nanomolar siRNA.

Stock volume needed = required amount ÷ stock concentration

For molar dilution: $C_1 \times V_1 = C_2 \times V_2$

Here C_1 and V_1 describe the stock concentration and stock volume; C_2 and V_2 describe the desired final concentration and final volume. Use compatible units. One micromolar equals 1,000 nanomolar, and one milliliter equals 1,000 microliters.

A useful relationship for small RNA calculations is: 1 nM × 1 mL = 1 pmol. A picomole is an amount of substance; nanomolar is an amount per volume. The same number of picomoles gives a different concentration when the final well volume changes.

Worked Example 12.1 Calculating an siRNA Addition

A hypothetical plan calls for a final siRNA concentration of 20 nM in a final well volume of 2.0 mL. The stock is 10 µM. These are calculation values, not recommended treatment settings.

Required amount = 20 nM × 2.0 mL = 40 pmol

Stock concentration = 10 µM = 10 pmol/µL

Stock volume = 40 pmol ÷ 10 pmol/µL = 4.0 µL

The final 2.0 mL includes the added complex mixture. If 0.2 mL of complexes is added to an existing 2.0 mL culture without removing liquid, the final volume is 2.2 mL. The same 40 pmol then gives 40 ÷ 2.2 = 18.2 nM. Record the actual volume rather than reporting the planned concentration automatically.

If the calculated transfer is too small for the available pipette, an approved working dilution may improve measurement. Calculate and record the new stock concentration. Changing stock dilution does not change the intended final amount if the correct amount is delivered.

Worked Example 12.2 Preparing an mRNA Batch

A hypothetical treatment requires 1.0 µg mRNA per well for four wells. The preparation plan includes a 10% allowance for liquid retained in tubes and tips. The mRNA stock is 0.20 µg/µL.

Preparation equivalents = 4 wells × 1.10 = 4.4 well-equivalents

mRNA needed = 4.4 × 1.0 µg = 4.4 µg

Stock volume = 4.4 µg ÷ 0.20 µg/µL = 22 µL

Scale the other mixture components according to the evaluated formulation, and dispense the specified amount to each well. The allowance remains extra mixture; it is not extra dose for every well. Prepare the control mRNA separately with its own matched calculations.

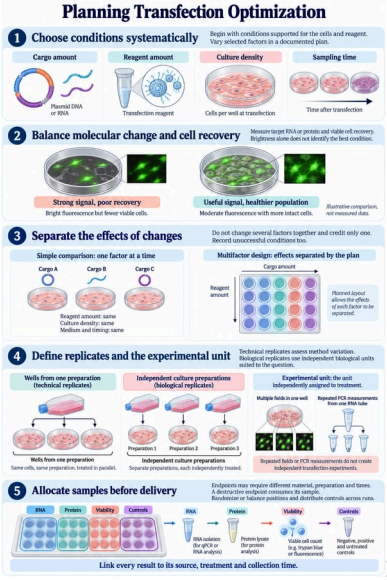
If the plan instead uses plasmid DNA, the same amount-divided-by-concentration arithmetic applies when both values use mass units. Equal masses of different-length nucleic acids do not necessarily contain equal numbers of molecules. Record whether matching is based on mass, molarity, or another defined property.

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12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning

Optimization is the systematic selection of conditions that produce a



useful result. It may evaluate cargo amount, delivery-reagent amount, culture density, or sampling time. Begin with conditions supported for the chosen cells and reagent, then vary selected factors in a documented plan.

Do not judge a condition from brightness alone. Measure the intended molecular change and viable cell recovery. Increasing reagent or cargo can increase signal while also increasing stress or unintended effects. The useful condition balances the study's needs rather than maximizing one number.

Change one factor at a time for a simple comparison, or use a planned multi-factor design that allows the effects to be separated. Avoid changing density, cargo amount, medium, and timing together and then attributing the result to one change. Record all tested conditions, including unsuccessful ones.

Technical replicates repeat measurements or preparation steps to assess variation in the method. **Biological replicates** are independent biological units suited to the question. Several wells from one preparation show differences among wells. Separate culture preparations can reveal differences among preparations. State where samples came from and how they were repeated. Do not assume every repeated well is an independent biological sample.

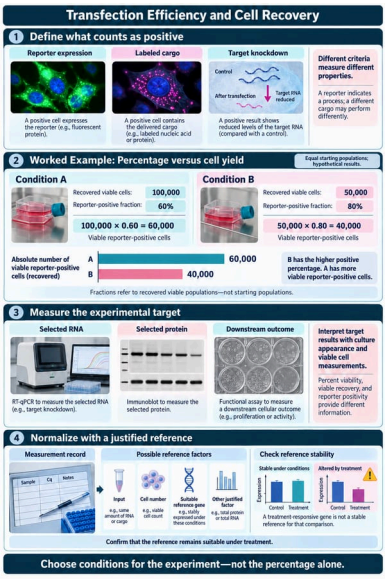
Randomize or balance well positions when practical, and distribute controls across runs. The experimental unit is the unit assigned independently to a treatment. Fields within one well and repeated PCR measurements from one extracted RNA sample do not become independent transfection experiments.

Plan sample collection before delivery. RNA, protein, and viability measurements may need separate material or different preparation methods. If an endpoint consumes the cells, another endpoint cannot simply be added later to the same sample. Allocate wells and define timing so each result remains connected to its source.

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12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health



Transfection efficiency describes the fraction of a defined cell population meeting a stated delivery or expression criterion. Specify how it is measured. Reporter-positive cells, cells containing labeled cargo, and cells showing target knockdown are different measures and should not be treated as interchangeable.

A **reporter** is a measurable product or label used to indicate a biological process. Fluorescent-protein expression from an appropriate plasmid or mRNA can support functional delivery and expression in that reporter system. It does not guarantee that a different cargo performs identically.

Worked Example 12.3 Efficiency and Cell Recovery

Two hypothetical conditions begin with equal populations. After treatment, condition A yields 100,000 viable cells, of which 60% are reporter-positive. Condition B yields 50,000 viable cells, of which 80% are reporter-positive. Assume the reporter-positive fractions describe the recovered viable populations.

Condition A reporter-positive viable cells = 100,000 × 0.60 = 60,000

Condition B reporter-positive viable cells = 50,000 × 0.80 = 40,000

Condition B has the higher positive percentage, while condition A provides more viable reporter-positive cells. The preferred condition depends on the experiment, including whether the surviving cells retain suitable behavior. Percent viability, recovered viable cell number, and reporter positivity each provide different information.

For a target experiment, measure the target directly. RT-qPCR can assess a selected RNA sequence; an immunoblot, immunoassay, or evaluated imaging assay can assess selected protein properties. A functional assay measures a downstream outcome. These results should be interpreted together with culture appearance and viable cell measurements.

Normalization adjusts a measurement using a defined reference. The reference may account for input, cell number, a suitable reference gene, or another justified factor. Check that it remains suitable under the treatments. A gene changed by the treatment cannot serve as a stable reference for that comparison.

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12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment

Human telomerase reverse transcriptase (hTERT) is the catalytic protein component of telomerase, a complex involved in maintaining sequences at chromosome ends. An siRNA directed at hTERT is intended to reduce its message. It does not directly remove telomeres or demonstrate an immediate change in their length.

Confirm that hTERT RNA is measurable in the chosen mesenchymal stromal cells before planning a reduction study. Some primary preparations may have expression too low for reliable analysis. If the cells were engineered to express hTERT, verify that the siRNA matches the expressed sequence. A target name alone does not confirm a sequence match.

Compare target RNA with an appropriate reference and then with the non-targeting control. Detailed RT-qPCR analysis requires checks of assay performance, reference stability, and amplification efficiency. A low or undetectable signal should not be assigned an invented value merely to obtain a percentage.

Worked Example 12.4 Reporting Relative Knockdown

Suppose an evaluated analysis gives normalized hTERT expression of 1.00 in the non-targeting control and 0.30 in the target-siRNA condition. The treated condition has 30% of the control's measured expression.

Relative knockdown = (1 – treated expression ÷ control expression) × 100

Relative knockdown = (1 – 0.30 ÷ 1.00) × 100 = 70%

This is a 70% reduction in the measured normalized RNA value, not proof of a 70% reduction in hTERT protein, telomerase activity, or cell growth. Each of those outcomes needs a suitable separate measurement. Retain replicate data and uncertainty rather than reporting the example arithmetic as exact biological truth.

If two distinct siRNAs reduce target RNA but only one changes growth, investigate differences in protein reduction, toxicity, and unintended effects. If neither reduces RNA while a delivery control works, examine sequence match, baseline expression, collection timing, and assay design. A failed target result can still provide useful information when the controls and records are complete.

YouTube Video

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"Trypsinizing cells" LafayetteChBE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hEUmLz1Ew0Standard YouTube License. No changes made.

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12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment

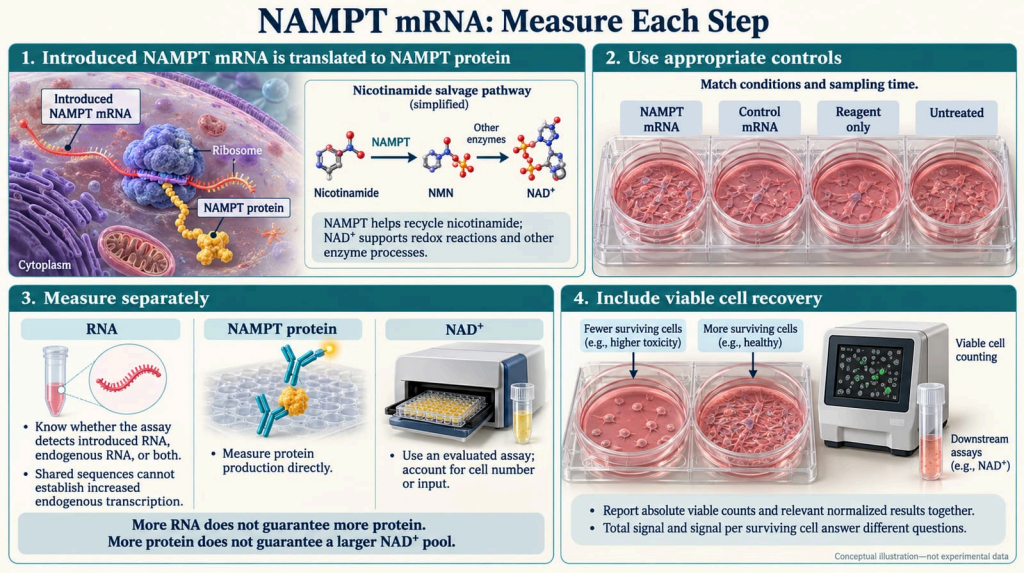
Nicotinamide phosphoribosyltransferase (NAMPT) helps recycle nicotinamide in the **NAD⋄** salvage pathway. **NAD⋄** takes part in cellular redox reactions and other enzyme processes. Adding NAMPT mRNA supplies extra instructions for making NAMPT protein. Whether protein or NAD⋄ increases must be measured separately.

Compare NAMPT mRNA treatment with appropriate control mRNA, reagent-only, and untreated conditions as needed. Record whether the RNA assay detects introduced RNA, endogenous RNA, or both. If their measured sequences are shared, a higher RNA result may include the supplied message and does not establish increased transcription of the cell's own NAMPT gene.

Measure NAMPT protein separately if protein production is the question. If NAD⋄ is an endpoint, measure it with its own evaluated assay and account for relevant differences in cell number or input. A higher RNA result alone does not establish a protein increase, and a protein increase does not guarantee a larger NAD⋄ pool.

A culture with fewer viable cells may produce a lower total assay signal despite a greater signal per surviving cell. Conversely, a high normalized signal can hide poor recovery if only surviving cells are sampled. Present the relevant absolute counts and normalized results together when they answer different parts of the question.

Use conclusions that match the measurements. "NAMPT RNA was higher at the recorded time" is supported by an appropriate RNA comparison. "The cells made more NAMPT protein" requires protein evidence. "The treatment improved cell function" requires a defined functional endpoint and suitable controls. Do not replace missing measurements with assumptions about the pathway.



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12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation

When a result is unexpected, inspect the full chain from culture to assay. Poor signal can arise from degraded cargo, ineffective delivery, inappropriate timing, weak target expression, or assay failure. High signal with poor viability can reflect a dose that is unsuitable for the study. One observation can have several causes.

Compare control patterns before changing conditions. Reagent-only toxicity suggests a delivery-context problem. A working reporter with a failed target construct points toward cargo, expression design, or target detection. A failed positive-control siRNA suggests that target-specific conclusions should wait until delivery and measurement are evaluated.

Preserve cell source, passage, plate map, nucleic-acid identity, stock concentration, reagent lots, actual amounts, final well volume, mixture times, addition times, incubation conditions, and any medium change. Link collection tubes to wells and record elapsed time at sampling. Retain raw counts, viability data, assay data, and analysis rules.

Document deviations and their likely relevance rather than silently correcting the record afterward. An accidental extra volume can change final concentration. An extended mixing delay can affect the preparation. A label uncertainty can compromise sample identity even when assay values look plausible. Resolve such concerns before drawing a treatment conclusion.

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12.14: Chapter Summary

Transfection introduces nucleic acid into cells. Plasmid DNA, mRNA, and siRNA have different roles. Plasmid-based protein production needs transcription and translation; introduced protein-coding mRNA bypasses the transcription step. siRNA helps reduce a target message rather than deleting the gene.

Delivery depends on the cells, reagent, cargo, and conditions. Match controls to the experiment and calculate amounts from final volume. Reporter positivity, viable cell recovery, target RNA, and target protein measure different outcomes. A high positive fraction can still occur when many cells have been lost.

Interpret hTERT knockdown and NAMPT expression using the right sampling times and assays. An assay may detect introduced and cell-made RNA together. RNA and protein can change at different rates. Keep treatment records linked to later measurements and avoid claiming a mechanism from one signal.

Key Terms

Transfection	Gene expression	transcription	translation
Plasmid	promoter	mRNA	siRNA
Transient expression	stable expression	Knockdown	knockout
RISC	guide strand	Off-target effect	rescue experiment
Lipofection	electroporation	endosomal escape	RNase
Empty-vector control	non-targeting siRNA	Reporter	transfection efficiency
Normalization	hTERT	NAMPT	NAD⁺

Review Questions

1. Trace the steps from plasmid DNA delivery to protein production. Which steps are bypassed by introducing protein-coding mRNA?

2. Explain how siRNA differs from mRNA and why knockdown differs from knockout.

3. Why does a fluorescently labeled RNA inside a cell outline not necessarily demonstrate functional delivery?

4. Explain why a transient reporter signal does not establish a stable cell line or genomic integration.

5. Design a control set for an hTERT siRNA experiment. State which question each control helps answer.

6. Design a control set for a NAMPT mRNA experiment. Explain why reagent-only and control-mRNA conditions are different.

7. Calculate the volume of a 10 µM siRNA stock needed for 25 nM in a final 1.0 mL well. How would the concentration change if

the same amount were placed in 2.0 mL?

8. A plan needs 0.8 µg mRNA per well for six wells plus a 10% preparation allowance. The stock is 0.16 µg/µL. Calculate the total amount and stock volume, and explain how the allowance is used.

9. A condition yields 80,000 viable cells with 50% reporter positivity. Another yields 40,000 with 90% positivity. Calculate viable reporter-positive cells and explain why the higher percentage is not the whole result.

10. Normalized target expression is 0.45 relative to a control value of 1.00. Calculate the relative knockdown and state what the calculation does not establish.

11. Why can target protein remain after its mRNA falls? How should that possibility affect sampling times?

12. Two siRNAs reduce target RNA, but only one changes the functional endpoint. Identify three explanations to investigate.

13. A NAMPT RNA assay measures a sequence shared by introduced and endogenous RNA. What can and cannot be concluded from a higher signal after delivery?

14. Explain how cell loss and a changing reference measurement can each distort a normalized result.

15. Identify the records needed to reconstruct a transfection treatment and connect it to a later RNA or protein result.

Apply Your Understanding

An hTERT siRNA treatment lowers target RNA but also reduces viable cell number. Identify the comparisons needed to distinguish a target-related effect from delivery-reagent stress.

Calculate the volume of a 10 µM siRNA stock required for 25 nM in a final 1.0 mL well. State why the final volume must include all additions.

Condition A gives 80,000 viable cells with 50% reporter positivity. Condition B gives 40,000 viable cells with 90% positivity. Calculate the positive viable yield in each and compare them.

NAMPT RNA increases but detected protein does not at the same time. Propose two explanations and a follow-up measurement that could help distinguish them.

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13: EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN, CYTOTOXICITY, AND FUNCTIONAL ASSAYS

A treated culture produces less ATP than its control, yet most cells still exclude a viability dye. In another experiment, a gap in a fibroblast monolayer closes faster after treatment. Neither observation explains its own cause. The first could reflect fewer cells, altered metabolism, or cell death. The second could reflect movement, division, or both. A useful experiment connects a clear question to appropriate controls and a measurement that can answer that question.

This chapter explains how to plan treatment comparisons, interpret cell-health measurements, examine concentration-response curves, count colonies, and measure scratch closure. All numerical examples and figures are hypothetical teaching examples, not measured effects of resveratrol or any other treatment.

13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome

13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations

13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time

13.4: Replication and Plate Layout

13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity

13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal

13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}

13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival

13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure

13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion

13.11: Chapter Summary

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13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome

Experimental design connects a question to a comparison and a measurement. Begin with a question narrow enough to answer. “Does this compound improve cells?” is too broad. A clearer question asks whether resveratrol changes NAD⁺ per well in specified mesenchymal stromal cells after a defined exposure. This identifies the model, treatment, outcome, and time. Cell-health measurements are still needed to interpret a difference.

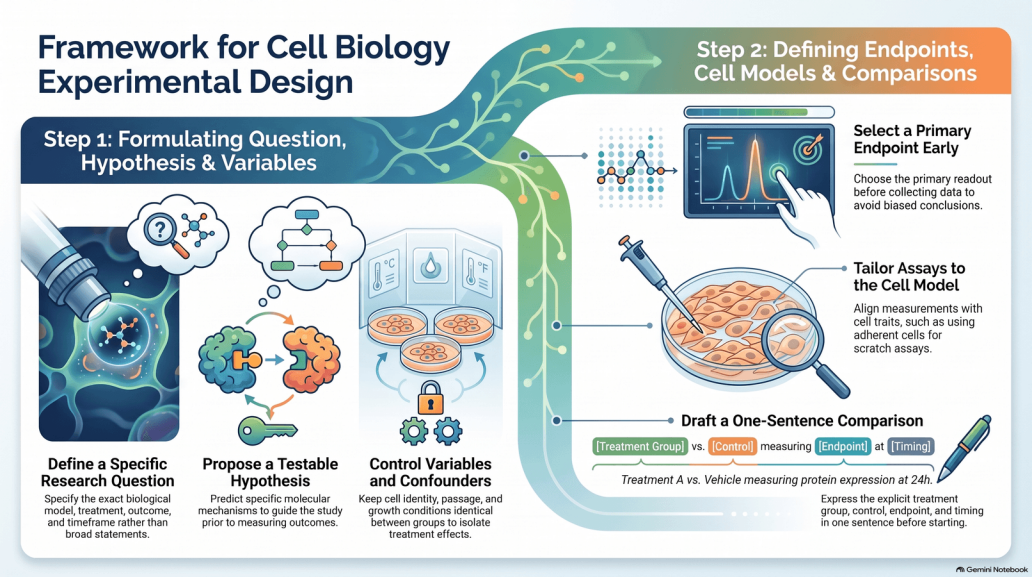
A **hypothesis** is a testable proposed explanation or prediction. For example, an investigator might predict that resveratrol treatment increases NAMPT protein and that the change contributes to an altered NAD⁺ level. The prediction guides the study; it does not become a result until measurements support it. A valid experiment can produce no detectable change or a change opposite to the prediction.

The **independent variable** is the factor deliberately changed, such as treatment concentration. A **dependent variable** is the outcome measured. A **controlled variable** is kept as similar as possible between groups. Cell identity, passage, starting density, medium, volume, and exposure time often need control. A **confounder** changes along with the treatment and provides another possible cause of the result.

Define the **endpoint**, the particular measurement used to judge the outcome. Cell count, relative ATP signal, colony number, and percent gap closure are different endpoints. Select a primary endpoint before looking at the results. Additional endpoints can help explain it, but choosing whichever measurement appears most favorable after collecting data can distort the conclusion.

The cell model also limits the question. Normal human dermal fibroblasts, or NHDFs, provide an adherent monolayer for scratch measurements. THP-1 cells grow in suspension unless placed in a defined differentiation state; a **scratch assay** is not directly transferable to an untreated suspension. Mesenchymal stromal cells, or MSCs, may differ across donors and passages. Describe the actual model rather than treating all human cells as interchangeable.

Write the planned comparison in one sentence: “At the specified time, compare the endpoint in treatment group X with the same endpoint in matched control Y.” This sentence helps expose missing controls and unclear timing before cultures are used.



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13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations

A **control** is a comparison condition that helps interpret the experimental outcome. Several controls may be needed because different sources of uncertainty require different comparisons.

An untreated culture gives the baseline without an added treatment or solvent. A **vehicle control** receives the solvent or carrier used to deliver the treatment, without the active test compound. Comparing treated cells only with untreated cells leaves open the possibility that the vehicle caused the difference. An untreated group can still be useful for checking whether the vehicle itself changes the endpoint.

A **positive control** receives a condition known to produce a detectable response in the selected assay and model. It checks that the experiment can detect an expected effect. It does not establish the mechanism of the test compound. A **blank** contains the relevant noncell components and measures assay background. Blanks for different treatment matrices may be needed when compounds change the signal in the absence of cells.

For a processed sample, such as an extracellular vesicle preparation, a **preparation control** follows the relevant preparation steps without the intended cell-derived material. It helps identify effects of carrier medium or background components. The appropriate control depends on what was actually collected and processed.

Condition	Main question
Untreated cells	What is the baseline without treatment or vehicle?
Matched vehicle	What does the compound change beyond its carrier?
Positive control	Can the assay detect a known response?
No-cell blank	What background or interference occurs without cells?
Preparation control	Do processing components affect the endpoint?

Keep these comparisons linked to the question. A reagent-only control from a transfection study answers a different question from a DMSO vehicle control in a compound study. A control is useful because of what differs between it and the treatment, not because its label sounds reassuring.

A **factorial design** tests combinations of two or more factors. To examine NAMPT's role in a resveratrol response, compare resveratrol with vehicle under two conditions: non-targeting siRNA and NAMPT-targeting siRNA. This gives four groups. Ask whether reducing NAMPT changes the resveratrol effect. Simply identifying the group with the largest value would not answer that question.

Such a study also needs evidence that knockdown worked and that delivery and cell loss do not explain the outcome. A response that changes after knockdown supports involvement under those conditions; it does not, by itself, prove a complete pathway or exclude unintended siRNA effects. RNA, protein, NAD◈, and cell health remain separate measurements.

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13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time

In culture experiments, a treatment “dose” often means its final concentration in the well. State the units and final volume. A stock concentration without its added volume does not describe what cells received. For a simple dilution, use $C_1V_1 = C_2V_2$, where V_2 is the final treatment volume, including the added stock.

Dimethyl sulfoxide, or DMSO, is a solvent used for many compound stocks. A stock dissolved in DMSO contributes both compound and solvent. When larger stock volumes are added at higher compound concentrations, DMSO exposure also increases unless the design corrects it. Match the final vehicle concentration across the treatment comparisons and confirm that it is suitable for the selected model and endpoint.

Worked example: matching DMSO across a concentration series

Assume a hypothetical 50 mM resveratrol stock in DMSO and a final volume of 2.00 mL per well. The planned compound concentrations are 0, 10, 25, and 50 µM. Convert the stock to 50,000 µM and the final volume to 2,000 µL.

For 25 µM: V_1 = (25 µM × 2,000 µL) ÷ 50,000 µM = 1.00 µL of stock.

The highest concentration requires 2.00 µL of stock. Match all groups to 2.00 µL total DMSO per 2,000 µL final volume. In this example, every group therefore contains 0.10% DMSO by volume.

Final compound	Stock added	Extra DMSO	Medium*
0 µM (vehicle)	0 µL	2.00 µL	1,998 µL
10 µM	0.40 µL	1.60 µL	1,998 µL
25 µM	1.00 µL	1.00 µL	1,998 µL
50 µM	2.00 µL	0 µL	1,998 µL

*Final volume is 2,000 µL in every group. All stock solvent is assumed to be DMSO.

These are calculation examples, not validated resveratrol treatment conditions. A planned 0.40 µL transfer is below the reliable range of many pipettes. Prepare an appropriately scaled treatment mixture or a validated working solution instead of attempting an inaccurate transfer. Recalculate both compound and solvent after any stock change. If solubility or precipitation prevents the planned exposure, revise the preparation before interpreting a response curve.

Exposure time is the interval during which cells experience the treatment. Record the actual start and end times. A 24-hour result and a 72-hour result may differ because cells have different opportunities to divide, recover, or accumulate damage. When wells are processed in sequence, plan the timing so the order does not systematically give one group longer exposure.

Specify whether treatment remains present during the entire assay, is removed before measurement, or is followed by a recovery period. A short pulse followed by several days of growth asks a different question from continuous exposure. Changing medium or washing can also remove detached cells or change the effective treatment duration.

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13.4: Replication and Plate Layout

An **experimental unit** is the smallest unit independently assigned a treatment. In a typical well-based experiment, it is the well. Several image fields from one well are subsamples of that well, and repeated readings of one sample are repeated measurements. They improve measurement precision but do not create additional independent cultures.

A **technical replicate** repeats a measurement or closely related preparation to examine measurement variation. **Biological replication** examines independent biological preparations or sources relevant to the intended conclusion. Separate donors can address donor variation; independent culture runs can address variation across preparations or days. State exactly what was replicated, because these labels alone do not explain the design.

Three treated wells on one plate can be separate treatment units, but all may share the same parent culture, reagent preparation, and incubation history. Repeating the study with independently prepared cultures provides information that one plate cannot supply. If the intended conclusion concerns donor variation, three passages from one donor do not replace three donors.

Randomization assigns treatments by chance to reduce systematic bias. **Blocking** groups units that share a source of variation, such as a plate, donor, or day. Place treatment comparisons and their controls within each block. If treatment is on one plate and control on another, a plate effect becomes another possible explanation.

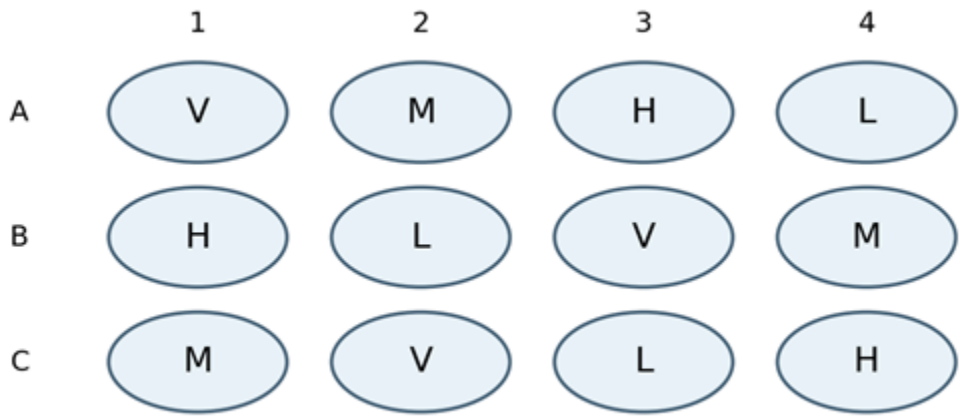


Figure 13.1. Example balanced allocation on a 12-well plate. V is vehicle; L, M, and H are three treatment concentrations. Each condition occurs once in every row. This is an illustrative allocation, not a complete assay plate: blanks and other controls require planned additional wells or plates. Original diagram.

Evaporation, uneven seeding, delayed processing, and plate position can introduce systematic differences. Distribute groups rather than placing all controls on one side and all high-dose wells on the other. Use a model-appropriate plan to evaluate position effects. Record the full map, including blank wells and wells excluded before analysis.

Blinding means that the person measuring or scoring samples does not know the treatment assignment during that task. Coded images reduce the temptation to select especially convincing fields. Choose imaging positions, colony thresholds, and exclusion rules before viewing treatment outcomes. A documented contamination event or failed assay control may justify exclusion; an inconvenient value alone does not.

When multiple fields are measured per well, first summarize them by a stated method to obtain a well-level result. Preserve the individual measurements for checking variation. For three wells with four fields each, the dataset contains twelve field measurements and three well-level units, not twelve independently treated cultures.

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13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity

Cytotoxicity is a harmful effect that causes cell injury or death. **Cytostasis** is reduced cell proliferation without necessarily causing cell death. A treated well can contain fewer cells than its control because cells divided more slowly. The difference is biologically meaningful, but calling it cell killing requires additional evidence.

Viability describes whether cells are alive according to a stated measurement. Dye exclusion tests membrane integrity. Metabolic assays estimate cell health through biochemical activity. **Clonogenic survival** asks whether cells retain the ability to produce colonies. These methods examine different properties and can disagree without any measurement being automatically wrong.

For example, suppose two groups each begin with 20,000 cells. The control reaches 80,000 cells and the treatment reaches 40,000 cells. If both groups remain mostly dye-excluding, the treatment has half as many endpoint cells but has still doubled from its starting number. “The treatment killed half the cells” is not supported by that observation. A time-zero reference helps distinguish reduced accumulation from a decrease below the starting population.

Measurement	Main property measured	Interpretation limit
Direct cell count	Number of recovered or imaged cells	Requires a separate way to identify viable cells
Dye exclusion	Membrane integrity	Does not test long-term reproduction
ATP or reagent conversion	Biochemical activity in the sample	Activity per cell and interference can change
Colony formation	Capacity to form qualifying colonies	Depends on plating and growth conditions
Scratch closure	Change in cell-free gap	Movement, division, and loss can all contribute

ATP assays produce light related to the ATP in a sample. Under validated conditions, this signal can estimate metabolically active cell abundance. However, ATP per cell can change without the same change in live-cell count. Common endpoint ATP assays break open cells. Plan separate wells if later growth or microscopy will also be measured.

Tetrazolium assays, such as MTT or MTS, and resazurin assays rely on biochemical conversion of an assay reagent. Metabolic state, incubation time, and assay conditions affect the response. Verify the useful signal range for the chosen cell density. A saturated reading cannot distinguish two different cell populations.

An **orthogonal assay** uses a different measurement principle to examine the same general question. For example, membrane-integrity staining and a cell count can help interpret a reduced ATP result. Agreement across different methods makes the interpretation stronger; disagreement identifies a question that needs investigation.

An **assay interference** effect occurs when the treatment changes the measurement process rather than the intended biological endpoint. Colored compounds can affect absorbance, fluorescent compounds can affect fluorescence, and treatments can alter reagent chemistry. A no-cell compound control can reveal some interference. Other effects require additional checks, such as adding compound to a defined assay standard.

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13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal

Normalization expresses a measurement relative to a reference

so that a planned comparison is clearer. It should preserve the meaning of the measurement. Background correction comes first when required, followed by division by the appropriate reference. Retain raw values and describe every calculation.

Relative response (%) = [(treatment signal – treatment blank) ÷ (vehicle signal – vehicle blank)] × 100.

Worked example: a relative ATP signal

The vehicle group gives 12,500 light units and its blank gives 500. The treated group gives 9,500 light units with a matched blank of 500. Corrected signals are 12,000 and 9,000.

Relative ATP response = (9,000 ÷ 12,000) × 100 = 75%.

This supports the statement, “ATP signal was 75% of the vehicle-control signal under these conditions.” It does not directly establish that 75% of the cells were alive. Cell counts, membrane integrity, and possible interference help explain why the signal fell. Relative inhibition of this endpoint would be 100% – 75% = 25%; that number still refers to the measured signal.

A treatment can produce a value above 100%. Such a result means the normalized endpoint exceeded the reference, not that more than 100% of cells were alive. A value below zero after background correction may indicate noise, an unsuitable blank, or another measurement problem. Investigate it rather than silently replacing it with zero.

A different calculation applies to direct counts: percent viable = viable cells ÷ total counted cells × 100. A culture with 72 dye-excluding cells among 80 total counted cells has 90% viability by that method. This proportion is distinct from a 75% ATP signal relative to another culture.

Do not normalize away the very effect under study. If the question concerns total NAD◈ per well, report that endpoint clearly. If the question concerns NAD◈ relative to viable cell number, collect an appropriate count and report both quantities. Cell loss can make a total-well measurement fall while the surviving cells show a different per-cell pattern. The denominator is part of the biological question.

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13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}

A **concentration-response curve**, often called a dose-response curve in culture work, plots an endpoint against treatment concentration. A pilot study helps identify a useful concentration range. The main study should include enough concentrations to describe the pattern, including the transition region if a half-response estimate is intended.

Display concentration units and the endpoint on the axes. A logarithmic concentration axis makes equal concentration ratios equally spaced and often clarifies a broad range. Zero concentration cannot be plotted directly on a logarithmic axis; show the vehicle reference separately or identify it in another clear way.

IC_{50} is the concentration associated with 50% inhibition of a defined response. State which definition is used. An absolute IC_{50} refers to 50% on a scale normalized to specified assay controls. A relative IC_{50} refers to the midpoint between the fitted upper and lower plateaus. These values coincide only when the plateaus and normalization allow it.

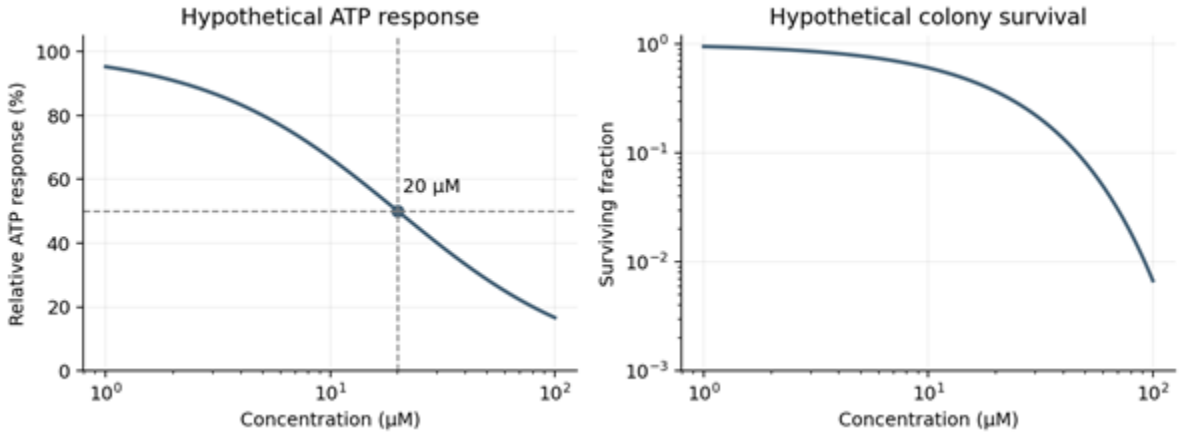


Figure 13.2. Hypothetical concentration-response and clonogenic survival curves. Left: a curve with upper and lower limits of 100% and 0% crosses 50% at 20 µM. Right: plating-efficiency-corrected survival is shown on a logarithmic vertical axis. Lines illustrate teaching models, not measurements or fitted experimental results. Original plots.

Worked example: locating a half-response

Suppose relative ATP responses at 5, 10, 20, 40, and 80 µM are approximately 80%, 67%, 50%, 33%, and 20%. These hypothetical values suggest a half-control ATP response near 20 µM. The statement must include the cell model, exposure time, assay, and normalization. It is an assay-specific estimate, not a universal toxicity threshold or a clinical dose.

A curve that decreases from a fitted 100% upper plateau to a 40% lower plateau has a relative midpoint of 70%. Its relative IC_{50} occurs at that midpoint. The concentration where the response reaches 50% of control, if reached, is different. A curve that remains above 50% of control throughout the tested range does not support a directly observed absolute IC_{50} within that range.

Curve-fitting software estimates parameters from data, often with a sigmoidal model. A plausible-looking curve cannot repair inadequate concentration coverage. Report uncertainty, model choices, and whether the relevant response was bracketed by tested concentrations. Avoid presenting a precise half-response value when the dataset contains only a control and one treatment concentration.

Compare curves only after considering exposure time, cell density, model, medium, and endpoint. A lower IC_{50} in one assay can reflect a stronger effect on that endpoint, but it does not establish selectivity for diseased cells. A nonmonotonic pattern may be real, or it may reflect solubility, interference, or variable cultures. Examine the observations before forcing them into a standard curve.

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13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival

A **clonogenic assay**, or colony-formation assay, tests whether cells can reproduce enough to form colonies during a planned growth period. Cells may remain intact after treatment yet lose this ability. The assay therefore differs from short-term metabolic or membrane-integrity tests. A common colony criterion is at least 50 cells, but the experiment must state its own criterion.

Use a model that forms measurable colonies under the selected conditions. Seed sparsely enough that separate colonies can be distinguished, and allow the planned growth period. Treatment may occur before plating or after cells attach, and may be continuous or followed by recovery. These designs address different exposures, so record the sequence rather than comparing colony numbers without context.

Fixing and staining the endpoint cultures makes colonies easier to see. Each qualifying colony is one counted event. The total intensity of stain across a well measures a different property and is not automatically equivalent to colony number. An image threshold must distinguish colonies from debris and small cell clusters consistently.

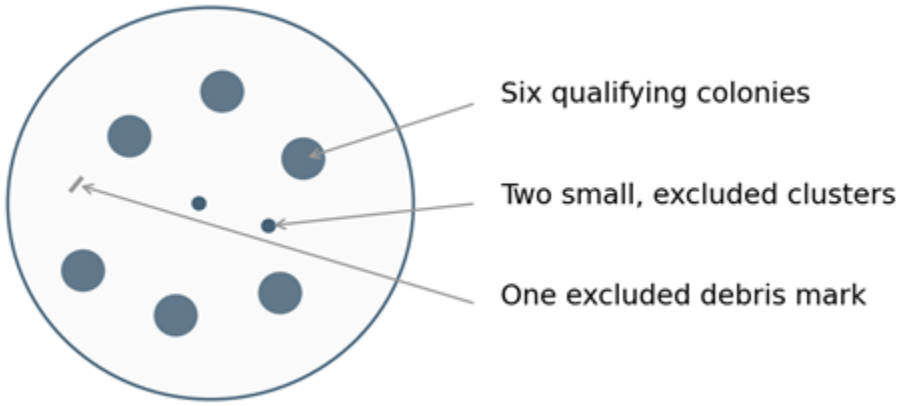


Figure 13.3. Schematic stained culture with six qualifying colonies, two small clusters below the preset criterion, and one debris mark. The six colonies are counted once each. The labels are teaching annotations, not an automated size rule or a microscopic cell count. Original diagram.

The **plating efficiency** is the fraction of seeded control cells that forms colonies. It accounts for the fact that not every control cell produces a qualifying colony. Calculate it as a fraction for use in the survival equation.

Plating efficiency = control colonies ÷ control cells seeded.

Surviving fraction = treatment colonies ÷ (treatment cells seeded × control plating efficiency).

Worked example: correcting colony counts

A matched vehicle control produces 120 colonies from 200 seeded cells. Its plating efficiency is 120 ÷ 200 = 0.60, or 60%. A treatment produces 90 colonies from 500 seeded cells.

Surviving fraction = 90 ÷ (500 × 0.60) = 0.30, or 30%.

After correction for control plating efficiency, the treated cultures showed 30% colony-forming survival. Dividing 90 treatment colonies by 120 control colonies gives 75%, but that ignores the different numbers seeded. Use the recorded cell numbers in the denominator. If only viable recovered cells were replated, the result describes survival among those cells. It does not automatically include cells lost earlier during treatment or recovery.

A survival curve plots surviving fraction against concentration or another exposure variable. A logarithmic vertical axis can reveal large reductions, but zero cannot be plotted directly on that axis. “No colonies observed” is a finite observation at the number of

cells tested, not proof that no cell could ever survive. Report the seeded count and the observation rather than inventing a tiny positive value to fit the graph.

Merged colonies, patchy seeding, and poorly defined staining make counting uncertain. Photograph the entire growth area at a consistent scale, score using a preset rule, and retain the images. If two colonies cannot be separated reliably, do not claim the count is exact. Revise the seeding density or scoring approach in a new planned experiment.

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13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure

A **scratch assay** examines how a cell-free gap changes within an adherent **monolayer**, a single layer of attached cells. NHDFs can move and divide as the gap fills. Although often called a wound-healing assay, this simplified culture lacks many components of a wound in tissue, including blood vessels, immune interactions, and a three-dimensional tissue structure.

Start with healthy cultures of comparable coverage. The initial gap should be measurable and reasonably consistent, but perfect equality is rarely achieved. Image the same positions immediately after gap creation and at the planned later times. Changes in gap area can then be compared with each location's own starting area.

Percent gap closure = [(initial gap area − later gap area) ÷ initial gap area] × 100.

Worked example: comparing two gaps

A vehicle-control field starts at 0.50 mm^2 and later measures 0.30 mm^2. Closure is [(0.50 − 0.30) ÷ 0.50] × 100 = 40%. A treated field starts at 0.60 mm^2 and later measures 0.24 mm^2. Closure is [(0.60 − 0.24) ÷ 0.60] × 100 = 60%.

The treatment field shows 20 percentage points more closure. The difference is 50% relative to the control closure, because (60 − 40) ÷ 40 = 0.50. State which comparison is intended. These two fields are a calculation example; they are not enough to establish a treatment effect across independent wells.

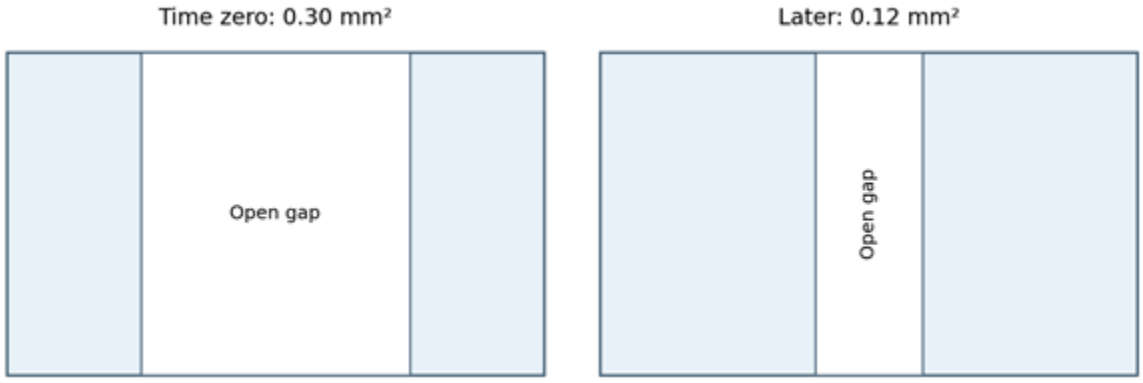


Figure 13.4. Hypothetical matched fields showing initial and later open-gap areas. Each outlined frame is 1.0 mm wide and 0.6 mm high. The open gap falls from 0.30 to 0.12 mm^2, giving 60% closure. Blue regions represent the cell-covered area. Original schematic; not microscopy data.

A narrower gap does not isolate **migration**, the movement of cells. **Proliferation**, an increase in cell number through division, can also fill the gap. Conversely, cell death, detachment, or damage at the edge can widen it. A negative closure value means the measured open area increased; it should trigger inspection rather than automatic deletion.

To study migration more specifically, investigators may use time-lapse tracking, parallel proliferation measurements, or a validated way to limit division. Serum reduction or an antiproliferative treatment can itself alter cell health and movement. Such conditions require model-specific validation and matching controls; they cannot be assumed to remove proliferation without other effects.

Use the same magnification, position, focus, and analysis rule across time points. Area measurement is useful when a gap is irregular. Width measurement may suit a more uniform gap, but use defined positions and a consistent averaging method. Do not combine area and width as though they were the same endpoint. Avoid selecting only fields with especially clear closure after learning the treatment identity.

A useful observation window preserves differences between groups. If all gaps close completely before the first follow-up, the endpoint cannot reveal which closed sooner. Take planned earlier images or use time-lapse data. Summarize fields within wells, compare replicate well values, and report the initial gaps alongside the normalized closure results.

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13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion

A result has three layers: the observation, its biological interpretation, and the proposed mechanism. Keep them connected but distinct. “Relative ATP signal fell to 75%” is an observation. “Treatment reduced metabolically active cell abundance” is an interpretation that needs supporting information. “Treatment blocked a specific signaling pathway” is a mechanistic claim requiring additional experiments.

Consider a hypothetical MSC study in which resveratrol increases NAMPT protein while total NAD⋄ per well falls and viable cell count also falls. The findings do not support a simple claim that more NAMPT necessarily increased NAD⋄. Cell loss, altered metabolism, and other reactions could contribute. Report the outcomes separately, check the measurements, and design the follow-up around the competing explanations.

For a scratch study, a supported conclusion might read: “At the planned time, treated NHDF wells showed greater percent gap closure than matched vehicle wells. The data establish a difference in closure under these conditions. Parallel cell-health and proliferation measurements are needed to determine how much of the difference reflects migration.” Include the replicate results and their variation in the actual report.

Troubleshooting begins with validity. If the positive control fails, blanks are unexpectedly high, or wells are outside the assay’s useful range, the measurement may not answer the question. Separate an invalid experiment from a valid experiment that shows little or no detectable treatment effect. Retain deviations, identify what failed, and revise the next study for a stated reason.

Before beginning, record the question, model, primary endpoint, treatment concentrations, vehicle exposure, timing, plate map, unit of replication, and analysis plan. Afterward, report raw measurements, calculations, control performance, variability, and limitations. This record lets another reader follow how the conclusion arose from the observations.

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13.11: Chapter Summary

A useful experiment asks a focused question and uses a suitable cell model, control, and endpoint. Match solvent exposure and relevant starting conditions. Distinguish independently treated units from repeated readings or fields from the same unit. Cell number, membrane integrity, metabolic signal, colony formation, and scratch closure describe different properties. Correct background as the method requires and state the denominator of each result. An IC_{50} depends on the response measured and the tested conditions. Colony survival uses control plating efficiency; scratch closure can reflect both movement and division. Report what was measured and what the controls allow you to conclude. A treatment can alter cell number, cell activity, or the measurement itself. Choose follow-up measurements that separate likely explanations before making a broader claim.

Key Terms

Experimental design	Hypothesis	Confounder	Endpoint
Vehicle control	Experimental unit	Randomization	Blinding
Cytotoxicity	Cytostasis	Orthogonal assay	IC_{50}
Plating efficiency	Surviving fraction	Scratch assay	

Review Questions

1. Turn “Does this treatment improve cells?” into a question that specifies the model, comparison, endpoint, and exposure time.

2. Explain why untreated cells cannot replace a matched DMSO vehicle control.

3. Using a 50 mM stock, calculate the stock volume needed for 25 µM in a final volume of 2.00 mL. Explain how the vehicle-control composition is determined.

4. A class images five fields from each of four treated wells. How many fields and independently treated wells are present? What additional preparation would address variation between separate runs?

5. Explain how randomization, blocking, and blinding reduce different sources of bias.

6. Cultures begin at 10,000 cells. Controls reach 40,000 and treated wells reach 20,000, with similar dye-exclusion viability. What conclusion is supported? What claim is not established?

7. Vehicle, treatment, and matched blank signals are 8,400, 6,400, and 400 units. Calculate relative treatment response. State exactly what the result means.

8. Why might ATP signal and direct live-cell count disagree? Propose a measurement that tests a different cell property.

9. A fitted curve has an upper plateau of 100% and a lower plateau of 30%. What response lies at the relative midpoint? Why is that midpoint different from 50% of control?

10. Every tested concentration gives more than 70% of the control signal. Can a measured absolute IC_{50} be reported within that range? Explain.

11. Controls produce 80 colonies from 200 seeded cells. Treatment produces 60 colonies from 500 seeded cells. Calculate plating efficiency and surviving fraction.

12. Why does staining intensity across an entire well differ from counting qualifying colonies? How would merged colonies affect the count?

13. A gap decreases from 0.80 to 0.32 mm^2. Calculate percent closure. Explain why the result does not measure migration alone.

14. A treated group closes its gaps faster but also has a higher proliferation rate. Design one follow-up comparison to help distinguish movement from division.

15. Write a cautious conclusion for a treatment that increases NAMPT protein but reduces viable cell count and total NAD⋄ per well. Identify one additional measurement that would clarify the result.

Apply Your Understanding

A treatment lowers ATP signal while dye-exclusion viability remains high. Propose two explanations and select a second type of measurement to investigate them.

A vehicle gives 8,400 signal units, a treatment gives 6,400, and the matched blank gives 400. Calculate the background-corrected relative treatment response and describe what it measures.

Control wells produce 80 colonies from 200 seeded cells. Treated wells produce 60 from 500 seeded cells. Calculate plating efficiency and surviving fraction. Explain why raw colony counts are insufficient.

An NHDF gap decreases from 0.80 to 0.32 mm^2. Calculate percent closure and plan a check before claiming that the treatment increased migration alone.

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14: CELL DERIVED SAMPLES AND MOLECULAR ANALYSIS

A culture can change in several ways: cells may become larger, divide, specialize, stop dividing, or die. These changes are related, but they do not mean the same thing. This chapter connects cell structures, the cell cycle, signaling, and gene expression with growth and development. It also introduces stem cell self-renewal and potency. Understanding these processes helps you choose measurements that reveal what cells are doing and explain changes without drawing conclusions beyond the evidence.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Match cell lysates, RNA samples, and conditioned medium to appropriate biological questions and assays.

  2. Trace samples to their source cultures and explain how collection and preservation affect interpretation.

  3. Distinguish extracellular vesicle enrichment, concentration, and recovery, and calculate basic TFF processing measures.

  4. Explain reverse transcription and qPCR controls and calculate relative RNA abundance when assay requirements are met.

  5. Interpret SDS-PAGE and immunoblot results using size references, specificity controls, and loading normalization.

  6. Calculate cytokine concentration from an ELISA result and assess conclusions across RNA, protein, and functional measurements.

14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
14.12: Chapter Summary

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14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question

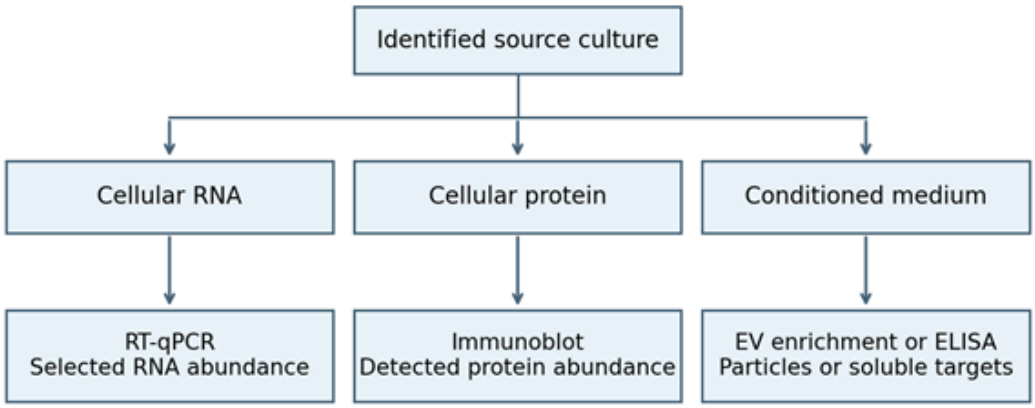
A **cell-derived sample** comes from cells or the environment they have changed. A **cell lysate** contains material released by breaking cells open. A purified RNA sample contains RNA separated from much of the other cell material. **Conditioned medium** is collected after cells have been maintained in it for a defined time. It contains the original medium ingredients and material the cells released, removed, or changed.

The location of a molecule matters. A whole-cell lysate describes intracellular material under the selected extraction conditions. Conditioned medium describes material outside the cells at collection. Detecting a protein in medium does not establish that it was actively secreted; damaged or dying cells may also release cellular contents. Cell health and collection conditions help distinguish these possibilities.

Begin with the question and then choose the sample. To ask whether hTERT-targeting siRNA reduced its matching message in MSCs, collect cellular RNA. To ask whether the detected hTERT protein changed, collect a protein sample and use a suitable protein assay. To ask whether a treatment changed cytokine accumulation around THP-1 cells, collect culture supernatant and select the cytokine-specific assay.

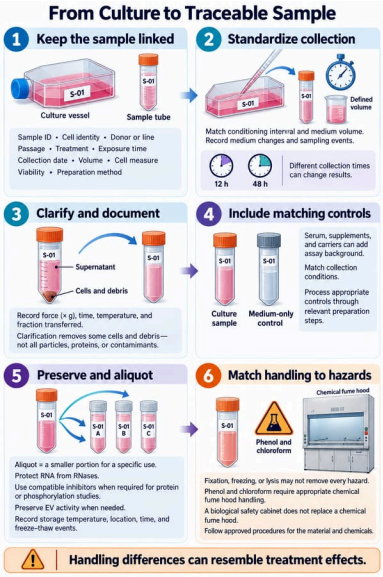
Sample	Example measurement	Main interpretation limit
Cellular RNA	hTERT or NAMPT RT-qPCR	RNA abundance does not establish protein activity
Protein lysate	NAMPT or hTERT immunoblot	Detected protein does not establish enzyme activity
Clarified conditioned medium	Cytokine ELISA	Accumulated concentration is not secretion rate
EV-enriched preparation	Particles, markers, functional assay	Enrichment does not prove purity or exosome origin

A single collection cannot always serve every assay. Phenol-based RNA reagents disrupt proteins and do not provide a ready-to-use protein sample for every downstream method. Detergent-rich protein buffers may interfere with nucleic acid reactions or functional enzyme assays. Plan separate culture wells, separate fractions, or a validated method for extracting more than one material from the same sample. If matched wells supply RNA and protein separately, describe them as matched cultures rather than pretending that both assays measured exactly the same cells. Different wells can vary even when prepared together. Include independent biological preparations when the conclusion requires evidence beyond one culture run.



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14.2: Collection Records and Preservation



Traceability is the ability to connect a sample and its result to the culture, treatment, collection, and preparation that produced it. A sample ID should remain connected to cell identity, donor or line, passage, treatment, exposure time, and collection date. Add the collected volume, cell number or another relevant cell measure, viability information, and the method used to prepare the sample.

The **supernatant** is the liquid above material that has settled or been collected by centrifugation. Clarification removes some cells and debris from a liquid sample. It does not remove every particle, dissolved protein, or contaminant. Record the force, time, temperature, and fraction transferred, because different clarification conditions produce different sample compositions.

The collection medium can affect the result. Serum, supplements, and treatment carriers may add proteins, particles, or assay background. A medium-only sample kept under matching conditions helps reveal this contribution. If the study processes a preparation, put an appropriate medium or preparation control through the relevant processing steps too.

Standardize the conditioning interval and medium volume when comparing secreted material. A sample collected after 48 hours has had more time for accumulation, degradation, and uptake than one collected after 12 hours. Different culture volumes can produce different concentrations even when the total amount of material is similar. Record medium changes and sampling events that alter the volume or accumulation period.

Preserve the material needed for the assay. Protect RNA from RNases and use validated storage conditions. Protein samples may need protease inhibitors. Phosphorylation studies may also need compatible phosphatase inhibitors. EV preparations used in functional assays need conditions that preserve activity as well as particles. Storage must suit the target, preparation, and assay.

An **aliquot** is a smaller portion of a sample prepared for a specific use. Aliquoting reduces repeated thawing of the same stock and helps keep each portion linked to its history. Record storage temperature, location, elapsed time, and freeze–thaw events. Samples handled differently can acquire differences that resemble a treatment response.

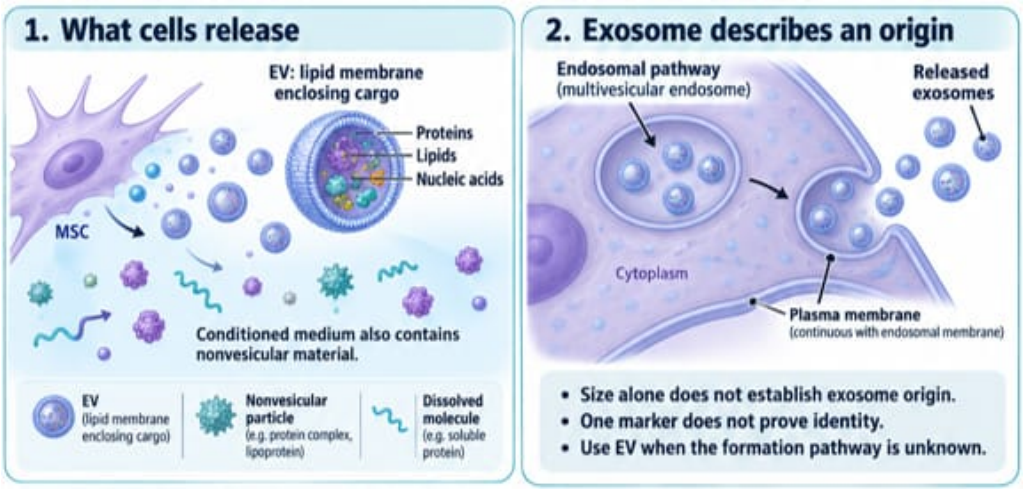
Do not assume that fixation, freezing, or lysis removes every hazard. Select containment and handling methods for the original material and the chemicals introduced during preparation. Phenol and chloroform require appropriate chemical-hood handling; a biological safety cabinet does not replace a chemical fume hood. Apply the laboratory's approved procedures to the sample actually being handled.

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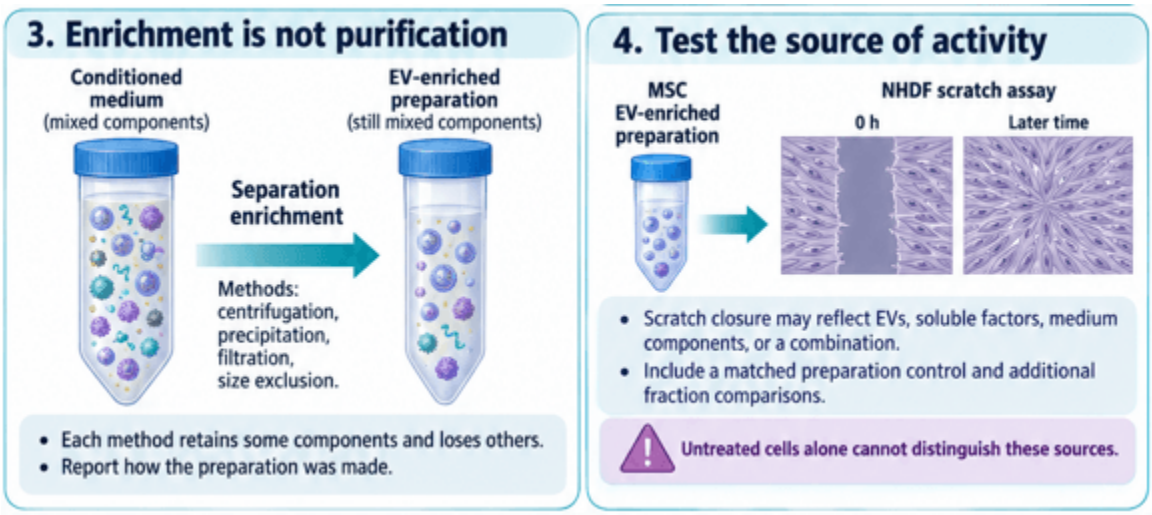
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means

Extracellular vesicles, or EVs, are particles released by cells and enclosed



by a lipid membrane. They can carry proteins, lipids, and nucleic acids. Conditioned medium also contains nonvesicular particles and dissolved molecules. A collected fraction may therefore contain EVs together with other materials that affect later measurements.

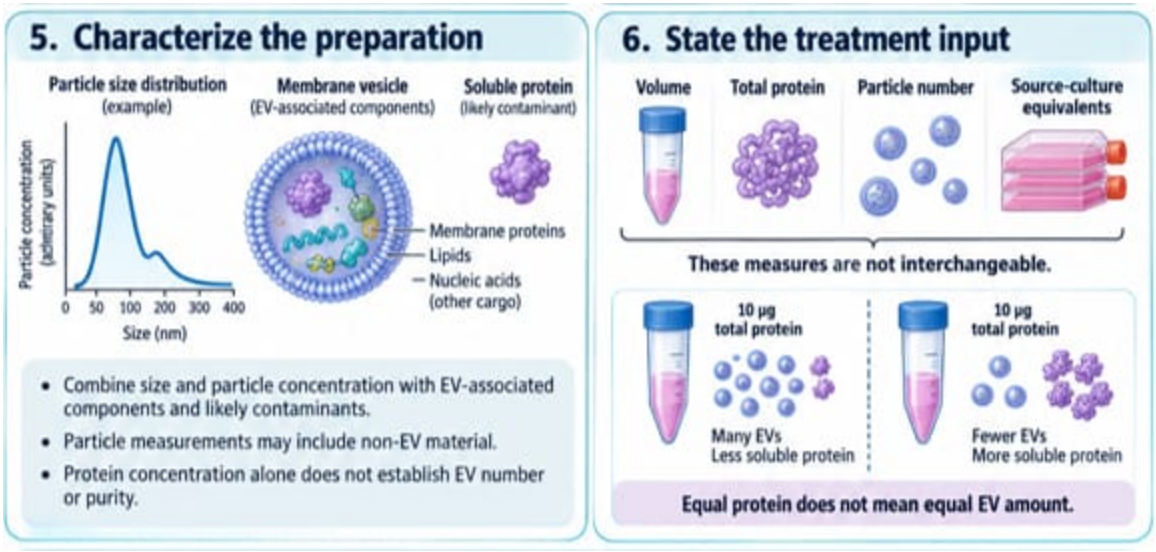
An **exosome** is an EV formed through a particular pathway involving endosomal compartments inside cells. Size alone cannot establish this origin. Routine separation methods often collect mixed populations, and one marker does not prove exosome identity. Use EV and describe the source and measured properties when the formation pathway is unknown.



Enrichment increases the share or concentration of a selected material in a preparation. It does not mean complete purification. Centrifugation, precipitation, filtration, and size-exclusion methods separate materials in different ways. Each method retains some components and loses others. Describe an MSC small-particle preparation by how it was made and the checks actually performed.

A treatment study requires both a well-described preparation and relevant controls. If an MSC EV-enriched sample changes NHDF scratch closure, the activity could arise from vesicles, co-collected soluble factors, background medium components, or a combination. Comparing only treated NHDFs with untreated NHDFs cannot distinguish these sources. A matched preparation control and additional fraction comparisons help test the explanation.

Characterization measures properties that help describe the preparation.



Particle concentration and size distribution are useful, but a particle measurement may also detect non-EV material. Combine measurements of physical properties with EV-associated components and likely contaminants. Protein concentration alone cannot establish EV number or purity.

Describe the treatment amount explicitly. Volume, total protein, particle number, and source-culture equivalents are different ways to express input. A preparation containing 10 µg total protein may not contain the same EV amount as another preparation with 10 µg total protein. Retain the input measure and its limits rather than calling it simply “one EV dose.”

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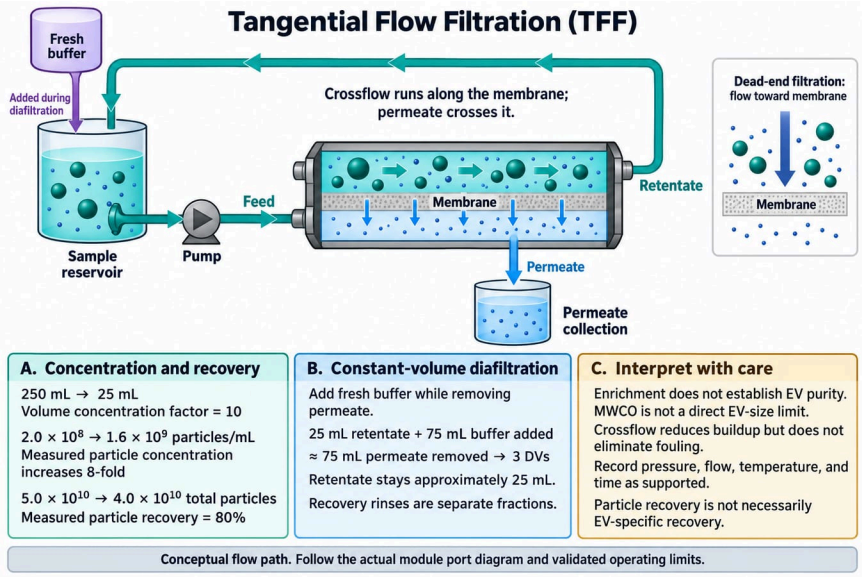
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration

Tangential flow filtration, or TFF, moves liquid along a membrane. Some liquid and material cross through it. In dead-end filtration, flow is directed toward the membrane instead. Cross flow can reduce buildup but cannot eliminate fouling. TFF can concentrate an EV-containing sample and exchange its solution. It does not by itself establish EV purity. The **feed** is liquid entering the filter module. The **retentate** is material remaining on the feed side, often returned to the reservoir in a recirculating system. The **permeate** is liquid that crosses the membrane and leaves through a separate path. Follow these paths on the actual module's port diagram before interpreting the collected fractions.

A membrane's **molecular weight cutoff**, or MWCO, is based on retention of test molecules. It is not a direct EV-size limit or a guarantee that all EVs remain. Membrane properties and sample behavior affect retention. Some soluble material may remain in the retained fraction. Desired material may also be lost to surfaces or the permeate.

Fouling is buildup that changes membrane flow or retention. **Transmembrane pressure** is the pressure difference that drives flow across the membrane. Crossflow, pressure, temperature, sample composition, and processing time affect performance. A pump speed alone is insufficient to describe the operation. Record the measurements supported by the system and use the validated limits for that module and sample.

Concentration reduces the sample volume by collecting permeate. The volume-based **concentration factor** is starting volume divided by final retentate volume. **Recovery** is the amount of a selected material obtained at the end divided by its starting amount. These calculations answer different questions.



Worked example: volume reduction and particle recovery

A clarified preparation starts at 250 mL with a measured particle concentration of 2.0×10^8 particles/mL. Its final retentate is 25 mL with 1.6×10^9 particles/mL. Assume that both measurements use a comparable validated method and represent the mixed samples.

Volume concentration factor = 250 mL ÷ 25 mL = 10.

Starting measured particles = $250 \times 2.0 \times 10^8 = 5.0 \times 10^{10}$ particles.

Final measured particles = $25 \times 1.6 \times 10^9 = 4.0 \times 10^{10}$ particles.

Measured particle recovery = $(4.0 \times 10^{10} \div 5.0 \times 10^{10}) \times 100 = 80\%$.

The liquid volume decreased tenfold, while measured particle concentration increased eightfold. The particle result does not

establish EV-specific recovery unless the measurement distinguishes EVs from other particles. A volume change alone would not have revealed the 20% difference in measured total particles.

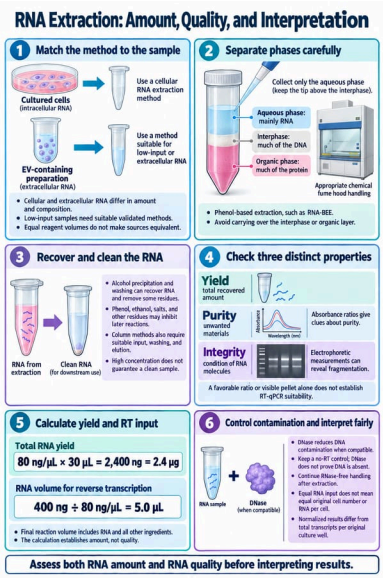
Diafiltration exchanges solution around retained material by adding fresh buffer while permeate is removed. In constant-volume diafiltration, the retentate volume remains approximately unchanged. One **diafiltration volume**, or DV, equals that retentate volume. For a 25 mL retentate, adding 75 mL of buffer while removing approximately 75 mL permeate supplies three DVs. Freely permeating small components become less concentrated, but complete removal is not guaranteed.

A rinse after the sample has been removed is a recovery or cleaning step, not the same process as exchanging buffer around a recirculating sample. Label recovery rinses separately so that a later assay can be linked to the correct fraction. Keep starting material, final retentate, and selected permeate portions when the analysis plan requires a mass balance or investigation of loss.

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14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality



RNA extraction separates RNA from other sample components. Cellular RNA and RNA associated with EV preparations can differ greatly in amount and composition. A method validated for millions of cultured cells may not recover low-input extracellular RNA adequately. Choose the method for the sample instead of assuming that equal reagent volumes make different sources equivalent.

Phenol-based reagents such as RNA-BEE break open cells and help inactivate proteins, including RNases. Adding the specified solvent and centrifuging separates the mixture into phases. RNA is mainly recovered from the upper **aqueous phase**, the water-based layer. Much of the DNA and protein stays in the interphase and organic layer. Carrying these layers into the RNA sample can contaminate it. [4]

Alcohol precipitation collects RNA from solution, and washing removes some salts and reagent residues. Leftover phenol, ethanol, salts, or other components can interfere with later reactions. Column-based methods use a different separation approach, but they also require suitable input, washing, and elution conditions. A high measured concentration does not guarantee a clean functional sample.

RNA yield is the total recovered amount: concentration multiplied by final volume. **Purity** concerns unwanted materials in the sample. **Integrity** concerns the condition of the RNA molecules. These properties are related but distinct. Absorbance ratios provide clues about purity, whereas electrophoretic measurements can reveal fragmentation. Neither a favorable ratio nor a visible pellet alone establishes suitability for RT-qPCR.

Worked example: RNA yield and reaction input

An RNA sample measures 80 ng/µL in a final volume of 30 µL. Yield is 80 × 30 = 2,400 ng, or 2.4 µg. If a validated reverse-transcription setup uses 400 ng RNA, the required sample volume is 400 ng ÷ 80 ng/µL = 5.0 µL. The final reaction volume includes this RNA portion and all other ingredients.

The calculation establishes amount, not quality. A 5.0 µL portion may also carry inhibitors into the reaction. A lower-yield but cleaner sample can perform better than a concentrated contaminated sample. Check both input amount and evidence of suitable RNA quality.

DNase is an enzyme that degrades DNA. It can help reduce genomic DNA contamination when compatible with the chosen preparation. It does not replace a no-RT control or establish that all contaminating DNA has been removed. RNase-free handling also remains necessary after extraction, because purified RNA can still be damaged during later work.

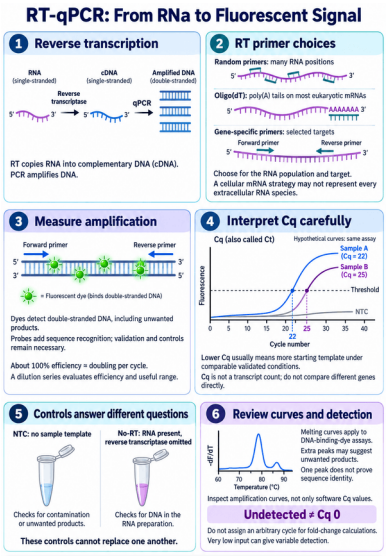
When comparing treated and control cultures, similar RNA input makes the RT step more comparable. It does not make the original cultures identical in cell number or RNA content per cell. A result normalized to RNA input and reference genes is different

from a measurement of total transcript amount per original culture well.

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14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR



Reverse transcription, or RT, uses reverse transcriptase to copy RNA into **complementary DNA**, or **cDNA**. PCR amplifies DNA, so RT supplies a DNA template when the original question concerns RNA. The combined approach is called **RT-qPCR**, reverse transcription followed by quantitative polymerase chain reaction.

The RT primer choice affects what is copied. Random primers can start copying at many RNA positions. **Oligo(dT)** primers bind poly(A) tails found on most eukaryotic messenger RNAs. Gene-specific primers focus on selected targets. Use a strategy that suits the RNA population and target; an approach suitable for cellular mRNA may not represent every extracellular RNA species.

In **quantitative PCR**, or qPCR, fluorescent signal is measured during amplification cycles. A target-specific primer pair selects a DNA region to amplify. DNA-binding dyes report double-stranded products, including unwanted products. Sequence-specific probes add another recognition step but still require assay validation and contamination controls.

The **quantification cycle**, or **Cq**, is the cycle when signal crosses a defined threshold. It is also called Ct. In the same validated assay under comparable conditions, lower Cq usually means more starting target template. Cq is not a transcript count. Comparing Cq values from different genes directly does not establish their relative abundance.

Amplification efficiency describes the increase in product per cycle. Approximately 100% efficiency means roughly doubling during the relevant amplification phase. A dilution series helps evaluate efficiency and useful measurement range. Inhibition, poor primer performance, or unsuitable template can change amplification and distort the relationship between Cq and starting amount.

A **no-template control**, or NTC, contains the qPCR components without the sample template. Signal may indicate contamination or unwanted products. A **no-RT control** contains the RNA preparation without reverse transcriptase; amplification may reveal DNA already present in that preparation. These controls address different sources of signal and cannot replace one another.

For a DNA-binding-dye assay, a **melting curve** examines how products separate as temperature increases. Extra peaks can suggest unwanted products or primer dimers. One peak supports a consistent product but does not prove sequence identity. Interpret it with controls and the validated target assay. Review the actual amplification curves rather than accepting software-generated Cq values without inspection.

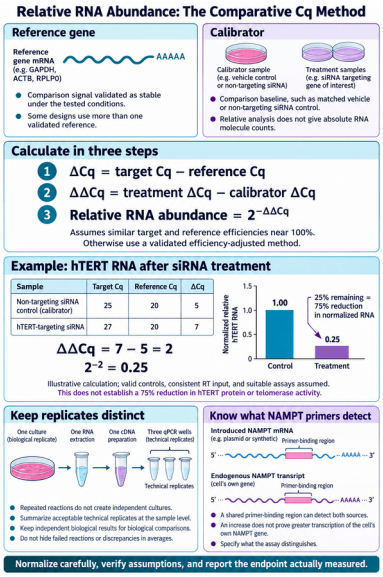
An undetected target is not a Cq of zero. It means that a qualifying signal was not obtained within the assay conditions and cycle range. Do not assign an arbitrary cycle value simply to produce a fold-change calculation. Very low starting input can produce variable detection across repeated reactions, which calls for an appropriate low-input analysis and clear reporting.

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14.7: Relative RNA Abundance

A **reference gene** provides a comparison signal for the tested conditions. Check its stability in the model and treatments. Even familiar reference genes may change with metabolism, differentiation, or stress. Some designs benefit from more than one validated reference.



A **calibrator** is the sample or group used as the comparison baseline. It is often the matched vehicle or non-targeting siRNA control. Relative analysis compares target abundance with that baseline after reference normalization. It does not automatically give the absolute number of RNA molecules.

For the **comparative Cq method**, first subtract reference Cq from target Cq in each sample. Then compare that difference with the calibrator's difference. The base-2 calculation assumes similar target and reference efficiencies near 100%. If those assumptions fail, use a validated method that adjusts for efficiency.

ΔCq = target Cq – reference Cq.

ΔΔCq = treatment ΔCq – calibrator ΔCq.

Relative RNA abundance = 2^(–ΔΔCq).

Worked example: relative hTERT RNA after siRNA treatment

Assume valid controls, consistent RT input, and suitable target and reference assays. The matched non-targeting siRNA control has target Cq 25 and reference Cq 20. The hTERT-targeting-siRNA sample has target Cq 27 and reference Cq 20.

Control ΔCq = 25 – 20 = 5. Treatment ΔCq = 27 – 20 = 7.

ΔΔCq = 7 – 5 = 2. Relative RNA abundance = 2^{-2} = 0.25.

The treated sample has 25% of the normalized target RNA abundance of its calibrator, corresponding to a 75% reduction in that RNA endpoint. It does not establish a 75% reduction in hTERT protein or telomerase activity. Those outcomes require their own measurements.

Repeat reactions from one cDNA preparation help assess technical variation. They do not create independent RNA extractions or cultures. Calculate a stated sample-level result from acceptable technical replicates and retain independent biological results for the biological comparison. Averages should not hide failed reactions or unexamined discrepancies.

For NAMPT mRNA delivery, primer location matters. If primers recognize a sequence present in both the introduced mRNA and the endogenous transcript, the result can include both sources. An increase then does not prove that the cell transcribed more of

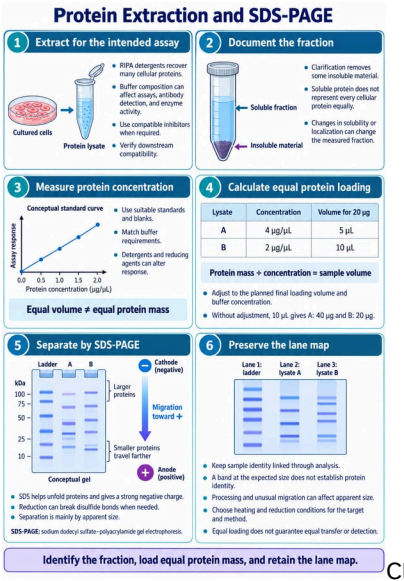
its own NAMPT gene. Specify what the assay can distinguish before interpreting the result.

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14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE

Protein extraction releases proteins into a solution suitable for the intended assay. RIPA buffer contains detergents that help recover many cellular proteins. Its composition can affect protein assays, antibody detection, and enzyme activity. Add compatible inhibitors where the target and plan require them, and verify compatibility with the specific downstream method.



Clarification removes some insoluble material from a lysate. The soluble fraction does not necessarily represent every cellular protein equally. If treatment changes solubility or localization, a change in the analyzed fraction can occur without an equal change in total cellular abundance. Document which fraction was measured.

A protein-concentration assay estimates total protein using a standard curve. Match the standard and blank preparation to the assay and sample buffer requirements. Detergents, reducing agents, and other components can alter assay response. Equal sample volumes do not imply equal protein masses.

Worked example: equal protein loading

Lysate A contains 4 µg/µL and lysate B contains 2 µg/µL. To load 20 µg from each, use 5 µL of A and 10 µL of B. Bring each to the planned final loading volume and buffer concentration using compatible reagents. Loading 10 µL of each without adjustment would supply 40 µg from A and 20 µg from B.

SDS-PAGE means sodium dodecyl sulfate–polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis. SDS helps unfold proteins and gives them a strong negative charge. A reducing agent can break certain disulfide bonds when needed. Proteins move through the gel toward the positive electrode and separate mainly by apparent size. Smaller proteins usually travel farther under comparable conditions.

A **molecular weight ladder** contains size references, often labeled in kilodaltons, or kDa. A band near the expected position supports a size assignment but does not establish protein identity. Modifications, processing, aggregation, and unusual migration can affect apparent size. Heating and reduction conditions should suit the protein and detection method rather than follow one universal setting.

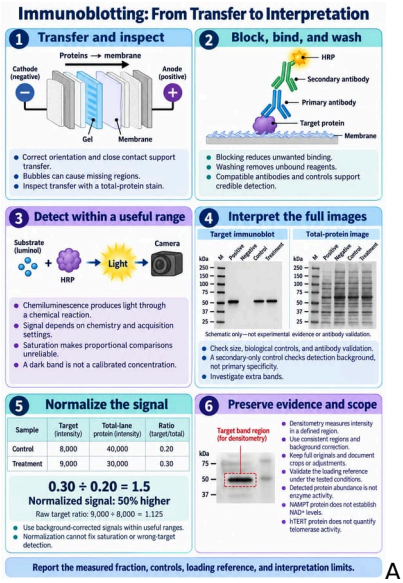
Each **lane** corresponds to a loaded sample. Maintain a lane map from sample preparation through image analysis. A misplaced label can turn a technically good separation into an uninterpretable treatment comparison. Equal loading is an important starting condition, but transfer and detection still need examination.

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14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization

Immunoblotting, also called Western blotting, detects selected proteins after transfer from the gel to a membrane. Proper membrane orientation allows proteins to move from the gel onto the membrane. Poor contact or bubbles can produce missing regions. A total-protein stain helps inspect transfer and provides a potential **loading reference**.



Blocking reduces unwanted antibody binding to unused membrane sites. A **primary antibody** recognizes the target; a compatible **secondary antibody** recognizes the primary antibody and provides or connects to a detection label. Washing removes unbound reagents. Antibody selection and controls determine whether a visible signal is a credible target measurement.

Chemiluminescence is light produced by a chemical reaction. In a common detection format, an HRP enzyme label reacts with substrate to produce light recorded by an imaging system. Signal depends on detection chemistry and acquisition settings as well as target amount. **Saturation** occurs when the response reaches a measurement limit, making proportional comparison unreliable.

Densitometry measures image intensity in a defined region. Apply consistent background correction and region selection. Preserve the full original images and document any cropping or adjustments used for presentation. A dark band alone is not a calibrated protein concentration.

A **loading reference** helps adjust target signal for differences in sample loading or transfer. Total-protein signal can provide this reference when its measurement is validated. A housekeeping protein is suitable only when its abundance and detection remain appropriate across the conditions. Check that both target and reference signals lie within useful measurement ranges. [8]

Worked example: normalized protein signal

After background correction, a control has target intensity 8,000 and total-lane protein intensity 40,000. A treatment has target intensity 9,000 and total-lane protein intensity 30,000. The target-to-loading ratios are 0.20 and 0.30.

Relative normalized target signal = 0.30 ÷ 0.20 = 1.5.

The normalized signal is 1.5 times the control value, or 50% higher, under these assumptions. Comparing the raw target bands alone would give 9,000 ÷ 8,000 = 1.125 and miss the loading difference. Normalization improves the stated comparison but does not correct an antibody that detects the wrong protein or a saturated signal.

Positive and negative biological controls, an appropriate band position, and suitable antibody validation strengthen identification. A secondary-only control examines background from that detection step; it does not prove primary-antibody specificity. Extra bands should be investigated rather than simply omitted without explanation.

An immunoblot measures detected protein abundance in the analyzed fraction. It does not directly measure enzyme activity. More NAMPT protein does not guarantee more NAD⁺, and less hTERT protein does not quantify telomerase activity. The relationship between abundance and function must be tested with suitable additional endpoints.

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14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA

Cytokines are proteins involved in communication between cells, including responses to injury and inflammation. THP-1 culture supernatant may be analyzed for targets such as IL-1β, IL-6, or IL-8. Choose a method validated for the specific target and sample type. Different cytokine kits have different working ranges and conditions.

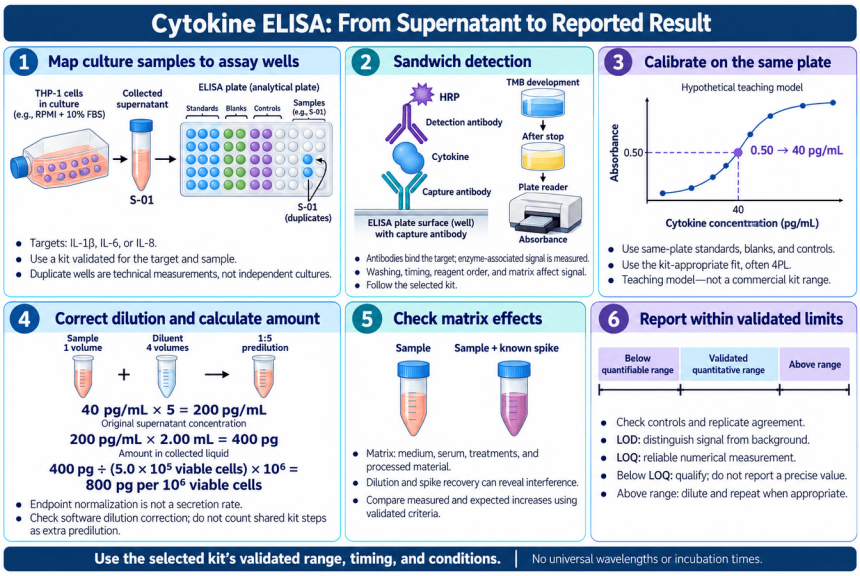
An **enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay**, or ELISA, uses antibodies and an enzyme-associated signal to measure a target. In a **sandwich ELISA**, a capture antibody binds the target. A detection antibody recognizes another site. The detection system then produces a measurable signal. Kits may combine steps or use different arrangements. Follow the selected kit's instructions for the actual assay.

Many colorimetric formats use HRP and TMB, a substrate that develops color. A stop solution ends development and the plate reader measures **absorbance**, the amount of light absorbed by the solution. In a validated range, signal relates to target amount. Washing, timing, reagent order, and the sample mixture affect that relationship.

The ELISA plate is an analytical plate, not the original culture plate. Samples from culture wells are transferred into mapped assay wells alongside standards, blanks, and controls. Duplicate assay wells from one supernatant sample are technical measurements of that sample; they are not independent treated cultures.

A **standard curve** relates signal to known concentrations measured on the same assay plate. Standards establish the calibration for converting sample signal to concentration. Use the model appropriate to the kit, often a four-parameter logistic fit, rather than forcing a straight line across an entire curved response.

A **dilution factor** is final diluted volume divided by the original sample volume added. One volume of sample plus four volumes of diluent gives a 1:5 dilution. Multiply the measured concentration by five to find the original concentration. Check whether software already applies that correction. Kit steps applied equally to standards and samples do not require an extra sample-dilution factor.



Worked example: cytokine concentration and amount

A validated curve assigns 40 pg/mL to a supernatant sample prediluted 1:5. Original supernatant concentration = 40 × 5 = 200 pg/mL. If 2.00 mL of that well's supernatant was collected, cytokine amount in the collected liquid = 200 pg/mL × 2.00 mL = 400 pg.

If the well contained 5.0×10^5 viable cells at collection, the endpoint amount corresponds to 800 pg per 10^6 endpoint viable cells. This descriptive normalization does not give a secretion rate per cell. Cells may have grown or died during collection, and cytokine may have been degraded or taken up. The accumulated liquid measurement must be interpreted with those changes in

mind.

The **matrix** is the mixture surrounding a target in the sample. Serum, medium, treatments, and processed material can affect binding or signal. Dilution and spike-recovery checks help reveal these effects. **Spike recovery** compares the measured increase after a known addition with the expected increase. Judge recovery using the assay's validated criteria.

Check standards, blanks, controls, and replicate agreement before reporting sample concentrations. The **limit of detection** concerns evidence that a signal can be distinguished from background. The **limit of quantification** concerns reliable numerical measurement. A detectable signal below the quantifiable range should not be presented as a precise concentration.

Samples above the validated range may require dilution and a repeat assay. Samples below range require an appropriate qualified report rather than extrapolation to an exact value. Different kits cannot share concentration ranges, wavelengths, or incubation times merely because both measure the same cytokine.

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14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them

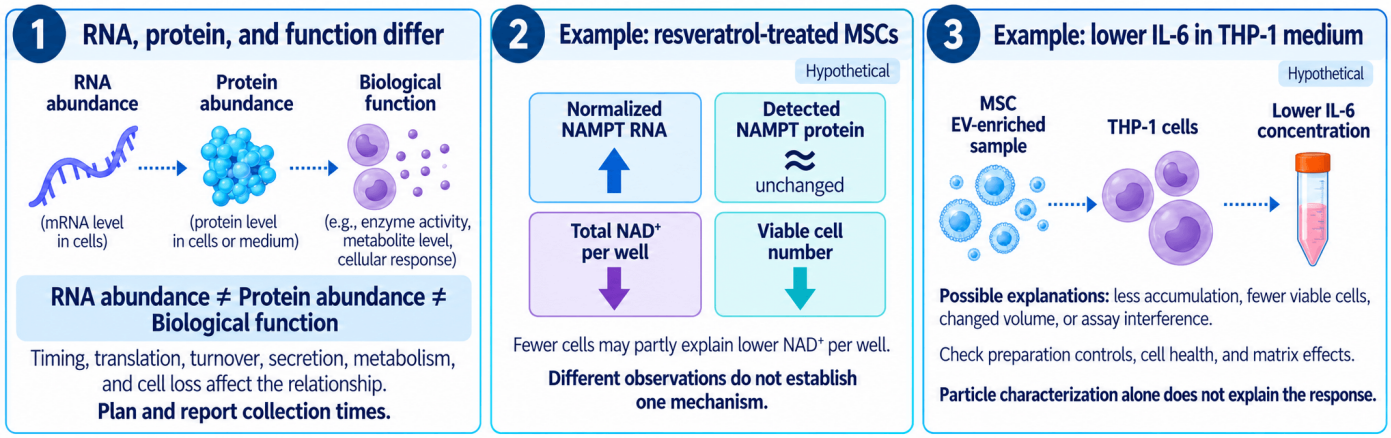
RNA abundance, protein abundance, and biological function

RNA abundance, protein abundance, and biological function are connected, but each measures a different endpoint. An RNA change may occur before a detectable protein change. Translation, protein turnover, secretion, metabolism, and cell loss can also affect the relationship. Plan collection times around the biological question and report when each measurement was made.

Interpreting different results

Consider a hypothetical resveratrol study in MSCs. Normalized NAMPT RNA increases, detected NAMPT protein changes little, and total NAD◈ per well decreases. Viable cell number also decreases. Fewer contributing cells may partly explain the lower NAD◈ amount per well, but additional measurements are needed to assess that explanation. Together, these findings describe several treatment-associated changes; they do not establish a single mechanism.

Similarly, a lower IL-6 concentration after exposing THP-1 cells to an MSC EV-enriched preparation has several possible explanations. These include reduced cytokine production or release, increased degradation or uptake, fewer viable cells, a different medium volume, or assay interference. Matched preparation controls, cell-health measurements, collection records, and matrix checks help distinguish these possibilities. Characterizing particles in the preparation does not, by itself, explain the cytokine response.



Connecting the source to the recipient

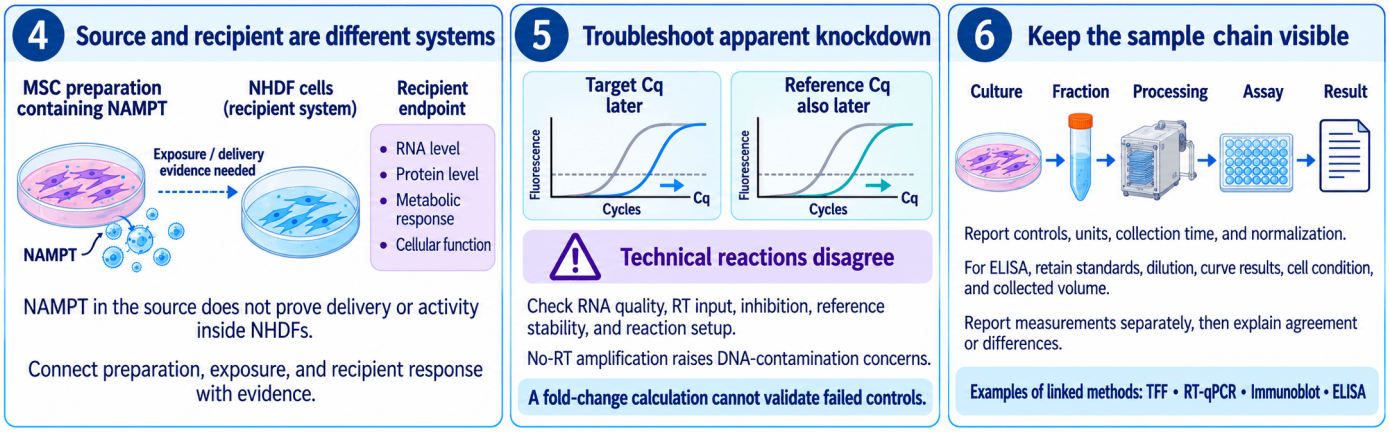
A source preparation and a recipient-cell response represent different parts of an experiment. Detecting NAMPT in an MSC preparation does not establish that NAMPT entered NHDFs or caused their response. That claim requires evidence connecting the preparation's contents, recipient exposure or delivery, and the measured endpoint. Additional controls are needed to distinguish NAMPT activity from effects of other preparation components.

Troubleshooting an apparent knockdown

A treated sample produces a later target Cq than its control, but the reference Cq also shifts later and technical replicates disagree. This pattern does not yet support target-specific knockdown. Investigate RNA quality, RT input, inhibition, reference-gene stability, and reaction setup. Amplification in the no-RT control raises an additional concern about DNA contamination. Resolve failed controls and unexplained discrepancies before calculating or interpreting fold change.

Keeping the sample chain visible

A clear report connects each result to its source culture, collected fraction, processing history, assay controls, collection time, measurement units, and normalization. Present the measurements separately before explaining where they agree or differ. This approach helps readers judge the conclusion and identify the next experiment needed to test the remaining explanations.



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14.12: Chapter Summary

Cell structures support growth, signaling, movement, and division. Their activities are connected, so a change in one measurement may reflect several processes. Growth increases cell size or mass. Proliferation increases cell number. Differentiation changes cell state and specialized function. These events can occur together or independently. The cell cycle includes preparation, DNA replication, and division. Checkpoints help regulate progression. Cells may also leave the active cycle. Development depends on gene regulation, signals, physical surroundings, and cell history. Stem cells combine self-renewal with developmental potential. Potency describes the range of descendants they can produce. Directed differentiation requires evidence from appropriate markers and functions. Reduced division or changed appearance alone is not enough.

Quiescence, senescence, and death are different states. Cancer-related changes can disrupt normal controls. Reliable conclusions use a model suited to the question and measurements suited to the claim. To interpret cell behavior, connect the measurement to the process it tests. Cell counts show population size. Markers can suggest a change in cell state. Neither result describes every activity in the culture. Ask whether cells are dividing, resting, becoming senescent, or dying. Several relevant measurements can help distinguish these possibilities and keep the conclusion within the evidence.

Key Terms

Eukaryotic cell	organelle	cell membrane	cytoplasm
nucleus	DNA	gene	ribosome
endoplasmic reticulum	Golgi apparatus	mitochondrion	ATP
cytoskeleton	actin filament	microtubule	cell growth
proliferation	differentiation	cell cycle	interphase
G1	S	G2	M phase
mitosis	cytokinesis	G0	quiescence
checkpoint	cyclin	CDK	contact inhibition
signaling	ligand	receptor	growth factor
extracellular matrix	gene expression	transcription	mRNA
translation	gene regulation	epigenetic regulation	marker

developmental biology	lineage	progenitor	germ layer
stem cell	self-renewal	niche	potency
totipotent	pluripotent	multipotent	embryonic stem cell
adult stem cell	iPSC	MSC	directed differentiation
senescence	apoptosis	necrosis	telomere
telomerase	hTERT	NAMPT	NAD
oncogene	tumor suppressor gene		

Review Questions

1. Connect the nucleus, ribosomes, and mitochondria to activities needed for cell maintenance.

2. Distinguish growth, proliferation, and differentiation using one example of each.

3. What occurs during S phase, and why must it precede division?

4. Why can a living culture contain cells that are not actively dividing?

5. Explain how checkpoints can protect a dividing population.

6. Describe how a surface or extracellular matrix can influence cell behavior.

7. Why can cells with similar inherited DNA have different functions?

8. Explain why one marker may not establish a differentiated cell state.

9. Compare totipotent, pluripotent, and multipotent cells.

10. Why does rapid division alone not prove self-renewal?

11. Compare embryonic stem cells, adult stem cells, and iPSCs.

12. What evidence would you use to evaluate directed differentiation?

13. Distinguish quiescence, senescence, and cell death.

14. Why does increased hTERT expression not establish that a culture has become cancerous?

15. Why can a stronger metabolic signal occur without increased cell number?

Apply Your Understanding

A researcher treats an MSC population and reports three findings: the cells look larger, the cell count is unchanged, and one differentiation-associated marker increases. The researcher concludes that the treatment caused successful differentiation.

Explain which findings support the conclusion and which remain ambiguous. Propose two additional types of evidence that would help assess the claim. Describe a suitable comparison group and explain why its starting culture conditions should match those of the treated group.

Two MSC EV-enriched preparations each contain 10 µg of total protein. A researcher calls these “equal EV doses” and compares their effects on NHDF scratch closure. Explain why equal protein input may not represent equal EV input. Identify additional characterization measurements and controls that would strengthen the comparison.

An immunoblot shows a darker NAMPT band in a treated sample, but the band is saturated and the total-protein image shows uneven transfer. A researcher normalizes the target signal and concludes that NAMPT protein increased. Explain why normalization cannot resolve these problems. What should be checked or repeated before interpreting the result?

Two THP-1 cultures have the same IL-6 concentration at collection, but one contains twice the medium volume of the other. Calculate how their total collected IL-6 amounts would compare if all medium were collected. Explain why neither concentration nor total amount alone establishes the secretion rate per cell. Identify two additional records or measurements needed for interpretation

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15: QUALITY TESTING STATISTICS AND REPORTING RESULTS

An NHDF scratch experiment shows faster gap closure in treated wells than in untreated wells. The images look clear, and the difference between the group averages appears large. But there is a problem: a mycoplasma test of the treatment preparation reported “not detected,” even though its positive control failed. Without a valid positive control, that result cannot establish that mycoplasma was not detected reliably. How much confidence should the team place in the treatment comparison? A convincing graph cannot resolve an invalid quality test.

Reliable conclusions depend on both valid measurements and suitable analysis. **Quality assurance** helps establish procedures and systems that support reliable work. **Quality control** uses specific checks to evaluate materials, processes, and results. Together, they provide a foundation for interpreting contamination screens, comparing experimental groups, and reporting findings clearly.

Even when a procedure is repeated carefully, results usually vary. Statistics help describe that variation and assess differences between conditions. Before choosing an analysis, identify what was independently prepared or treated. Repeated readings of one sample can help assess measurement variation, but they do not create additional independent biological samples.

A **mean** is the sum of a set of values divided by the number of values. Measures of spread describe how much those values vary. These summaries become useful only when the underlying records and measurements are sound. Check sample identity, assay controls, raw values, and units before calculating or interpreting a result. A correctly calculated average cannot make an invalid measurement reliable.

Evaluating culture data therefore begins with a practical question: Is the evidence suitable for the conclusion being considered? Contamination testing, data summaries, group comparisons, and clear reporting each contribute to that judgment. All figures and numerical examples are hypothetical teaching examples, not measured treatment effects or universal acceptance limits.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Distinguish quality assurance from quality control and define suitable criteria for cultures, samples, and assays.

  2. Use controls to interpret mycoplasma, microbial-growth, and endotoxin results and explain the limits of negative screens.

  3. Distinguish invalid, inconclusive, and valid results and document a reasoned response to a failed quality check.

  4. Identify the experimental unit and calculate a mean, sample standard deviation, and coefficient of variation.

  5. Select clear graphs and explain basic statistical comparisons, uncertainty, and outlier handling.

  6. Write a laboratory report that connects methods, controls, replicate results, and supported conclusions.

15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis

15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
15.13: Chapter Summary

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15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control

Purpose	QA example	QC example
Culture suitability	Defined identity and handling records	Identity, viability, and contamination checks
Reliable measurement	Qualified equipment and written assay method	Standards and positive and negative controls
Comparable groups	Planned timing, plate map, and sample handling	Checks of input, useful range, and replicate agreement
Traceable decisions	Documented deviations and review process	Recorded results against preset criteria

Fitness for purpose
Material and method must suit the intended use.
Suitable for expansion may not mean suitable for a scratch assay.

Acceptance criterion
Set the decision rule before measurement.
Use the validated method and study plan.

Specification
A defined requirement for a material or process.
Meeting one requirement does not establish all others.

Reliable decisions need both traceable processes and valid measured evidence.

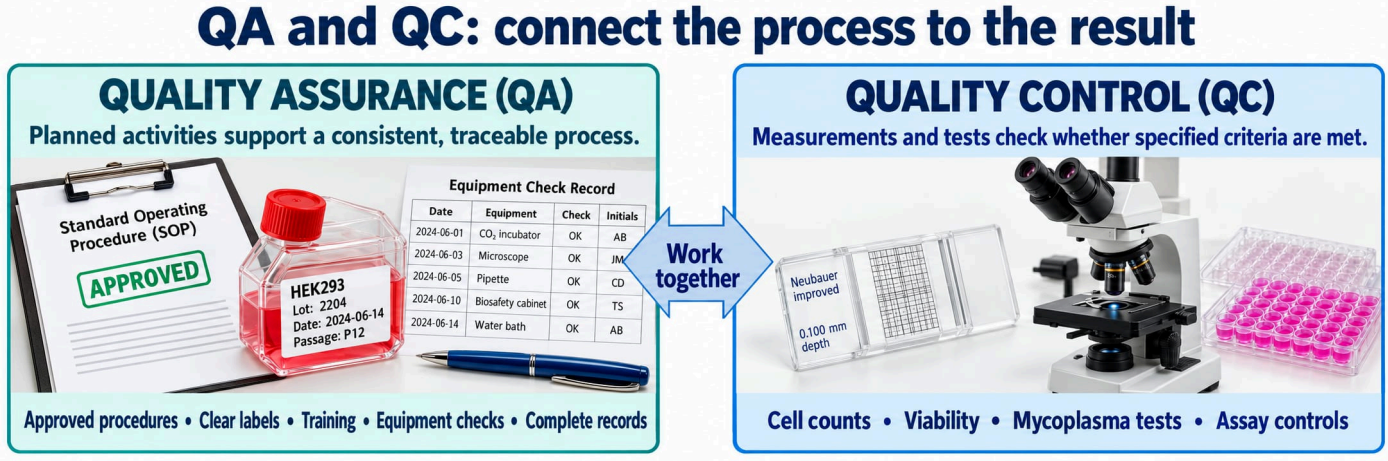
Good viability does not establish freedom from mycoplasma. A negative mycoplasma test does not establish cell identity.

Quality assurance, or QA, includes planned activities that make a process consistent, traceable, and suitable for its purpose. Approved procedures, clear sample labels, trained personnel, equipment checks, and complete records are examples. QA helps reduce preventable errors before and during an experiment.

Quality control, or QC, uses observations, measurements, and tests to evaluate whether specified criteria are met. Cell counts, viability measurements, mycoplasma testing, and assay-control checks are examples. QC results supply evidence about a culture, sample, or measurement at the time and under the conditions tested.

QA and QC work together. An accurate sample label is a process control; a valid test on the labeled sample supplies measured evidence. A complete record cannot make a contaminated culture acceptable, and a good test result cannot reconstruct an unknown sample identity. The quality system must connect the process to the result.

Fitness for purpose means that the material and method are suitable for the intended use. A culture suitable for routine expansion may not meet the conditions needed for a scratch assay. A sample with sufficient protein for an immunoblot may be unsuitable for an activity assay because its extraction buffer disrupts the enzyme. Define suitability in relation to the question.



An **acceptance criterion** is a rule set before measurement to judge whether a condition or result is acceptable. Criteria may cover identity, passage, density, viability, controls, assay range, or replicate agreement. Base them on the validated method and study plan. Choosing a convenient limit after seeing the results can bias the decision.

A **specification** is a defined requirement for a material or process. Meeting one specification does not establish that every other requirement has been met. For example, satisfactory viability does not establish freedom from mycoplasma, and a valid negative

mycoplasma test does not establish cell identity. Keep each decision linked to the property actually examined.

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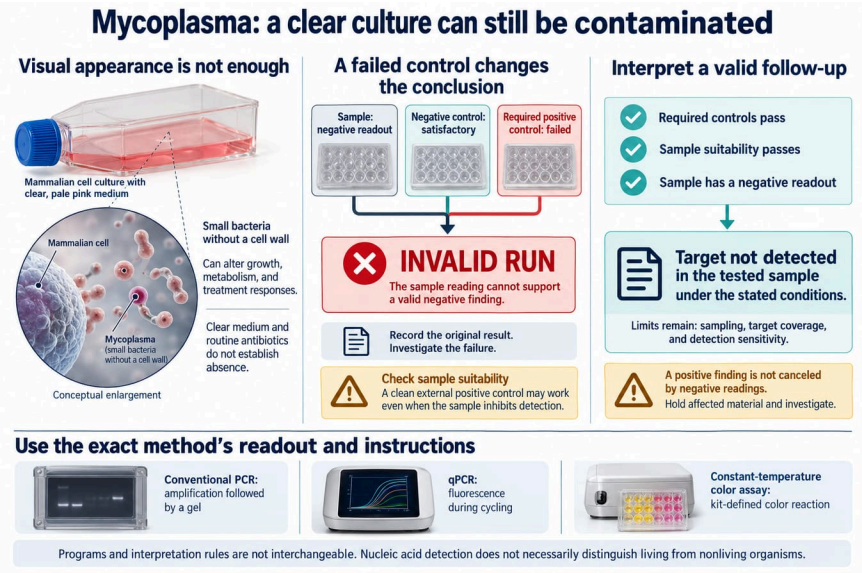
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15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis

Before adding the treatment, the team examines the NHDF cultures and their records. The same review is needed when samples are collected. Record cell identity, passage, growth pattern, morphology, density or confluence, relevant viability results, and recent handling. These details help explain later measurements and reveal differences that could affect the comparison.

Healthy appearance is useful but limited. Mycoplasma can contaminate cultures without obvious cloudiness, while cross-contamination by another mammalian cell line may look like normal growth. Appropriate identity and contamination checks address questions that routine microscopy cannot resolve.

Quality also depends on what happens between collection and analysis. Supernatant



from damaged cells may contain material released during cell loss. RNA can degrade, and substances carried into a reaction can interfere with it. Protein measurements can change after unsuitable extraction or repeated freezing and thawing. Record the sample fraction, collection time, preparation, storage, and relevant departures from the procedure.

Plan checks where they can guide a decision. If several cultures are combined before testing, tracing a problem to its source becomes harder. Keeping suitable individual samples and linked records can help locate the affected stage. This matters when material collected from one culture is later applied to another.

Suppose the scratch study uses an extracellular vesicle, or EV, enriched preparation from mesenchymal stromal cells, or MSCs. The MSC source culture, collected preparation, and recipient NHDF cultures each have their own history. An acceptable finding for one does not establish the condition of the others. The records must connect all three.

If contamination or a major identity problem is suspected, follow the laboratory's approved hold and investigation procedure. Prevent further use or distribution of the affected material while its status is unresolved. Document which experiments, shared reagents, or neighboring cultures may have been affected. Preserving the record is part of resolving the problem.

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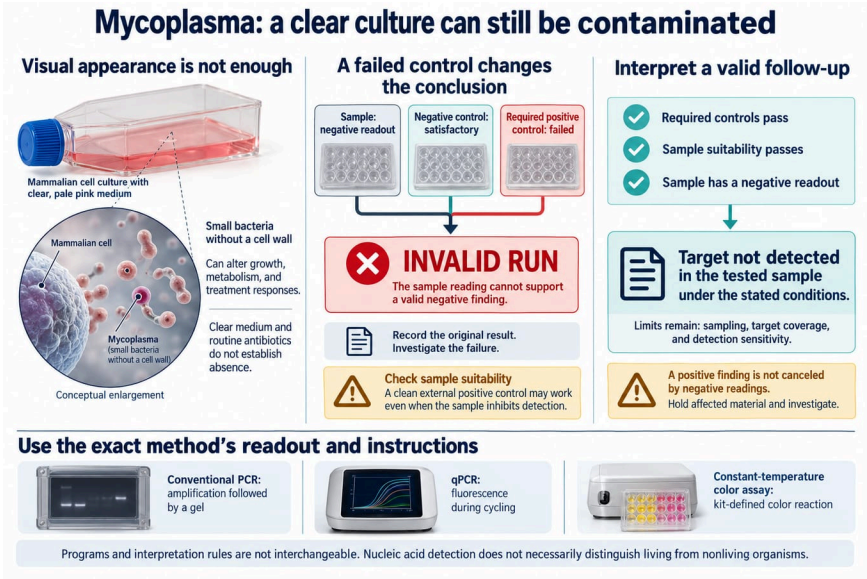
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15.3: Mycoplasma Testing

The failed control in the opening example matters because **mycoplasma** can escape visual detection. **Mycoplasma** are small bacteria that lack a cell wall. They can change cell growth, metabolism, and responses to treatment while the medium remains clear. The use of routine culture antibiotics does not establish that a culture is free from these organisms.

Methods can include culture-based detection, nucleic acid amplification, or other validated biochemical approaches. They detect different properties and have different limits. A nucleic acid method detects its target sequence; that result does not necessarily distinguish living from nonliving organisms. Use a method and sampling plan suited to the intended decision.

Controls help distinguish a sample finding from a test failure. A positive



control contains material expected to give a detectable response. A negative control should give the method-defined negative response. An internal control or a sample portion with a known addition can help reveal problems within a sample. Each control must be interpreted according to the method; no single control checks every possible failure.

Inhibition occurs when sample components suppress the assay response. Imagine that an external positive control works in a clean reaction mixture, but the treatment preparation contains an interfering substance. The sample could appear negative even though the assay cannot detect its target properly in that mixture. Follow the method's sample-suitability checks before accepting nondetection.

Match the readout to the exact method. A conventional PCR test may use amplification followed by a gel. A qPCR test records fluorescence during cycling. The MycAway Plus-Color 40612 format uses a color-based reaction at a constant incubation temperature. Its program and result rules are not interchangeable with a conventional PCR cycling program.

Worked example: judging a negative mycoplasma reading

Return to the opening result. The sample gives the kit-defined negative readout and the negative control is satisfactory, but the required positive control does not respond. The run has failed. Record the sample result as invalid in this run and investigate the failure. The absence of a sample signal cannot support a valid negative finding.

Suppose a documented follow-up run meets all required control and sample-suitability checks, and the sample is negative. The supported conclusion is that the target was not detected in the tested sample under the stated conditions. Sampling, the targets covered by the method, and detection sensitivity still limit that statement. It does not guarantee the condition of every vial or future passage.

A positive finding requires an appropriate response rather than averaging it with negative readings to obtain an overall "negative." Keep the affected material on hold and follow the investigation procedure. If confirmation or repeat sampling is needed, preserve

the original finding and explain why the follow-up was performed.

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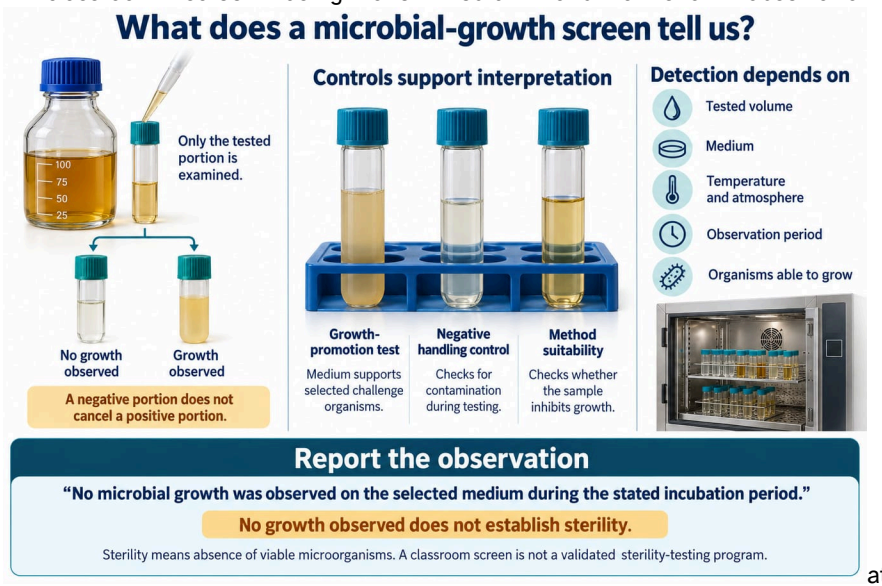
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15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits

A valid **mycoplasma** result answers one question. What about other microorganisms? A microbial-growth screen looks for organisms that grow in a selected medium under stated incubation conditions. The sample portion, medium, temperature, atmosphere, and observation period all influence what can be detected.

Growth-promotion testing checks whether the test medium supports growth of selected challenge organisms. A negative or handling control helps reveal contamination introduced during testing. Method-suitability checks address whether the sample itself prevents growth. No growth in a sample is difficult to interpret when the test conditions cannot support the organisms of interest.

A classroom screen using one medium and a short observation interval is not equivalent to a valid



ated sterility-testing program. Some organisms may not grow on the chosen medium, may require other conditions, or may be absent from the small portion examined. Even formal sterility testing has scientific and practical sampling limitations.

Use language that preserves the observation. "No microbial growth was observed on the selected medium during the stated incubation period" is more informative than "The sample was sterile." Include the tested volume, medium, conditions, controls, and observation interval when these details affect interpretation.

Sterility means the absence of viable microorganisms. A negative screen does not establish **sterility** for an entire preparation or show that it is suitable for administration to people. Such decisions require a broader controlled process and evidence appropriate to the intended use. For research cultures, report what the selected screen actually examined.

Contamination can be unevenly distributed. A negative portion does not cancel a positive portion from the same preparation. Investigate whether the finding reflects the source culture, processing, storage, or testing. Document the affected material and the limits of the available evidence rather than describing an unexplained positive as random noise.

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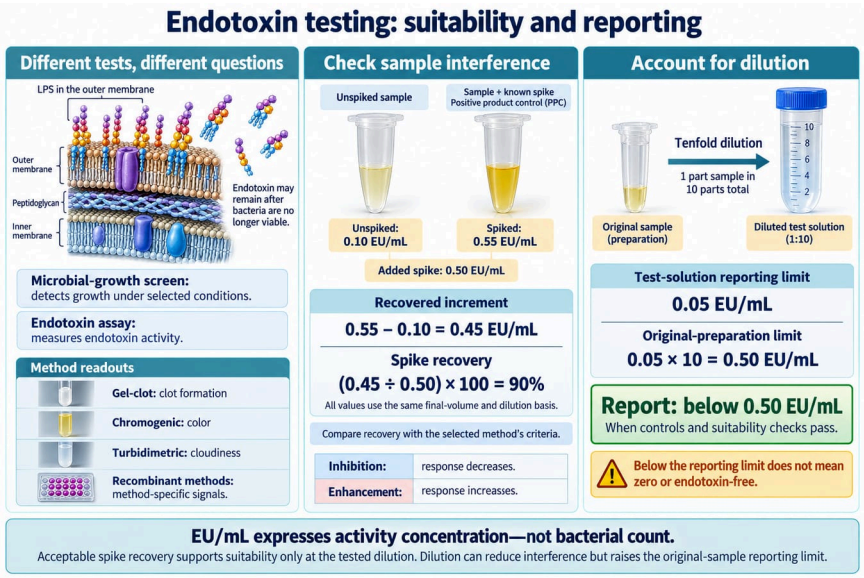
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15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference

Even when no living bacteria are detected, bacterial material may remain. **Endotoxin** is associated with lipopolysaccharide in the outer membrane of Gram-negative bacteria. It can alter cellular responses, making it relevant to experiments on inflammation or signaling. A microbial-growth screen and an **endotoxin** test examine different properties; one cannot replace the other.

Endotoxin methods use different signals. A **gel-clot assay** assesses clot formation. A **chromogenic assay** measures a color-producing reaction. A **turbidimetric assay** measures changes in cloudiness. Some recombinant-reagent methods use fluorescent or other readouts. Follow one identified method and its validated conditions rather than combining reagents or reading instructions from different kits.

Endotoxin results are often reported in **endotoxin units**, or EU, which express biological activity relative to a reference standard. EU/mL is an activity concentration, not a count of bacteria or a universal mass concentration. Report the method, sample preparation, dilution, and applicable measurement range.



A **positive pro**duct control, or PPC, is a sample portion containing a known **endotoxin** addition. It tests whether that sample mixture permits the expected response. **Inhibition** lowers the response, while enhancement raises it beyond what is expected. A standard curve prepared in clean water cannot establish that a complex culture-derived sample is free from interference. [5]

Worked example: an endotoxin spike check

The team checks whether its preparation interferes with a quantitative **endotoxin** assay. The unspiked portion reads 0.10 EU/mL. A matching portion reads 0.55 EU/mL after an addition of 0.50 EU/mL. Assume all values refer to the same final-volume and dilution basis. Subtract the original sample contribution before calculating recovery.

Recovered increment = 0.55 − 0.10 = 0.45 EU/mL.

Spike recovery = (0.45 ÷ 0.50) × 100 = 90%.

The recovered addition is therefore 90% of the amount added. Compare that value with the selected method's acceptance criteria. An acceptable recovery supports sample suitability at the tested dilution. It does not establish that the sample is suitable at every concentration or that it has no other biological effects.

Dilution can reduce interference, but it also dilutes the target and changes the effective detection limit in the original sample. Keep dilution within the validated method and the sensitivity needed for the intended decision. An arbitrary large dilution can create a reassuring-looking negative while making the test unable to detect the concentration of concern.

Worked example: a dilution-adjusted reporting limit

An evaluated method has a reporting limit of 0.05 EU/mL in the tested solution. Before testing, the preparation is diluted tenfold: one part sample in ten parts total. The controls and suitability checks pass, and the result is below that limit. The corresponding limit for the original preparation is 0.05 × 10 = 0.50 EU/mL.

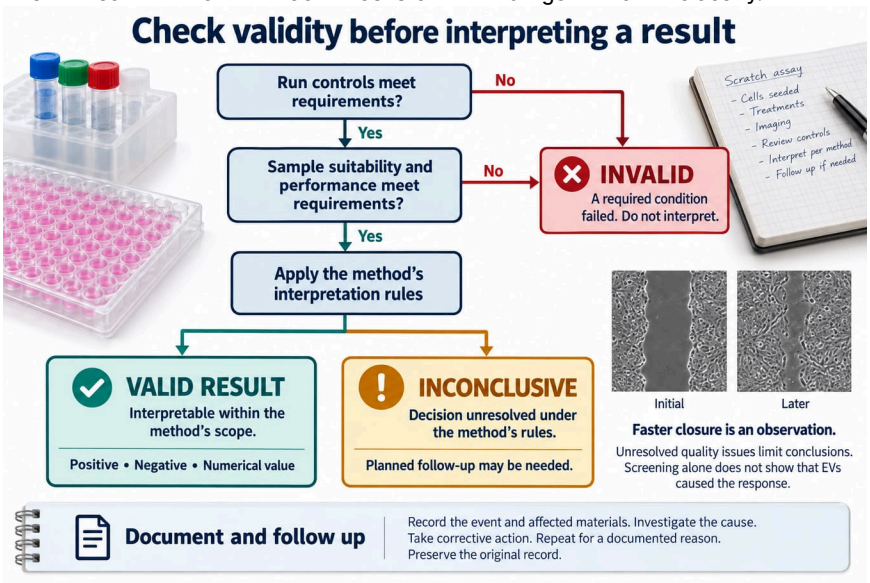
Report the original preparation as below 0.50 EU/mL under this method, rather than assigning zero or calling it **endotoxin**-free. Whether this meets the study's criterion depends on the limit chosen for that use. Clinical and manufacturing decisions require testing and limits appropriate to the intended application.

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15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results

The team now has several findings to classify. A valid result meets the required



control and performance conditions and can be interpreted within the method's scope. For a detection assay, a valid finding may be positive or negative. Quantitative assays can also provide valid numerical results. Validity describes whether the evidence is interpretable, not whether the outcome is desirable.

An **invalid result** cannot be interpreted for its intended purpose because a required condition failed. Examples include a failed positive control, a contaminated negative control, an incorrect reaction program, or failed sample suitability. An **inconclusive result** leaves the decision unresolved under the method's interpretation rules, even when required controls pass. A borderline or method-defined indeterminate signal may require planned follow-up.

A **deviation** is a departure from an approved instruction or expected condition. Document what happened, when it occurred, which materials were affected, and how it might influence the result. Compare "procedure error" with "the positive-control tube was omitted during setup." The second statement gives the investigation a concrete starting point.

A **corrective action** addresses an identified problem. Revising a plate map after repeated omissions, replacing a failed reagent lot, or adjusting sample preparation after demonstrated interference are possible actions. Repeat the assay for a documented reason. Repeatedly testing until one acceptable-looking value appears hides uncertainty instead of resolving it.

Keep these quality findings linked to the scratch measurements. Faster closure remains an observation even if the treatment preparation has unresolved **endotoxin** interference. The team must disclose the unresolved issue and limit its conclusions. Even satisfactory screening would not, by itself, show that EVs caused the response; other components of the preparation may contribute.

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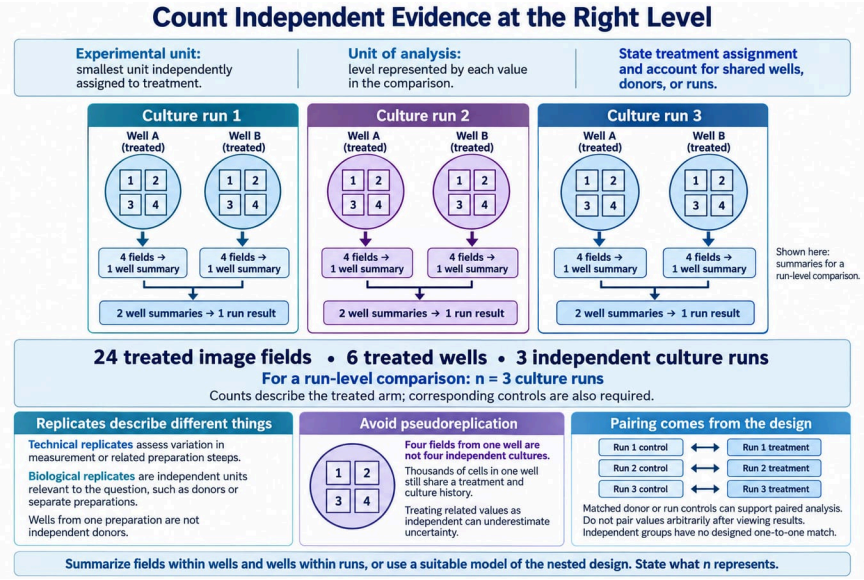
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15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis

Once the quality checks support analysis, the team must decide how much independent evidence it has. The **experimental unit** is the smallest unit independently assigned to a treatment. The **unit of analysis** is the level represented by each value used in a comparison. These levels must fit the design. When measurements share a well, donor, or culture run, the analysis must account for that relationship.

A **technical replicate** repeats a measurement or a closely related preparation step to assess variation in the method. **Biological replicates** are independent biological units relevant to the question, such as donors or separate culture preparations. State what was repeated and how treatments were assigned. Wells from one preparation can be experimental units for some questions, but they do not represent independent donors or source preparations.

Pseudoreplication occurs when related measurements are treated as if they were independent biological evidence. Four image fields from one well share that well's treatment and culture history. Treating the fields as four independent cultures can underestimate uncertainty. Counting thousands of cells within one treated well has the same grouping issue.



Worked example: counting the evidence

A scratch study has three independent culture runs. Within each run, two treated wells are imaged at four positions each. The dataset contains 24 treated image fields, six treated wells, and three independent culture runs. None of these counts is a substitute for the others.

For a run-level comparison, first summarize fields within each well and then use a stated method to summarize the wells within the run. Compare the three independent run-level results with the corresponding control results. A more advanced analysis can model the nested structure directly. In either case, state the level represented by n, the sample size.

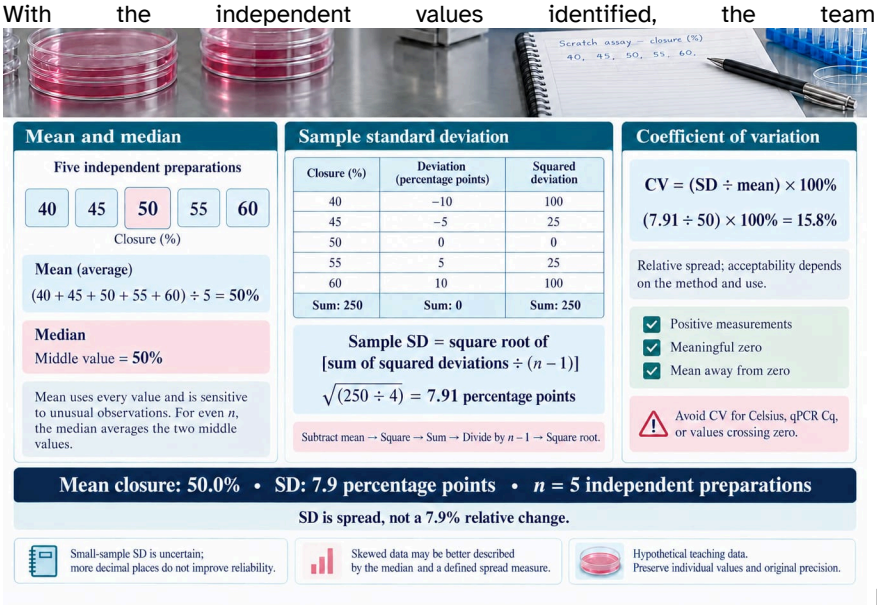
Matched controls from the same donor or run can produce **paired data**. Each treatment value is linked to a particular control by the design. Arbitrary pairing after viewing the values does not create a paired experiment. Independent groups use a different analysis because there is no designed one-to-one relationship.

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15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation

With the independent values identified, the team can summarize its results.



Descriptive statistics describe the data actually observed. The **mean** uses every value and can be influenced strongly by an unusual observation. The **median** is the middle value after the values are ordered, or the average of the two middle values when their number is even. Examining both can help reveal an uneven pattern.

The **sample standard deviation**, or SD, describes how widely values are spread around the sample **mean**. It uses the same units as the original measurement. To calculate it, find each value's difference from the **mean**, square each difference, add the squares, divide by n − 1, and take the square root. Here, n is the number of values. Dividing by n − 1 is part of estimating population variation from a sample.

Mean = sum of values ÷ n.

Sample SD = square root of [sum of squared deviations from the mean ÷ (n − 1)].

Worked example: summarizing scratch closure

Five independent culture preparations give vehicle-control closure values of 40%, 45%, 50%, 55%, and 60% at the specified time. Treat these as five independent preparation-level values for this example.

Mean = (40 + 45 + 50 + 55 + 60) ÷ 5 = 50% closure.

Deviations from the mean are −10, −5, 0, 5, and 10 percentage points. Their squared values sum to 100 + 25 + 0 + 25 + 100 = 250.

Sample SD = square root of (250 ÷ 4) = 7.91 percentage points.

Report the result as mean closure 50.0%, SD 7.9 percentage points, n = 5 independent preparations. The SD describes spread in closure values, not a 7.9% relative change in closure. Preserve the individual values so the reader can see the pattern.

Closure (%)	Deviation (percentage points)	Squared deviation
40	−10	100

Closure (%)	Deviation (percentage points)	Squared deviation
45	−5	25
50	0	0
55	5	25
60	10	100
Sum: 250	Sum: 0	Sum: 250

The **coefficient of variation**, or CV, expresses SD relative to the **mean**. For positive measurements on a scale with a meaningful zero, percent CV = (SD ÷ **mean**) × 100. For these closure values, CV = (7.91 ÷ 50) × 100 = 15.8%. It describes relative spread. Whether that spread is acceptable requires a criterion suited to the method and use.

CV can help compare variation at different positive concentration levels. It becomes unstable when the **mean** is near zero and is unsuitable for scales without a meaningful zero. For example, Celsius temperatures and qPCR Cq values should not be treated like concentrations in this calculation. Background-corrected measurements that cross zero also need a different approach.

An SD from two or three values is itself uncertain. More decimal places do not make that estimate more reliable. Use a sensible number of reported digits while retaining the original precision in the data record. For skewed data, a median and a clearly defined spread measure may describe the observations more usefully than a mean alone.

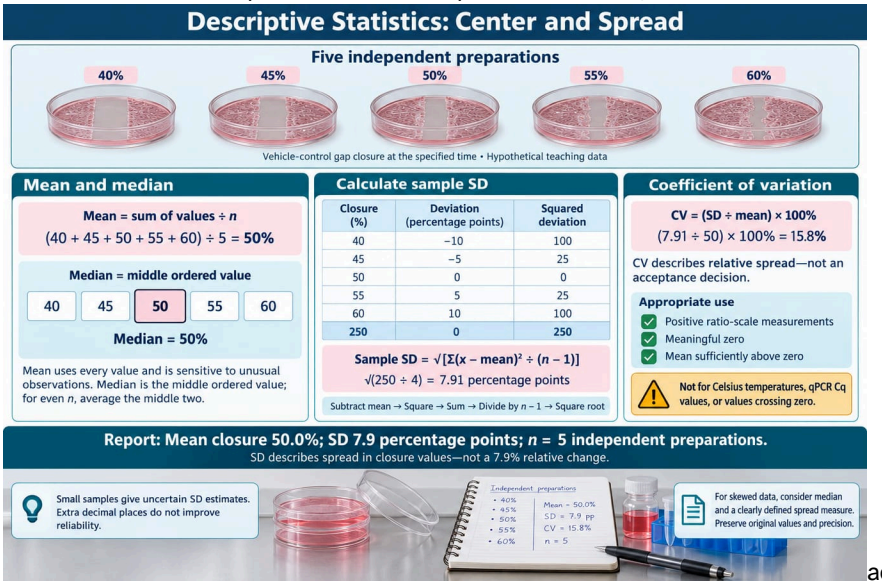
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15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars

The summary describes the five preparations, but the team wants to know what a repeated study might show. Inferential statistics use sample data and assumptions to estimate a broader population or process. Additional independent samples can improve an estimate. Repeated readings of the same sample cannot replace independent evidence or remove a consistent measurement bias.

The **standard error of the mean**, or SEM, estimates how much a sample **mean** would vary across repeated samples under the relevant assumptions. For independent values, SEM = SD ÷ square root of n. SD describes spre



ad among the observed values; SEM describes the precision of their **mean** as an estimate.

For the five closure values above, SEM = 7.91 ÷ square root of 5 = 3.54 percentage points. This smaller number does not mean that the preparations were less variable. It describes a different property of the same dataset.

Figure 15.2. The same five hypothetical preparation-level values shown with mean ± SD on the left and mean ± SEM on the right. The points are identical. The different bars summarize spread and mean precision, respectively. Both graphs identify n and the bar definition. Original plots.

A **confidence interval**, or CI, gives a range calculated to estimate a population value, such as a **mean**. A 95% CI method would produce intervals containing that value in about 95% of repeated samples under its assumptions. An individual interval does not contain 95% of the observations, and the confidence level does not give a probability that the fixed population value lies in this particular interval.

For a small sample of independent values, a t-based **confidence interval** for the **mean** may be suitable when its assumptions are reasonable. This method uses a multiplier that depends on sample size. For the five closure values, the multiplier is approximately 2.776, based on four degrees of freedom, or n − 1. The interval is 50.0 ± (2.776 × 3.54), approximately 40.2% to 59.8% closure. This calculation illustrates the method; five values provide limited evidence for assessing its assumptions.

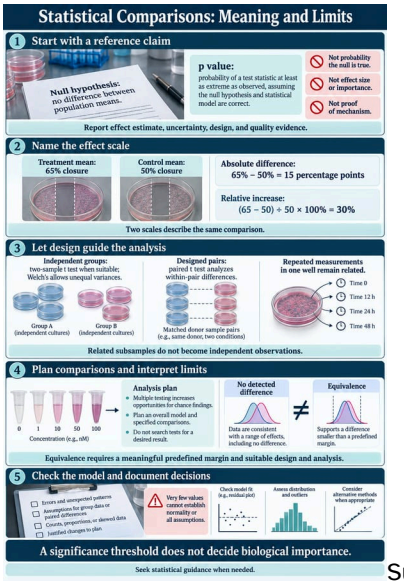
An **error bar** must be identified as SD, SEM, a confidence interval, or another stated quantity. “Mean ± error” is insufficient. Overlapping or nonoverlapping bars are not a general substitute for the statistical comparison appropriate to the design, especially when bars have different definitions.

Plan sample size using the question, expected variation, effect of interest, and analysis. **Statistical power** is the probability of detecting a specified effect when it exists, under an assumed model. A pilot can help estimate variation, but a small pilot gives an uncertain estimate. More samples cannot fix confounding, contamination, or the wrong endpoint.

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15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values



Suppose the quality checks are satisfactory and the treatment group has greater average closure. Could ordinary sampling variation help explain the difference? A **null hypothesis** supplies a reference claim, such as no difference between population means. A statistical test compares the observed data with that claim. The **p value** is the probability, assuming the **null hypothesis** and the statistical model are correct, of obtaining a test statistic at least as extreme as the one observed.

A p value is not the probability that the null hypothesis is true, and it does not measure the size or importance of an effect. A small p value cannot establish a specific biological mechanism. Report the effect estimate, uncertainty, design, and quality evidence alongside any p value.

An **effect size** describes the magnitude of a difference or association. In a scratch study, a treatment mean of 65% closure compared with a control mean of 50% gives a difference of 15 percentage points. The relative increase in closure is (65 – 50) ÷ 50 × 100 = 30%. These are different descriptions of the same comparison, so identify the scale used.

The study design helps determine the test. A two-sample t test can compare means from independent groups when its assumptions are suitable. Welch's t test allows the groups to have unequal variances. A paired t test instead analyzes differences within pairs established by the design. The relevant distributional assumptions apply to the group data or the paired differences, respectively. Neither test turns related subsamples into independent observations.

For example, treatment and control results from the same donor may be paired. The relevant values are each donor's treatment-minus-control difference, rather than two unrelated lists. If measurements are followed over time in the same well, they are also related; an analysis that assumes independent observations at every time point is unsuitable.

Comparing several concentrations creates more than one possible comparison. **Multiple testing** increases the opportunity to find a small p value by chance when many claims are examined. Use a planned analysis that handles the comparison structure, such as an appropriate overall model and specified follow-up comparisons. Do not repeatedly try different tests until one produces the desired result.

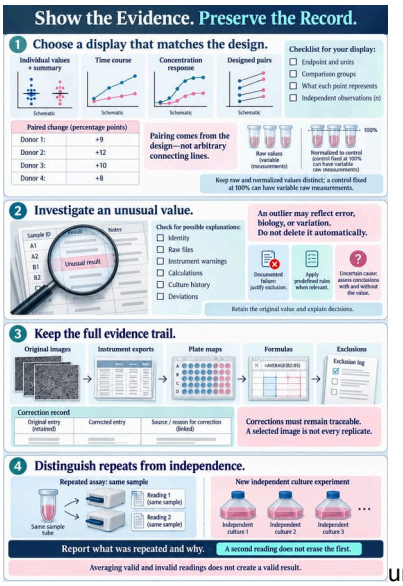
A result that does not meet a chosen significance threshold does not prove that the groups are identical. It may reflect little effect, high variation, limited sample size, or an unsuitable analysis. **Equivalence** is a separate question requiring a meaningful predefined margin and an appropriate design and analysis. "No detected difference" and "equivalent" are not interchangeable conclusions.

Inspect the data for errors, unexpected patterns, and whether the planned model is suitable. Counts, proportions, and strongly skewed values may need approaches beyond a simple **mean** comparison. A normality check with very few values cannot establish that all assumptions are satisfied. Document justified changes to the plan, and seek statistical guidance when needed.

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15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity



The team's graph should make the evidence easier to inspect. Label the endpoint, units, comparison groups, and level represented by each point. For a small dataset, individual values with a suitable summary usually show more than a bar displaying only the **mean**. The reader should be able to see the spread and the number of independent observations. Lines connect each donor's control and treatment values. The donor-level changes are 9, 12, 10, and 8 percentage points. The pairing is part of the experimental design, not a line added between unrelated values. Original plot.

Use a time-course plot for planned measurements over time, a concentration-response plot for a concentration series, and a paired plot when each value has a designed partner. State whether points represent fields, wells, cultures, runs, or donors. Keep raw and normalized values distinguishable. A normalized control fixed at 100% does not imply that its original measurements had no variation.

An **outlier** is an observation unusually distant from other values. It may reflect error, a genuine biological difference, or ordinary variation in a small dataset. An unusual value is a reason to investigate, not an automatic reason to delete it.

Investigate an unusual result by checking identity, raw files, instrument warnings, calculations, culture history, and deviations. A documented failure may justify exclusion; use a predefined rule when one applies. If an unforeseen failure requires a new decision, explain that decision openly. Keep the original value and report the reason for exclusion. If its cause is uncertain, show how including or excluding it affects the conclusion rather than quietly removing it.

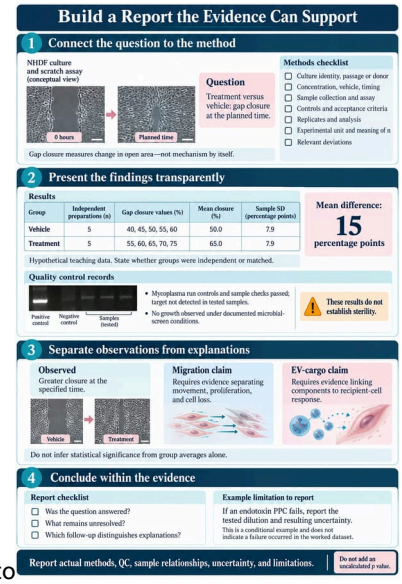
Data integrity means that the record accurately preserves what was done and observed. Keep original images, instrument exports, plate maps, formulas, and exclusions. Corrections should remain traceable. Do not overwrite an original value with a preferred replacement or present one selected image as though it represented every replicate.

Repeated measurement is appropriate when a documented problem needs resolution. Distinguish a repeated assay on the same sample from a new independent culture experiment. Report what was repeated and why. A second reading does not erase the first, and averaging valid and invalid readings does not create a valid result.

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15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report



The final report brings the evidence together. A reader should be able to follow the question, understand the method, inspect the findings, and assess the conclusion. Begin with the cell model and a specific comparison. Explain why the chosen endpoint addresses the question: gap closure measures a change in an open area, while additional evidence is needed to explain the cellular processes behind it.

In the methods, describe culture identity, relevant passage or donor information, treatment concentration, vehicle, timing, sample collection, and assay. State the controls, acceptance criteria, replicate structure, and analysis method. Identify the experimental unit and the level represented by n. Include deviations that affect interpretation rather than hiding them in an unlabeled note.

In the results, present control performance before using the assay to support a biological claim. Report invalid or inconclusive findings alongside valid ones. Show individual replicate values where practical, then provide the stated summary, units, and uncertainty. Include dilution corrections and normalization definitions needed to understand the reported number.

Condition	Independent preparations (n)	Mean closure (%)	SD (percentage points)
Vehicle	5	50.0	7.9
Treatment	5	65.0	7.9

Example results table. The endpoint is gap closure at the planned time. Each n is an independent preparation, SD describes spread, and control findings and assay methods are reported separately. Values match the hypothetical report statement below.

In the discussion, separate observation from explanation. “Treated wells showed greater closure at the specified time” describes an endpoint. “The preparation increased migration” requires evidence that distinguishes movement from proliferation and cell loss. “EV cargo caused the change” requires evidence connecting the preparation’s components to the recipient-cell response.

Worked example: a supported report statement

“Across five independent preparations per group, mean NHDF gap closure was 65.0% in the treatment group and 50.0% in the vehicle group at the planned time, a difference of 15 percentage points. Control closure values were 40%, 45%, 50%, 55%, and 60%, with SD 7.9 percentage points. Treatment values were 55%, 60%, 65%, 70%, and 75%, with SD 7.9 percentage points. The

selected mycoplasma run controls and required sample checks passed, and no target was detected in the tested samples. No growth was observed under the documented microbial-screen conditions. These findings describe gap closure under the tested conditions; they do not establish sterility or isolate migration from proliferation."

This statement describes the observations without claiming a mechanism. A complete report would also identify the actual methods, sample relationships, other relevant QC findings, images, uncertainty for the group difference, and any planned statistical comparison. State whether preparations were independent between groups or matched across conditions. Do not add an uncalculated **p value** or infer statistical significance from the group averages alone.

End with a conclusion proportional to the evidence. Identify whether the question was answered, what remained unresolved, and which follow-up would distinguish the main competing explanations. A useful limitation is specific: "The endotoxin PPC failed at the tested dilution" tells the reader what is uncertain. "More research is needed" alone does not.

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15.13: Chapter Summary

A promising culture result becomes useful evidence only when its source, measurement, and interpretation can be assessed. **Quality assurance** supports consistent, traceable work. **Quality control** evaluates stated requirements. Identity, viability, **mycoplasma**, microbial-growth, and **endotoxin** checks answer different questions. A negative screen requires satisfactory controls and remains limited to the method and sample tested.

Identify the **experimental unit** and relationships among measurements before choosing a summary or analysis. The **mean** describes the average, and sample SD describes observed spread. CV describes relative spread when the scale is suitable. SEM and confidence intervals address uncertainty in an estimate. State what n represents and identify every error bar.

Group comparisons must fit the design. A **p value** does not show the size, practical importance, or biological cause of a difference. Clear graphs, preserved raw data, and explained exclusions allow others to evaluate the result. Returning to the scratch study, faster gap closure can support further investigation, but the final claim must reflect the quality checks, replicate structure, and limits of the endpoint.

Key Terms

Quality assurance	Quality control	Acceptance criterion	Inhibition
Positive product control	Invalid result	Inconclusive result	Pseudoreplication
Mean	Sample standard deviation	Coefficient of variation	Standard error of the mean
Confidence interval	p value	Effect size	Outlier
Data integrity			

Review Questions

1. Give one QA activity and one QC measurement for a cryopreservation or scratch experiment. Explain how they support different decisions.

2. Why should culture identity, viability, and contamination be examined separately?

3. A mycoplasma sample is negative, but the positive control fails. How should the result be reported, and why?

4. Why does a valid external positive control not necessarily rule out inhibition in every sample?

5. A microbial screen shows no growth on one medium after the planned interval. Write a supported conclusion and identify two detection limits of that screen.

6. Explain why a negative microbial-growth screen cannot replace an endotoxin test.

7. An unspiked sample reads 0.20 EU/mL and its spiked portion reads 0.60 EU/mL after a 0.50 EU/mL addition. Calculate spike recovery and explain how its acceptability is judged.

8. A method detects 0.02 EU/mL in a solution tested after a 1:20 predilution. What is the corresponding original-sample reporting limit, assuming the method supports it?

9. Distinguish invalid, inconclusive, and valid negative results. Give a specific example of each.

10. Three culture runs each contain two treatment wells imaged at five positions. Identify the number of fields, wells, and independent runs. Explain which level n should represent in a run-level comparison.

11. Calculate the mean and sample SD for closure values of 30%, 40%, and 50%. Calculate CV and state the units or interpretation of each summary.

12. Why are SD and SEM different even when they use the same values? What information must accompany an error bar?

13. Control and treatment means are 40% and 50% closure. Calculate the difference in percentage points and the relative increase.

14. Explain why paired donor data require an analysis that preserves the pairing. Why is arbitrary pairing unsuitable?

15. A test gives p = 0.08. Explain why this does not prove that the treatment and control are equivalent.

16. Describe how you would investigate an unusually high cytokine result before deciding whether to exclude it.

17. Write a short report statement for faster scratch closure when proliferation was not measured and an endotoxin sample-suitability check was invalid.

Apply Your Understanding

A team combines material from three MSC cultures and applies the preparation to NHDFs. The pooled preparation gives a negative **mycoplasma** reading, but the positive control fails. Explain what can be concluded, what should happen to the affected material, and which source records or retained samples could help the investigation.

Three independent culture runs each include a control and a treatment condition. Each condition has two wells, and each well is imaged at five positions. Design a summary and graph for a comparison of run averages. State the number of fields, wells, and runs per condition, define n, and explain how you would preserve the matching between conditions.

A preparation diluted twentyfold gives an **endotoxin** result below a reporting limit of 0.02 EU/mL in the tested solution. The required suitability checks pass. Calculate the original-sample reporting limit. The study requires a result below 0.10 EU/mL: explain whether this finding can establish that requirement and what method changes might need evaluation.

A treatment group has higher **mean** gap closure than its control, with p = 0.08. One unusually high value has no documented technical failure. Write a short conclusion and explain how you would handle that value. Propose an additional measurement that could help distinguish cell movement from cell division.

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16: ETHICS REGULATION AND CLINICAL APPLICATIONS

A research team finds that a preparation collected from cultured cells increases closure of a gap in a fibroblast monolayer. This observation may justify further investigation, but it does not establish that the preparation heals wounds in people. Gap closure can involve cell movement, division, or both, while wound healing involves interactions among many cell types and tissues. Before moving toward a clinical application, the team must address several questions. Were the source cells obtained and used appropriately? Are the results reliable? What does the preparation contain? Could it cause harm? Can it be produced consistently, and would its effects extend to living tissue?

Cell culture connects basic biology to drug testing, tissue repair, and cell therapy. Responsible development requires respect for donors, accurate records, appropriate oversight, and evidence suited to the intended use. When cells come from a person, their collection and use create responsibilities to the donor, laboratory staff, and anyone who may later receive a product. **Ethics** addresses what is respectful, fair, and responsible. **Regulation** establishes requirements and permissions that apply to particular activities and products. Meeting regulatory requirements does not resolve every ethical question.

Laboratory studies and studies in people provide different kinds of evidence. A response in cultured cells can support a biological explanation or guide further testing. Clinical use requires additional evidence about product identity, quality, manufacturing controls, safety, and effectiveness for the intended application. A strong response in a culture is one step in that process.

Ethical principles and United States regulatory requirements guide how cell culture findings move toward clinical applications. Source records, contamination control, characterization, and careful interpretation support responsible decisions throughout development. Regulatory examples draw on sources checked in October 2026. Specific requirements depend on the activity, product, jurisdiction, and stage of development.

Learning Objectives

- After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

  1. Analyze a cell culture case using respect for persons, risk and benefit, and fairness.
  2. Explain how consent, cell origins, and privacy affect the collection and sharing of human biological materials.
  3. Compare the purposes of institutional research review, biosafety oversight, and regulatory review.
  4. Distinguish laboratory research, investigational clinical use, and an approved clinical application.
  5. Describe how identity, purity, potency, safety testing, and traceability contribute to manufacturing quality.
  6. Identify the additional evidence needed to translate a culture result into a claim about patient benefit.

16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine

16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
16.13: Chapter Summary

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16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture

Research ethics concerns how research should be planned, performed, and reported to respect people and produce trustworthy knowledge. Some decisions concern the person who donated tissue. Others concern staff, research participants, future patients, and communities affected by the work.

The Belmont Report describes three central principles for research involving people. **Respect for persons** recognizes individual choice and the need to protect people whose ability to choose is limited. **Beneficence** calls for reducing possible harm and evaluating possible benefits. **Justice** concerns fair treatment and the distribution of research burdens and benefits. These principles help guide consent, risk assessment, and participant selection.

Apply these ideas to concrete choices. If a research team asks students to donate cells, students may feel pressure to agree because the investigator teaches their class. A fair design should address that relationship and protect a student's ability to decline. If a study draws conclusions from only one donor group, the report should explain the limits of that evidence rather than treating the group as representative of everyone.

Scientific quality also has an ethical role. An uncontrolled experiment can consume donated material without answering the intended question. A mislabeled culture can lead another team to pursue the wrong result. Planning suitable controls and preserving accurate records help honor the effort and trust invested in the research.

Ethical judgment goes beyond asking whether an action is convenient. Identify who may be affected, what information is missing, what alternatives exist, and who has responsibility for the decision. Keep the reasoning specific enough that another person can review it.



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16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent



A **biospecimen** is biological material obtained from an organism, such as blood, tissue, or cells. Human biospecimens may be collected specifically for research or may remain after a clinical procedure. Collection for clinical care does not, by itself, explain the permissions and review needed for every later research activity.

Informed consent is a process in which a person receives understandable information and makes a voluntary decision about participation. A signature documents part of that process; it does not replace a clear explanation or the opportunity to ask questions. Consent information addresses the purpose, procedures, relevant risks and possible benefits, privacy protections, and voluntary participation.

For cell-based research, the consent process and study documents should address the planned use of the material. Relevant questions may include whether cells will be stored, shared, genetically modified, or used to create a continuing cell line. When applicable, information about future research, commercial use, and whether individual results will be returned also matters. The revised Common Rule includes specific consent provisions concerning biospecimens, including commercial profit when appropriate.

The legal requirements for secondary research vary with identifiability, the study, and applicable rules. Some activities may qualify for an exemption, a waiver, or a determination that they do not involve human subjects under a particular regulation. Researchers should follow their institution's process for that determination. A technician should not decide that review is unnecessary simply because a vial lacks a name.

Respect the limits described in the approved source documentation. A research group may have permission to study a cell line in one project while transfer to another organization requires additional review or an agreement. Buying cells does not automatically settle every question about downstream use.

A donor's withdrawal request also needs a clear process. The team should explain the practical limits of withdrawing material or information that has already been distributed, used in completed work, or rendered unlinked to the donor. Avoid promising that every copy can always be recovered. Follow the approved consent terms and institutional process rather than inventing a response after a request arrives.

Worked example: a proposed use beyond the source record

A laboratory receives coded fibroblasts for a study of cell growth. A collaborator asks to use them to create induced pluripotent stem cells and distribute the new lines. The original transfer record does not establish permission for those activities.

The appropriate next step is to review the source agreement, available consent information, and institutional requirements with

the responsible investigator and review office. Document the decision before beginning the new activity or transferring the material. The absence of a visible donor name does not answer whether the proposed use is permitted.

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16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy

Provenance is the documented origin and history of a material.



For a cell culture, relevant information includes the source tissue, supplier or repository, cell designation, derivation history when available, permitted use, and authentication evidence. Provenance connects the scientific identity of the culture with the conditions under which it was obtained.

HeLa cells provide an important historical example. The line was derived from cervical cancer specimens obtained from Henrietta Lacks in 1951 without her knowledge or consent. HeLa cells became a major research resource. The NIH-Lacks Family Agreement later established a process for controlled access to specified HeLa whole-genome sequence data. This agreement addresses genomic data access; it should not be described as a general permission system for every HeLa experiment.

The case shows why scientific usefulness does not remove the need to consider a material's origins and the people connected to it. A culture label may seem like a technical code, but the source can carry personal, family, and community concerns.

Coded specimens have direct identifying information replaced by a code, while a key exists that can link the code to an individual. Whether researchers can readily identify the person is important under HHS human-subjects regulations. OHRP distinguishes secondary research with coded materials from research in which investigators directly obtain specimens through interaction or intervention. Coding alone does not make every activity outside human-subjects research.

Privacy protection includes practical handling choices. Use approved sample codes in ordinary working records. Keep identifying information and any linking key in appropriately restricted systems. Share only the information needed for the authorized purpose. A slide showing a patient's name beside a microscopy image can disclose information even if the experiment itself uses coded tubes.

Genomic information requires particular care because it can contain sensitive information relevant to a donor and relatives. Removing a name should not be treated as a guarantee that data cannot be linked back to someone. Follow the approved sharing plan and access controls.

A **material transfer agreement**, or MTA, sets terms for transferring research materials between organizations. It can address permitted uses, redistribution, publication, and other responsibilities. It supports controlled sharing but does not replace consent, required research review, or a biosafety assessment.

Worked example: preserving useful records without revealing a donor

A student report needs to identify which NHDF preparation supplied an experiment. The report can use a laboratory code and the relevant culture history. It does not need the donor's name, address, or medical record number.

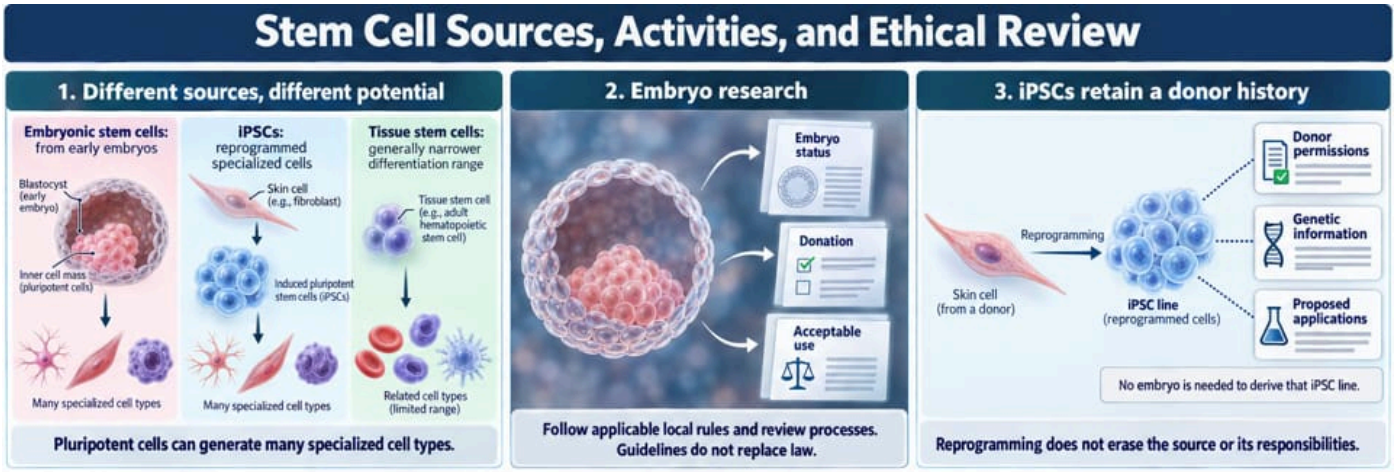
The laboratory can retain the authorized source link in its restricted record system while the report documents the cell code, supplier, lot, passage, and relevant experimental conditions. Scientific traceability and protection of personal information can be maintained together.

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16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries

Stem cell research includes different cell sources and

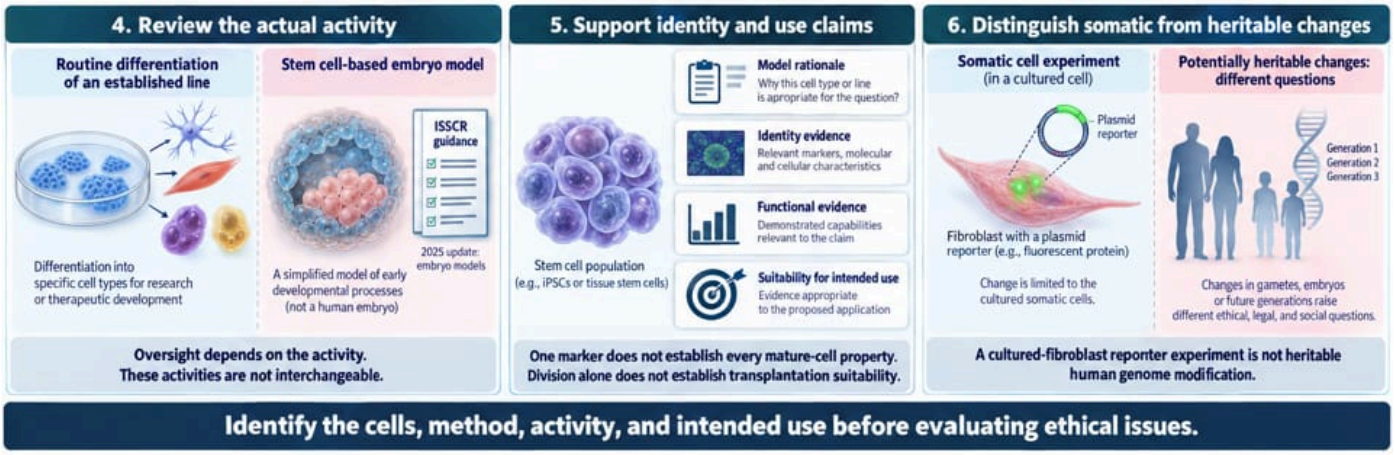


different activities. **Embryonic stem cells** originate from early embryos, while **induced pluripotent stem cells**, or iPSCs, are produced by reprogramming specialized cells. Pluripotent cells can generate many specialized cell types. Tissue stem cells generally have a more limited range of differentiation. These biological differences influence both research goals and ethical questions.

Research using embryos raises concerns about embryo status, donation, and acceptable use. People and jurisdictions may approach these concerns differently. Investigators need to understand the rules and review processes that apply where the work takes place. Professional guidelines can help interpret ethical issues, but they do not replace local law.

Using iPSCs avoids obtaining an embryo to derive that particular line. It still requires attention to donor permissions, genetic information, and proposed applications. Reprogramming a donated cell does not erase its origin. A new line may also be used in ways that were not obvious at the time the original tissue was collected.

Some activities require specialized scientific and ethical review because of their developmental significance. ISSCR guidance addresses human embryo research, certain stem cell-based embryo models, and related activities. Its 2025 update focused on embryo models. The appropriate oversight depends on the activity; routine differentiation of an established line should not automatically be treated as the same activity as producing an embryo model. A proposal should explain why its model is needed and how the investigators will establish what the cells have become. Expression of one marker does not demonstrate every property of a mature cel



l type. A claim that a population is suitable for transplantation requires evidence beyond its ability to divide or express a chosen gene.

Somatic cell modification changes cells outside the reproductive lineage for the intended application. Changes that could be inherited by future generations raise different questions. A plasmid reporter experiment in cultured fibroblasts should not be described as heritable human genome modification. Identify the actual cells, method, and intended use before evaluating the ethical issues.

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16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility

An **institutional review board**, or IRB, reviews research involving human participants within the applicable framework. Its role includes evaluating protections for participants, consent, and the balance of risks and possible benefits. Researchers should work through the institution's process to determine whether and how a proposed activity falls within that review.

An **institutional biosafety committee**, or IBC, reviews relevant research involving recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecules under the NIH Guidelines. It considers containment, facilities, practices, and personnel training. The timing and type of review depend on the research category and applicable institutional requirements.

Specialized stem cell or embryo review addresses scientific and ethical issues that may require additional expertise. Animal research review addresses animal welfare when an activity involves research animals. These functions concern different questions. One committee's decision does not automatically answer every question within another committee's scope.

Review function	Main focus	Relevant example
Human research review	Participant protections and consent	New tissue collection for a study
Biosafety review	Containment practices and relevant nucleic acid research	Proposed genetic modification
Specialized stem cell review	Sensitive developmental activities	A proposed embryo model
Regulatory product review	Product development and intended clinical use	An investigational cell product

Oversight remains relevant after a project begins. A change in cell source, delivery method, genetic construct, or planned use may affect the original assessment. Report proposed changes through the applicable process before implementing changes that require review.

Technicians support oversight by following approved procedures, documenting departures, and raising questions when records do not match the work. For example, a shipment described as a different cell type should prompt a source check before use. Continuing with an uncertain identity can compromise both the experiment and its approved scope.

Responsibility is shared, but it is not vague. The investigator directs the study, the institution provides review systems, and staff maintain the records and practices within their roles. When the correct decision is unclear, preserve the material and evidence while seeking a documented determination.

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16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use



Research use includes activities intended to develop knowledge, such as measuring gene expression in a culture or testing a compound in a plate. A laboratory finding can support further research without supporting administration of that material to a person.

Investigational clinical use studies an intervention in people under an appropriate clinical research framework. For many cellular and gene therapy products in the United States, an **investigational new drug application**, or IND, provides the regulatory framework for clinical investigation. An IND that is in effect allows the specified investigation to proceed; it is not marketing approval or proof of effectiveness.

An approved product has undergone the applicable regulatory review for a defined use. Approval of one product does not establish that another preparation with a similar cell name, source, or claimed mechanism has the same quality or clinical benefit.

The United States framework for **human cells tissues and cellular and tissue-based products**, or HCT/Ps, includes different regulatory pathways. Certain HCT/Ps that satisfy all applicable criteria can be regulated solely under section 361 of the Public Health Service Act and 21 CFR part 1271. Products that do not satisfy those criteria and are not within an applicable exception may be regulated as drugs, devices, and/or biological products requiring additional review.

Minimal manipulation and **homologous use** are two criteria in that framework. Minimal manipulation has definitions related to the type of tissue or cells and relevant characteristics. Homologous use concerns whether the material performs the same basic function in the recipient as in the donor. Both terms have regulatory meanings; they are not everyday judgments about whether a procedure seems simple. Other criteria also matter.

Autologous origin, a brief processing time, or a negative contamination screen does not by itself settle a product's regulatory status. The complete product and intended use need assessment. In particular, culture expansion or genetic modification should not be assumed to fit a pathway for minimally manipulated tissue.

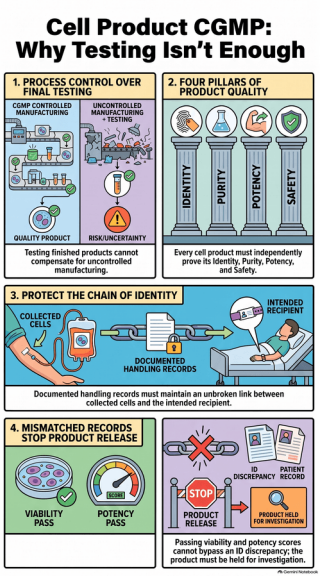
Laws and regulations establish applicable requirements. Guidance documents generally explain an agency's current thinking and recommendations; a draft guidance is not a final requirement. Distinguish these sources when evaluating a proposed activity.

A product label saying "research use" does not establish permission for clinical administration. The actual intended use and applicable rules matter. Likewise, registration of an establishment is different from product approval. Check the status of the specific product and application through authoritative sources.

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16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release



Current good manufacturing practice, or CGMP, refers to requirements intended to support consistent manufacturing quality for regulated drug products. Quality depends on suitable processes, facilities, equipment, materials, training, and records. Testing the finished product cannot fully compensate for uncontrolled production. The specific requirements depend on the product and development stage.

Cell products present particular challenges because the cells are living and can change during culture. An increase in cell number may be accompanied by changes in phenotype or function. Freezing, shipping, thawing, and delays before use can also affect the preparation. A process needs controls that address the attributes important for the intended use.

Identity establishes that the product is what it is intended to be. **Purity** concerns the desired material and unwanted components. **Potency** measures biological activity relevant to the product's intended effect. A high viable cell count does not demonstrate all three. Potency testing is product-specific and may require more than one assay to assess relevant activity.

Safety-related testing may address microbial contamination, endotoxin, or other product-specific risks. Its interpretation depends on the sampling plan, assay controls, sensitivity, and acceptance criteria. A final negative result is one part of the quality system rather than evidence that every risk is absent.

A **product specification** defines the required tests and acceptance criteria used to judge suitability. **Lot release** is the documented decision that a particular lot meets the applicable conditions for its intended use. FDA guidance describes release testing in relation to safety, identity, purity, and potency, along with suitable analytical methods and acceptance criteria.

Attribute or record	Question it addresses	Evidence example
Identity	Is this the intended material?	Product-specific characterization
Purity	What unwanted material is present?	Tests for relevant residual components
Potency	Does it have relevant biological activity?	An assay tied to intended function

Attribute or record	Question it addresses	Evidence example
Safety-related testing	Are specified risks acceptably controlled?	Suitable contamination and other risk tests
Traceability	Can the source and handling be followed?	Linked source production and transfer records

The criteria in a clinical manufacturing program are supported by product development and the applicable framework. A textbook exercise should not invent a universal viable cell threshold or endotoxin limit for every product. Even two products using the same cell type can differ in route of administration, composition, activity, and risk.

Chain of identity maintains the link between the material and its intended source or recipient. **Chain of custody** documents who controlled or handled the material and when. In an autologous process, these records help keep a patient's collected cells connected to the product intended for that patient. A technically successful process with a broken identity link can still be unsuitable for use.

Worked example: acceptable test values with an unresolved identity

A preparation meets its recorded viability and potency criteria. However, the transfer record contains a sample identifier that does not match the final container. A staff member suggests releasing the material because its test values are acceptable.

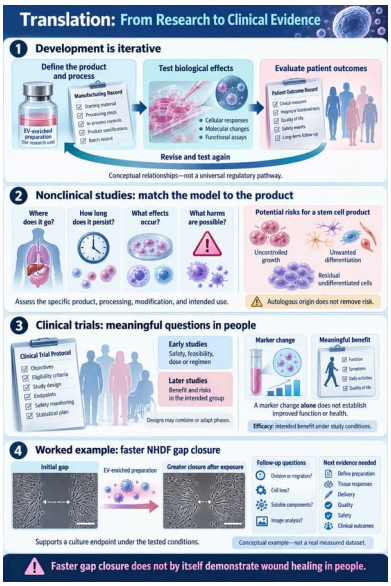
The test values do not resolve which source the container represents. Keep the material in the appropriate controlled status, preserve the records, and investigate the discrepancy through the quality process. Release requires resolution according to the program's criteria and authorized review, not a guess based on appearance.

Comparability assesses whether a manufacturing change has an acceptable effect on product quality. Changing a medium, vessel, or freezing method can change more than yield. Stability evidence also supports the interval and conditions under which a product remains suitable. FDA's development guidance discusses these issues as part of cell and gene therapy development.

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16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence



Translation is the process of developing research findings into useful applications, including potential medical interventions. It involves defining a product or intervention, testing its relevant properties, and gathering evidence in models and people as appropriate. Development is iterative: a later finding can require a change to the product, process, assay, or study design.

Nonclinical studies investigate a proposed intervention outside human clinical trials. Relevant questions include whether the material reaches the intended site, how long it persists, what biological effects it has, and what harms it could cause. The study program should reflect the product and its proposed use. A model that cannot respond to a human cell product may be poorly suited to evaluate its intended activity.

For stem cell-derived products, uncontrolled growth, unwanted differentiation, or remaining undifferentiated cells can raise concerns. The cells' source, processing, genetic modification, and persistence all influence the assessment. Autologous origin does not remove those risks. ISSCR guidance emphasizes a product-specific evaluation of nonclinical safety and potential benefit.

A **clinical trial** studies an intervention in people according to a protocol. Early trials often emphasize safety, feasibility, and selection of a suitable dose or regimen. Later studies evaluate benefit and risks in the intended patient group. Trials can combine or adapt phases, and cell and gene therapy development may require designs suited to small populations or product-specific features.

Efficacy refers to the ability of an intervention to produce the intended benefit under the study conditions. Choose an endpoint that addresses a meaningful question. A change in a molecular marker may help explain activity, but it is not automatically evidence of improved function or health.



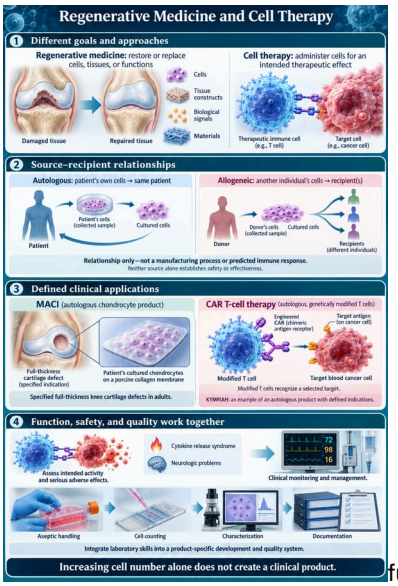
Worked example: the next question after faster gap closure

A controlled experiment finds greater NHDF gap closure after exposure to an EV-enriched preparation. This supports a statement about the measured culture endpoint under those conditions. Before proposing a clinical effect, the team needs to define the preparation and evaluate alternative explanations. Cell division, migration, cell loss, soluble components, and changes in image analysis can influence closure. Follow-up work should determine which explanation the evidence supports. A claim about wound healing would additionally require appropriate evidence about tissue responses, delivery, quality, safety, and clinical outcomes.

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16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine



Regenerative medicine seeks to restore or replace damaged cells, tissues, or functions. Approaches may use cells, tissue constructs, biological signals, or combinations of materials. **Cell therapy** administers cells for an intended therapeutic effect. Some cell therapies aim to repair tissue; others target a disease through immune activity or another function.

Autologous cells come from the person who will receive them. **Allogeneic** cells come from another individual. Autologous approaches require a separate source-to-recipient link for each patient. Allogeneic approaches can potentially support multiple recipients from a donor-derived supply, but require attention to donor source, recipient interactions, and consistency. Neither term alone establishes safety or effectiveness.

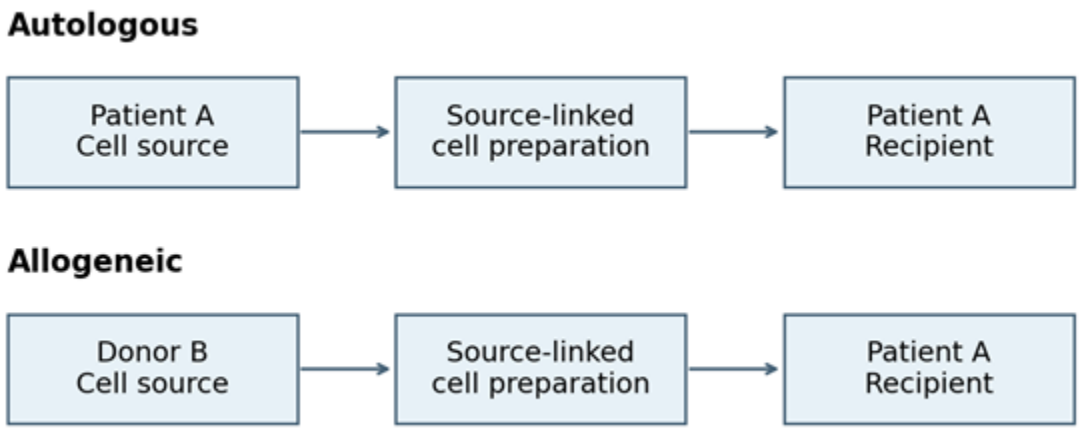


Figure 16.2. Autologous and allogeneic describe the relationship between the cell source and recipient. The diagram shows that relationship only; it does not imply a particular manufacturing process or immune response. Original diagram.

An established example that uses cultured cells is MACI, a product containing a patient's cultured chondrocytes on a porcine collagen membrane. FDA lists it for repair of specified full-thickness knee cartilage defects in adults. The example links tissue collection, cell expansion, a supporting membrane, and a defined clinical application. It does not establish that any cultured cell population can repair cartilage or that the product treats every joint disorder.

Another important application is **chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy**, or CAR T-cell therapy. T cells are modified to express a receptor that helps them recognize a selected target. Some approved products use a patient's own cells for specified blood cancers. KYMRIAH is one example of an approved, genetically modified autologous T-cell product with defined indications.

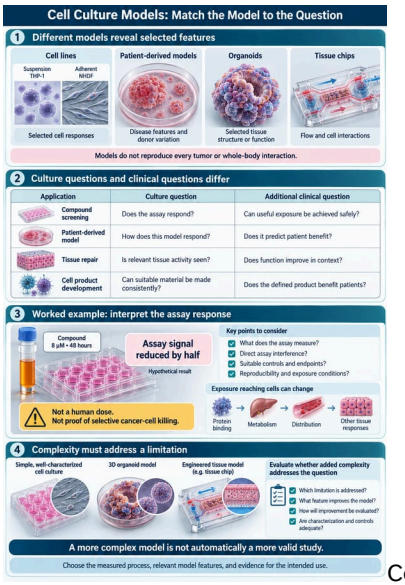
CAR T-cell treatment shows why function and safety must be assessed together. Activated immune cells can attack target cells, while the treatment can also cause serious adverse effects, including cytokine release syndrome and neurologic problems. Clinical monitoring and management are therefore part of the treatment program.

These applications share laboratory skills with basic cell culture: aseptic handling, cell counting, characterization, and documentation. Their success depends on integrating those skills into a product-specific development and quality system. A classroom or research culture is not converted into a clinical product simply by increasing its cell number.

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16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models



Cell culture helps investigators study cancer mechanisms and compare responses to potential drugs. A cell line can provide a repeatable model of selected biological features. It does not capture every interaction within a tumor, including the surrounding tissue, blood supply, and immune response.

Different models answer different questions. A leukemia-derived line such as THP-1 can support studies of selected cell responses. NHDFs can support questions about fibroblast behavior. A model should be chosen for the measured process and its limitations, rather than only because it is available or easy to grow.

Organoids are three-dimensional cultures that reproduce selected structural or functional features of a tissue. Patient-derived cells and iPSCs can help model disease-related features and donor variation. An organoid is still a model, and its useful features depend on the cell types, culture conditions, and characterization.

Tissue chips, also called organs on chips, use engineered devices to support living tissue models. They can incorporate features such as fluid flow and interactions between cell types. NCATS develops these systems to improve the prediction of drug effects and toxicity in humans. The value of a model depends on the question and evidence that its response is informative for that use.

Culture application	Question it can support	Additional clinical question
Compound screening	Does the assay respond at a tested exposure?	Can a useful exposure be achieved safely?
Patient-derived model	How does this model respond?	Does its response predict patient benefit?
Tissue repair research	Do cells show relevant tissue activity?	Does function improve in the intended setting?
Cell product development	Can suitable material be produced consistently?	Does the defined product provide clinical benefit?

Worked example: interpreting a promising concentration response

A compound reduces a cancer cell assay signal by half at 8 µM after 48 hours. The result describes an assay response at that exposure. It does not establish a suitable human dose or prove that the compound selectively kills cancer cells.

The team should determine what the assay measures, check for direct assay interference, and compare relevant endpoints in suitable control models. It should also examine reproducibility and the exposure conditions. A compound may behave differently when protein binding, metabolism, distribution, or other tissue responses change the concentration reaching cells.

A more complex model can provide additional information, but complexity does not automatically make a study valid. A poorly characterized organoid with weak controls may produce less useful evidence than a well-designed simpler culture experiment. Explain which feature of the new model addresses the earlier study's limitation and how that improvement will be evaluated.

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16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication

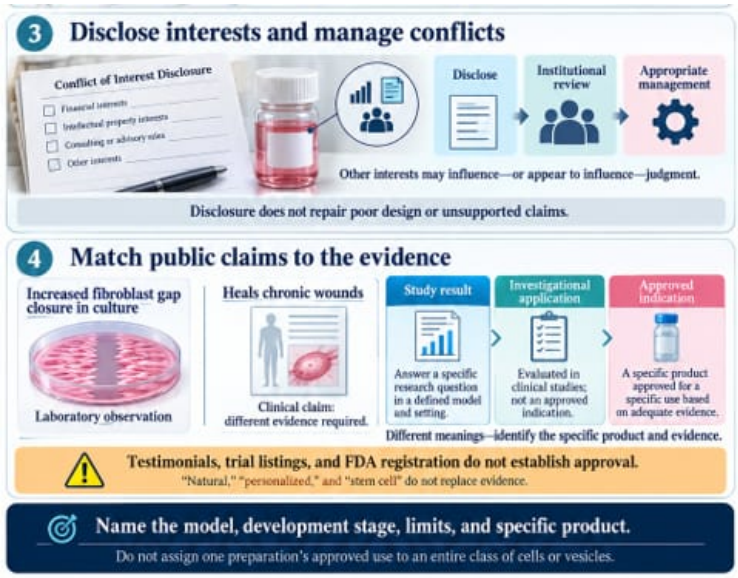
A reliable research record preserves what was done and observed.



Fabrication means making up data or results. **Falsification** involves changing materials, methods, or data so that the research is not accurately represented. **Plagiarism** uses another person's ideas, results, or words without appropriate credit. Federal research misconduct definitions distinguish these actions from honest error and differences of opinion.

An error still requires correction. If a dilution factor was entered incorrectly, retain the original record, document the correction, and update affected results. If a mislabeled sample makes a conclusion uncertain, explain the uncertainty rather than quietly relabeling it to fit the expected pattern.

A **conflict of interest** occurs when another interest could influence, or appear to influence, professional judgment. Financial interests in a product are one example. Disclosure allows the relevant institution or reviewer to decide how to manage the conflict. Disclosure itself does not resolve poor design or unsupported claims.



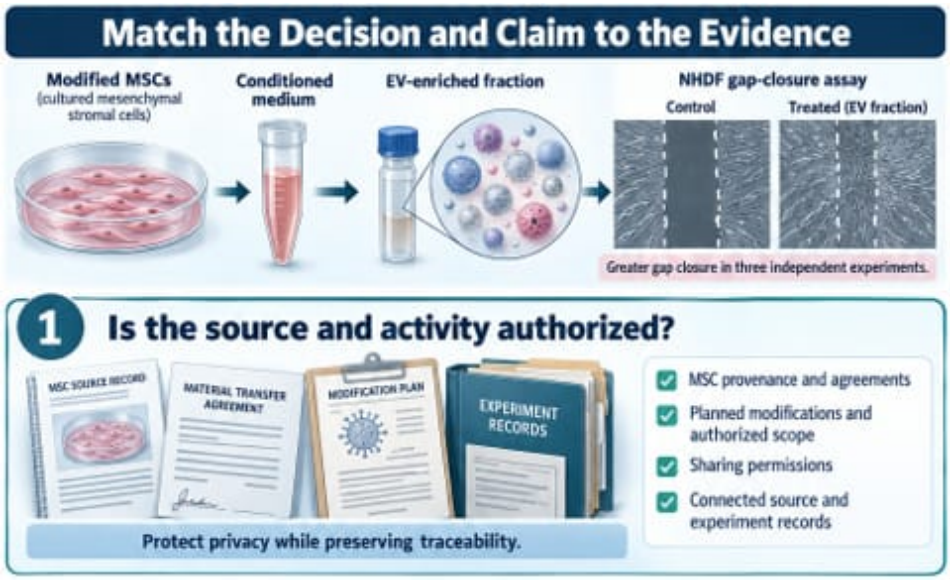
Public communication should identify the actual model and stage of development. “Increased fibroblast gap closure in culture” conveys a laboratory observation. “Heals chronic wounds” describes a clinical claim that needs different evidence. ISSCR guidance calls for accurate communication of research progress and limits.

Terms such as natural, personalized, or stem cell do not replace evidence. Patient testimonials cannot by themselves separate an intervention's effects from changes in other treatment, expectations, or disease course. FDA also warns that an entry on ClinicalTrials.gov or a claim of FDA registration should not be used to imply approval or establish that an offered treatment meets applicable requirements.

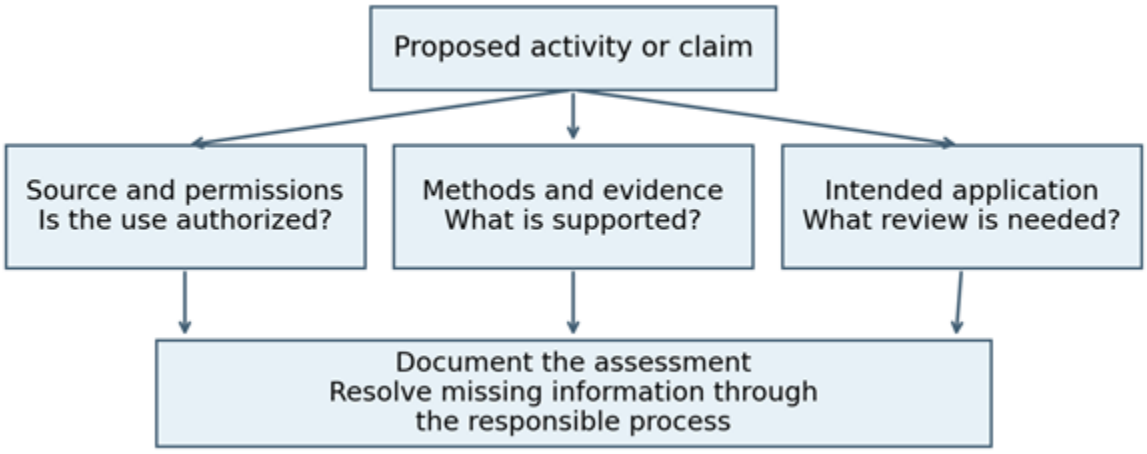
When discussing a product, distinguish a study result, an investigational application, and an approved indication. Use the specific product name and source when needed. Avoid implying that a general class of cells or vesicles has a single approved use shared by all preparations.
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16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment



A sound decision combines the source permissions, actual activity, available evidence, and intended claim. Missing information should be identified clearly so that the responsible person can resolve it. An uncertain claim should not become more certain because a deadline or funding opportunity is approaching.

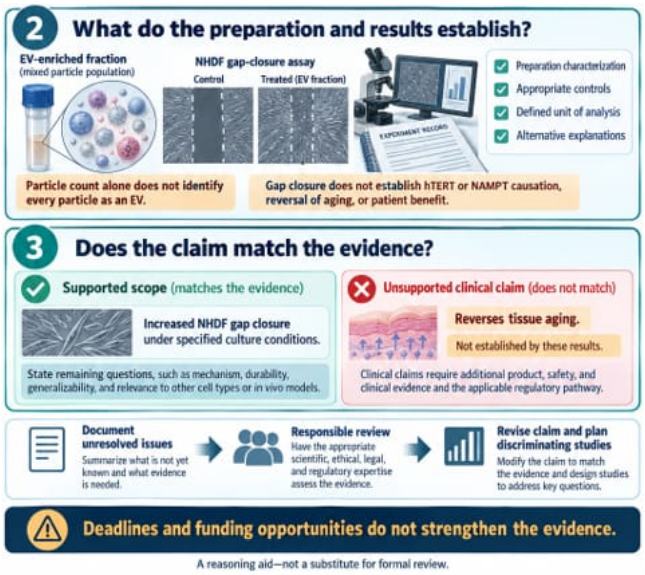


An unresolved issue should be documented and addressed by the responsible people before the proposed activity or claim proceeds. The diagram is a reasoning aid rather than a substitute for formal review.

Worked example: an EV preparation and a proposed treatment claim

A team modifies MSCs, collects conditioned medium, and enriches an EV-containing fraction. The fraction produces greater NHDF gap closure than the vehicle control in three independent experiments. A proposed presentation says the team has produced a treatment that reverses tissue aging.

Start by examining the source. Confirm that the MSCs, source agreements, and planned modifications fit the project's autho



rized scope. Review the permissions for sharing the preparation and related data. Keep source records and experimental records connected without adding unnecessary identifying information to the presentation.

Next, evaluate the preparation and result. The team needs characterization that supports what the fraction contains, appropriate controls, and a defined unit of analysis. A particle count alone does not demonstrate that every particle is an EV. Increased gap closure does not establish that hTERT or NAMPT cargo caused the response, that aging was reversed, or that a patient would benefit.

Finally, match the claim to the evidence. A supported statement could describe increased NHDF gap closure under the specified culture conditions and identify the remaining questions. A clinical treatment claim would need additional product, safety, and clinical evidence, along with the applicable regulatory pathway. The responsible action is to revise the claim and plan the next studies that distinguish the main explanations.

The same reasoning applies to a planned culture transfer or a discrepant production record. Identify the proposed action, verify the evidence it requires, and document the decision through the appropriate process. Good judgment includes knowing what the present evidence can support and what remains unresolved.

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16.13: Chapter Summary

Cell culture research involves responsibilities to donors, staff, participants, and future patients. Consent and provenance help define how human material may be used. Coded labels support privacy, but do not automatically eliminate review obligations or the possibility of identifying a source. Institutional oversight addresses different questions, including protection of people, biosafety, and sensitive stem cell research. Clinical product regulation also depends on the material, processing, and intended use. A research result, an IND in effect, establishment registration, and product approval have different meanings. Translation requires evidence about the intervention, manufacturing process, relevant biological effects, and patient outcomes. Identity, purity, potency, safety-related testing, stability, and traceability contribute to a suitable product. Approved applications such as cultured cartilage products and CAR T-cell therapies show the value of cell culture when it is combined with rigorous development.

Responsible reporting preserves the original evidence and states conclusions at the level the study supports. A useful laboratory result can justify the next question without establishing a clinical treatment. Moving from a culture observation to clinical use requires several distinct kinds of evidence and review. A promising laboratory response does not establish that a product is safe, effective, or authorized for patients. Keep claims connected to the material tested, the process used, and the outcomes measured. Responsible development also preserves donor protections and traceability as work moves between laboratories and production settings. Clear reporting makes the next decision possible while keeping unresolved scientific and regulatory questions visible.

Key Terms

Research ethics	Informed consent	Provenance	Coded specimen
Institutional review board	Institutional biosafety committee	Investigational new drug application	Homologous use
Potency	Lot release	Chain of identity	Chain of custody
Comparability	Translation	Autologous	Allogeneic
Organoid	Conflict of interest		

Review and Application Questions

1. Apply respect for persons, beneficence, and justice to a study that recruits students to donate cells.

2. Explain why a signed consent form is not the whole informed consent process.

3. Identify four source or permission questions to resolve before sharing a donor-derived cell line with another institution.

4. What does the history of HeLa cells teach about the relationship between scientific value and donor concerns?

5. Explain why a code on a tube does not automatically establish that every use is outside human-subjects research.

6. Compare ethical questions in routine iPSC differentiation with those in producing a stem cell-based embryo model.

7. Distinguish the purposes of an IRB, an IBC, and regulatory product review.

8. Explain the difference between an IND in effect and an approved product indication.

9. Why do autologous origin and a negative contamination screen fail to determine a product's regulatory pathway by themselves?

10. Compare identity, purity, viability, and potency. Why is one result insufficient to establish the others?

11. A final vial label does not match a transfer record, although all recorded assay values meet their criteria. Describe a supported response.

12. Why might a change from one culture medium to another require more evidence than an increase in cell yield?

13. Describe the cell source and intended activity of an autologous CAR T-cell product. Explain why clinical safety assessment remains necessary.

14. Identify three questions that organoids or tissue chips might help address, and one limitation that would remain.

15. A compound has an assay IC_{50} of 8 µM in a cancer cell line. Explain why this cannot be converted directly into a recommended patient dose.

16. Revise the claim “Our EV preparation reverses aging” when the only supported result is increased NHDF gap closure in culture.

17. Distinguish an honest calculation error from fabrication or falsification. Describe how the error should be corrected.

18. A clinic cites a trial registry listing and patient testimonials as proof that its cell preparation works. Identify the additional evidence needed to assess that claim.

Apply Your Knowledge

A laboratory receives coded donor cells, but the source records do not explain whether the cells may be shared. What permissions, agreements, and institutional review should be checked before transferring them to another laboratory?

A researcher asks students in her own class to donate cells. How could the study protect students’ privacy and their freedom to decline? Apply respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

An EV-enriched preparation increases NHDF gap closure in culture. A company claims that it “heals wounds in people.” Rewrite the claim to match the evidence. Identify additional questions about the preparation, safety, and patient outcomes that remain unanswered.

A clinic points to establishment registration and a clinical trial listing as proof that its cell product is approved and effective. Explain why this claim is unsupported. How do registration, an IND in effect, and product approval differ?

A cell product meets its recorded viability and potency criteria, but the final label does not match the transfer record. What should happen before release? Explain how chain of identity and chain of custody would support the investigation.

A new culture medium increases cell yield. Why is that result alone insufficient to justify a manufacturing change? Describe evidence that could help assess comparability, including effects on identity, purity, and potency.

A team discovers that an incorrect dilution factor affected its reported results. How should it preserve the original records, document the correction, and reassess its conclusions? Explain how this differs from fabrication or falsification.

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INDEX

A

absorbance readings
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports

acceptance
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions

acceptance criteria
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
3.14: Chapter Summary

acceptance criterion
15.13: Chapter Summary

accuracy
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks

accurate measurement
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens

acidity
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System

active compound
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions

adherent cells
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells

adherent culture
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking

adherent cultures
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map

administrative control
2.3: Layers of Protection

adult stem cells
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types

air intake
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization

airflow
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work

alarm
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization

ALCOA
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens

alkalinity
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System

allogeneic cells
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine

amino acids
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium

analysis method
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report

anatomy
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs

animal cells
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed

antibiotics
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute

antibodies
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA

antibody detection
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE

antibodyvalidation
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation

antigen
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers

apoptosis
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
4.14: Chapter Summary
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues

applications
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence

approval
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use

approved correction
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information

Argonaute protein
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message

arithmetic
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer

aseptic handling
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium

aseptic technique
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
5.15: Chapter Summary
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization

aseptic transfer
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery

aspiration systems
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design

assay
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act

assay background
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations

assay conditions
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity

assay performance
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment

assay plan
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map

assay preparation
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment

assay signal
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment

assessment procedures
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready

association
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values

ATP assays
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity

ATP production
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays

ATP signal
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal

ATP tests
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests

attachment
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently

attachment behavior
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells

authorized review process
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information

autofluorescence
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation

autologous cells
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine

automated cell counter
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests

automated instruments
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works

available cells
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations

available evidence
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment

average count
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations

B

background correction
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal

bacteria
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems

bacteria cultures
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment

bacterial contaminants
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible

bacterial growth
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute

balance
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care

balances
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design

bank
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing

bank calculations
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume

basal medium
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
6.14: Chapter Summary
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium

batch
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs

batch record
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information

Belmont Report
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture

beneficence
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture

bicarbonate
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You

bicarbonate buffer
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System

biochemical approaches
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing

biochemical methods
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations

biological activity
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference

biological assays
14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis

biological claim
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report

biological features
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models

biological function
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them

biological functions
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab

biological hazard
2.15: Chapter Summary

biological imaging
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method

biological interpretation
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion

biological material
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent

biological materials
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology

biological measurements
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome

biological models
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth

biological question
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias

biological questions
1: Introduction to Cell Culture

biological replicates
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis

biological replication
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout

biological research
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
9.1: Why Preserve Cells?

biological safety
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design

biological sample
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains

biological samples
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling

biological storage
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery

biological variation
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity

biology
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs

biosafety
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
16.13: Chapter Summary
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure

biosafety cabinet
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work

biosafety level
2.15: Chapter Summary
2.3: Layers of Protection

biospecimen
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent

biotechnology
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act

blinded analysis
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias

blinding
13.11: Chapter Summary

blocking
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout

blood vessel cells
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow

brightfield microscopy
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures

buffer systems
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System

C

cabinet
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization

calculating exposure
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration

calculation examples
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume

calculations
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View

calibration
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks

calibration records
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record

calibration settings
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size

calibrator
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance

camera gain
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images

cancer
4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth

cancer cell lines
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth

cancer cells
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control

cancer mechanisms
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models

capacity
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium

carbon dioxide
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You

carbon dioxide production
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density

cargo
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health

cargo amount
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning

cartilage repair
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine

catalog number
3.8: Inventory and Material Status

cDNA
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR

cell
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?

cell allocation
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume

cell analysis
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability

cell attachment
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map

cell authentication
- 11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
- 5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines

cell bank
- 9.1: Why Preserve Cells?

cell banking
- 9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking

cell behavior
- 1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
- 1.11: Chapter Summary
- 1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
- 1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
- 4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
- 4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
- 4.14: Chapter Summary
- 4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
- 6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment

cell biology
- 1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body

cell characterization
- 11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
- 11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells

cell concentration
- 1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
- 10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
- 10.13: Chapter Summary
- 7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
- 8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture

cell conditions
- 4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture

cell count
- 10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
- 13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion

cell counting
- 10.10: Checking Count Quality
- 10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
- 10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
- 10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
- 10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
- 10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
- 10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
- 10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
- 11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure

cell counts
- 10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations
- 13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
- 3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports

cell culture
- 1: Introduction to Cell Culture
- 1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
- 1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
- 1.11: Chapter Summary
- 1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
- 1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
- 1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
- 1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
- 1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
- 12.1: Changing What Cells Make
- 12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
- 13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays
- 15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
- 16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
- 16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
- 16.13: Chapter Summary
- 16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
- 2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
- 2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
- 2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
- 3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
- 3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
- 3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
- 4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
- 5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
- 5.3: Routes Into a Culture
- 5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
- 6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
- 6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
- 6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
- 6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
- 7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
- 7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
- 7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
- 7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
- 7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
- 7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
- 7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
- 7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
- 8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
- 8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment
- 8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
- 8.2: Inspecting Before You Act
- 8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
- 8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
- 8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells
- 9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
- 9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing
- 9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
- 9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure

cell cycle
- 14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
- 14.12: Chapter Summary
- 4.14: Chapter Summary
- 4.4: The Cell Cycle
- 4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control

cell death
- 4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
- 4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
- 4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation

cell density
- 10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
- 6.14: Chapter Summary
- 6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
- 8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
- 8.8: What a Split Ratio Means

cell detachment
- 10.2: Getting a Representative Sample

cell dissociation
- 7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery

cell division
- 1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
- 4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
- 4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
- 4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
- 4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
- 4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
- 4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
- 4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell

cell evaluation
- 9.1: Why Preserve Cells?

cell features
- 11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells

cell function
- 4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation

cell growth
- 1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
- 14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
- 4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
- 4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
- 5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
- 5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
- 6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
- 6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
- 7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells

cell guidance
- 4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture

cell handling
- 1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
- 8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
- 8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells

cell health
- 11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
- 13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
- 14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them

cell identity
- 10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
- 11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
- 14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
- 15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
- 3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
- 8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
- 8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map

cell injury
- 9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?

cell length
- 11.12: Turning Images into Measurements

cell line
- 1.11: Chapter Summary
- 1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
- 10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
- 5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control

cell line authentication
5.15: Chapter Summary
cell loss
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
cell lysate
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
cell maintenance
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
cell marker
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
cell membrane
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
cell membranes
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
cell metabolism
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
cell model
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
cell models
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
cell multiplication
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
cell observation
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
cell plating
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
cell preservation
9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking
9.12: Chapter Summary
cell processing
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume
cell proliferation
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
cell recovery
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
cell reproduction
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
cell response
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
cell sample
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
cell samples
9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
cell separation
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
cell settling
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
cell shape
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
cell signaling
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
cell storage
9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
cell strain
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
cell structure
4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
cell structures
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
14.12: Chapter Summary
4.14: Chapter Summary
cell survival
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
cell therapy
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine
cell type
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
cell types
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
cell viability
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume
cell yield
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
10.13: Chapter Summary
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
cells
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
cells per mL
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
cellular features
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
cellular models
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
cellular processes
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
cellular redox reactions
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
cellular RNA
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
centrifugal force
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
centrifugation
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
centrifuge
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
centrifuges
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
certification
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization
CGMP
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
characterization
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
characterization plan
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
checkpoints
14.12: Chapter Summary
4.14: Chapter Summary
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
chemical contamination
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
chemical fixation
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
chemical hazard
2.15: Chapter Summary
chemical hazards
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
chemical hygiene plan
2.15: Chapter Summary
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
chemically defined medium
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
chemicals
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
chemiluminescence
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
chromosomes
4.4: The Cell Cycle
claimed identity
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
clarification
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
Class II
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
clean bench
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
cleaning
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
5.15: Chapter Summary
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization

cleaning procedures
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
cleanroom practices
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
clear records
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
clinical application
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
clinical benefit
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
clinical claims
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
clinical monitoring
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine
clinical research
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
clinical safety assessment
16.13: Chapter Summary
clinical trials
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
clinical use
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
clonogenic assay
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
clonogenic survival
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
cloudiness
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
coded sample names
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias
coded specimens
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
coefficient of variation
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
cold storage
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
collection
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
colony counting
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays
colony formation assay
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
colored stains
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
comparison
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
comparison condition
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations
comparison methods
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
compatibility
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
complementary DNA
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
complete growth medium
6.14: Chapter Summary
complete medium
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
complete records
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
complex preparation
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
compliance
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
concentration
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
concentration comparison
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
concentration measurement
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
concentration range
13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}
concentration series
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
concentration variable
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
conditioned medium
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
confidence interval
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
conflict of interest
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
confluence
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
10.13: Chapter Summary
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
confocal microscopy
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
confounder
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
13.11: Chapter Summary
consent
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
contact time
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
containment
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization
contamination
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.11: Testing For Contamination
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
5.15: Chapter Summary
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act
9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
contamination assessment
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
contamination checks
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
contamination control
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
contamination prevention
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
contamination risk
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
contamination status
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
contamination test
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
contamination testing
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
contamination tests
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
continuous cell line
1.11: Chapter Summary
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
continuous cell lines
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
continuous growth
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
contrast
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
control
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
control mRNA
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions

controlled documents
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
controlled pipetting
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
controlled variable
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
controls
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map
controls in testing
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
cooling rate
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
cooling techniques
9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking
correction
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
corrections
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
corrective action
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
count
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
counting chamber
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
counting colonies
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
Cq method
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
critical surface
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
cross flow
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
crosslinking fixatives
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
cryogenic handling
9.12: Chapter Summary
cryogenic storage
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
cryopreservation
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
7.13: Chapter Summary
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
9.12: Chapter Summary
cryoprotectant
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
9.12: Chapter Summary
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
cryoprotectant removal
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
cryoprotectants
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking
culture
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
culture condition
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
culture conditions
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
culture density
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning
culture dilution
8.13: Chapter Summary
culture establishment
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
7.13: Chapter Summary
culture experiments
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
culture growth
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
culture history
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
culture maintenance
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
8.13: Chapter Summary
culture media
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
culture medium
1.11: Chapter Summary
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
6.14: Chapter Summary
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment
8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
culture observation
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
culture preparation
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
culture preservation
9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
culture procedure
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
culture protection
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
culture records
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
culture selection
7.13: Chapter Summary
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
culture surroundings
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
culture volume
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
culture yield
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
current good manufacturing practice
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
cyclins
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
cytokine accumulation
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
cytokine response
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
cytokines
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA
cytokinesis
4.4: The Cell Cycle
cytoplasm
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
cytoplasmic delivery
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
cytotoxicity
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays
13.11: Chapter Summary
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity

D

data accuracy
10.10: Checking Count Quality
data analysis
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
data integrity
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
15.13: Chapter Summary
3.14: Chapter Summary
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
data interpretation
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
data quality
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results

data reporting
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
data summarization
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
data summary
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
data visualization
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
dataset analysis
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
decontamination
5.15: Chapter Summary
defined coating
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map
delivery
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
delivery reagent
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions
densitometry
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
density
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
density management
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
dependent variable
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
descriptive statistics
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
destination
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means
detection
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
detection assay
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
detection limit
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
detection methods
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
detector
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
developmental biology
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
deviation
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
differentiation
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
14.12: Chapter Summary
4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
4.14: Chapter Summary
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
differentiation proof
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
differentiation protocols
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells
diluent
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
dilution
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
dilution correction
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
dilution equation
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
dilution factor
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
dilution method
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
dilution volumes
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
dimensional analysis
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
dimethyl sulfoxide
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
direct counts
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
direct labeling
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
directed differentiation
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
disclosure
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
discrepancy
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
disease research
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
disinfect work surface
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
disinfectant
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
disinfection
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
5.15: Chapter Summary
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
disinfection methods
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
dispensing method
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
disposal considerations
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
dissociation
8.13: Chapter Summary
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
division
14.12: Chapter Summary
DMSO
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
9.12: Chapter Summary
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
DNA
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
DNA replication
4.4: The Cell Cycle
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
document control
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
3.14: Chapter Summary
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
document management
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
document retention
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
documentation
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
documented receipts
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
documented response
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
donor
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
donor differences
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
donor permissions
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
donor withdrawal
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
drug effects
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
drug responses
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
dye details
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
dye exclusion
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations
10.13: Chapter Summary
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act
dye safety
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
dye staining
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently

E

ECM
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
EDTA
8.13: Chapter Summary
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage

effect size
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
15.13: Chapter Summary
effective date
3.14: Chapter Summary
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
effective treatment
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
efficacy
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
efficiency
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
electroporation
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
ELISA
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment
embryonic development
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
embryonic stem cells
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
emergency equipment
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
emergency procedures
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
endosomal escape
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
endosome
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
endotoxin
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
endpoint
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
13.11: Chapter Summary
endpoint cells
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
engineering control
2.3: Layers of Protection
enrichment
7.13: Chapter Summary
environmental control
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
environmental protection
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
enzymatic dissociation
7.13: Chapter Summary
enzymatic methods
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
enzyme activity
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
enzyme function
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
enzyme neutralization
8.13: Chapter Summary
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
enzyme reactions
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
epithelial
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
equipment
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
equipment checks
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
equipment integrity
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
equipment log
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
equipment operation
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
equipment readiness
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
equipment safety
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
errors
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
estimate population
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations
estimated concentration
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
ethical considerations
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
ethical issues
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
ethical questions
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
ethical research
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
eukaryotic cells
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
EV
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
evaluation process
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
evaporation
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
evidence
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
evidence presentation
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
EVs
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
executed batch record
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
exosomes
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
expected closing balance
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
experiment
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks
experimental condition
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
experimental conditions
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
experimental control
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
experimental controls
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays
experimental design
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
13.11: Chapter Summary
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
6.14: Chapter Summary
6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
experimental insert
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions
experimental outcome
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations
experimental plating
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
experimental procedure
10.10: Checking Count Quality
experimental records
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
experimental responses
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
experimental results
13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
experimental risks
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
experimental treatment
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
experimental unit
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
15.13: Chapter Summary
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
experimentalcontrols
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
experimentation
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
expiration
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
expiration date
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
explant culture
7.13: Chapter Summary
exponential phase
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
exposure
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
exposure response
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness

exposure time
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
expression
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
extracellular matrix
7.13: Chapter Summary
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
extracellular RNA
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
extracellular vesicles
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
eye protection
2.3: Layers of Protection

F

fabrication
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
factorial design
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations
falsification
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
FBS
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
FDA principles
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
feeding
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
fertilized egg
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
fetal bovine serum
6.14: Chapter Summary
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
fibroblast
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
fibroblast culture
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
fibroblasts
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
field of view
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
field selection
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias
filter integrity
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization
filtration
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
final concentration
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
final report
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
final volume
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
findings
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
finite cell line
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
finite cell lines
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
fixation
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
fixative methods
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
fixing staining
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
fluid transfer
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
fluorescence
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
fluorescence intensity
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
fluorescence microscopy
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
fluorescent labels
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
fluorescent viability assays
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
formal review
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
fraction kept
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means
freezers
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design
freezing batch
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest
freezing cells
9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking
freezing injury
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
freezing medium
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest
freezing solution
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
frozen
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
fume hood
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
functional tests
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
fungi
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible

G

G1 phase
4.4: The Cell Cycle
G2 phase
4.4: The Cell Cycle
gap area comparison
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure
gap closure calculation
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure
gas conditions
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
gas exchange
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
gene activity
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
gene expression
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
gene regulation
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message
14.12: Chapter Summary
gene therapy
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
genes
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
genetic information
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
genetic modification
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
genetic profiling
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
genomic DNA contamination
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
genomic information
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
glove contamination
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
gloves
2.3: Layers of Protection
glucose
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
good documentation practices
3.14: Chapter Summary
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
group comparisons
15.13: Chapter Summary

growth
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
14.12: Chapter Summary
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing
growth areas
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means
growth assessment
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
growth conditions
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
growth factors
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
6.14: Chapter Summary
growth history
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
growth medium
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
growth pattern
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
growth patterns
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
growth phase
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
growth signals
4.14: Chapter Summary
growth state
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
growth study
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
growth supplement
6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
growth surface
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
growth surface area
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
growth vessel
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment
guide strand
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message

H

haemocytometer
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
handling
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
handling date
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
handling errors
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
handling losses
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
harvest method
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest
hazard
2.15: Chapter Summary
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
hazardous materials
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
HCT/Ps
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
health risks
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
heat transfer
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
HeLa cell line
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
HeLa cells
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
hemocytometer
10.13: Chapter Summary
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
hemocytometer counting
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations
Henrietta Lacks
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
histogram
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
historical records
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
history
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
homeostasis
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
housekeeping protein
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
hTERT
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
human biological materials
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
human biospecimens
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
human cells
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
human dermal fibroblasts
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
human materials
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
human participants
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
human subjects
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
humidity
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
humidity control
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
hydrogen ions
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
hypothesis
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
13.11: Chapter Summary
hypothesis testing
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays
hypoxia
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density

I

IC50
13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}
ice
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
identification
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
identity
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
identity check
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
identity claim
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
identity method
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
illumination
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
image acquisition
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
image analysis
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
image calibration
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
11.15: Chapter Summary
imaging
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
imaging counter
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
imaging methods
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
imaging system
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
imaging techniques
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
imagingtechniques
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
immune
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
immune activity
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine
immune cell responses
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
immune cells
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow

immunoblot
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
immunoblotting
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
immunofluorescence
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
Improved Neubauer chamber
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
in vitro
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
1.11: Chapter Summary
in vivo
1.11: Chapter Summary
incident
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
inconclusive result
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
incubation conditions
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells
incubator
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
incubator conditions
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
incubators
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
IND
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
independent evidence
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
independent samples
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
independent variable
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
indirect labeling
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
induced pluripotent stem cells
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
inferential statistics
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
inflammation
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
information clarity
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
informed consent
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
16.13: Chapter Summary
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
initial gap measurement
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure
inorganic salts
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
inspection
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
institutional biosafety committee
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
institutional review board
16.13: Chapter Summary
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
instruction
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
instrument identity
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
intended claim
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
intended state
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
interphase
4.4: The Cell Cycle
interpretation
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
interpretations
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
intracellular material
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
invalid result
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
inventory
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
inventory balance
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
inventory management
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
inverted microscope
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
investigation
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
investigational new drug
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
investigational new drug application
16.13: Chapter Summary
iPSCs
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries

J

justice
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture

K

knockdown
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
knockout
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes

L

lab records
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
labeling
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
laboratory
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
laboratory compliance
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
laboratory equipment
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
laboratory ethics
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
laboratory investigation
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
laboratory notebook
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
laboratory practices
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
laboratory procedure
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
laboratory procedures
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
laboratory protocols
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
9.12: Chapter Summary
laboratory quality management
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
laboratory report
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports

laboratory safety
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
2.3: Layers of Protection
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
laboratory techniques
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
10.10: Checking Count Quality
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking
9.1: Why Preserve Cells?
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume
laminar flow
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
legal requirements
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
leukemia
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
leukemia model
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
ligands
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
light microscopy
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
limit of detection
5.11: Testing For Contamination
lipids
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
lipofection
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
lipopolysaccharide
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
liquid
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
liquid handling
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
liquid nitrogen
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
liquid transfer
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
living cells
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
living culture
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
loading reference
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
logarithmic axis
13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}
lot number
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
low temperature
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
low temperatures
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
lysate
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE

M

magnification
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
maintenance
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
maintenance comparison
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
maintenance records
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
malignant cells
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
mammalian cells
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
mammalian culture
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
mammalian expression plasmid
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
mammalian media
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
manufacturer
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
manufacturing quality
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
markers evaluation
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
master batch record
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
master cell bank
9.12: Chapter Summary
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
material balance
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
material tracking
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
material transfer agreement
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
materials
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
matrix mineralization
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
mean
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
measurement
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
measurement accuracy
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
measurement bias
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
measurement uncertainty
10.10: Checking Count Quality
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
measurement variability
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
measurement variation
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
measurements
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
measuring device
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
mechanical dissociation
7.13: Chapter Summary
mechanical methods
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
median
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
medium
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
medium addition
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
medium change
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
8.13: Chapter Summary
medium dilution
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
medium formulation
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
medium lot
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
medium optimization
6.14: Chapter Summary
medium preparation
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
medium volume
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means
membrane
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
membrane exclusion dye
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures

membrane integrity
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act
membrane trafficking
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
membranes
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
mesenchymal stromal cells
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
messenger RNA
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
metabolic assay
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
metabolic assays
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity
metabolic pathway
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
metabolically active cells
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
metabolism
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
metadata
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
method evaluation
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
method suitability
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
microbial contamination
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
5.15: Chapter Summary
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
microbial growth
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
microbial screens
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
micrometers per pixel
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
microorganisms
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
microorganisms entry
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
micropipette
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
microscope
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
microscope images
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
microscope settings
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
microscopy
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
migration
13.11: Chapter Summary
migration study
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure
minimal manipulation
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
missing information
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
mitosis
4.4: The Cell Cycle
mixing
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
mixing volumes
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
mixture volume
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
mock transfection
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions
model system
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
molar dilution
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
molarity
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
molds
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
molecular biology
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
molecular markers
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
molecular weight cutoff
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
molecular weight ladder
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
moles
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
monolayer
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
morphology
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
movement
14.12: Chapter Summary
mRNA
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message
mRNA delivery
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
MSC formulations
6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
MSC study
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
MSCs
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
multipotent
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
mycoplasma
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
5.11: Testing For Contamination
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
mycoplasma contamination
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
mycoplasma testing
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern

N

NAD
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
NAD+
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
NAMPT
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
NAMPT protein
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
necrosis
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
negative control
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
5.11: Testing For Contamination
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
5.15: Chapter Summary
negativecontrol
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
NHDF
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act

NHDF cells
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
nicotinamide
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
nitrogen gas hazards
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
normal human dermal fibroblasts
1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab
6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
normalization
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
nucleic acid amplification
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
nucleic acids
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
nucleus
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
nucleus number
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
null hypothesis
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
numerical aperture
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
nutrient competition
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
nutrient consumption
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
nutrient depletion
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
nutrient formulation
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
nutrient liquid
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
nutrient mixtures
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
nutrient use
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
nutrients
1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies

O

observation
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
observation recording
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens
observations
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
observed balance
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
observed data
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
oncogene
4.14: Chapter Summary
oncogenes
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
opening quantity
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
optical contrast
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method
optical measurements
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
optical resolution
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
optical system
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
optimization
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning
organ
1.11: Chapter Summary
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
organ culture
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
organ development
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
organelle distribution
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
organelles
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
osmolality
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
osmosis
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
outliers
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
oxygen availability
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density
oxygen consumption
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density

P

p value
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
15.13: Chapter Summary
participant selection
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
passage
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells
passage count
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
passage number
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
passage tracking
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
passaging
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
8.13: Chapter Summary
passive freezing
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
patient outcomes
16.13: Chapter Summary
patterns
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
PCR
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
pellet
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
pellet formation
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
percent
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
percent gap closure
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure
percent viability
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
10.13: Chapter Summary
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
percent yield
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
performance
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization
performance conditions
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
performance indicators
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
performance testing
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
permeabilization
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
personal protective equipment
2.3: Layers of Protection
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
personnel protection
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
pH
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System
pH changes
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible
pH control
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium
pH indicator
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
pharmaceutical manufacturing
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
phenol red
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You
photobleaching
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
11.15: Chapter Summary
physical dimensions
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size

physical hazard
2.15: Chapter Summary
physiology
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
pipette
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks
pipette calibration
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
pipette maintenance
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
pipettes
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
pipetting technique
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
pipetting techniques
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
pixels
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size
plagiarism
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
plasmid DNA
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
plasmid expression
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
plastic surface
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map
plating
8.13: Chapter Summary
plating efficiency
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
pluripotent
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
pluripotent cells
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
poliovirus
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
polymerase chain reaction
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems
population density
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
population doubling
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
population growth
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
population recovery
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
population representation
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias
population size
4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation
population study
4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture
population variation
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
positive control
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations
15.3: Mycoplasma Testing
5.11: Testing For Contamination
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
5.15: Chapter Summary
positivecontrol
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
potency
14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
PPE
2.15: Chapter Summary
2.3: Layers of Protection
precision
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks
precision measurement
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer
preparation
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
preparation date
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
preparation history
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
preparation volume
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume
preparationsteps
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
prepared medium
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
preservation
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
preventing contamination
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
preventive action
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
primary antibody
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
primary cells
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
primary culture
1.11: Chapter Summary
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
7.13: Chapter Summary
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
primary cultures
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
primary donor material
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
primer choice
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
principles of research
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
privacy protection
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
procedural documentation
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
procedures
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
process consistency
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
process improvement
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
processing
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
processing history
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
product protection
2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure
product supplements
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
proliferation
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
proliferation rate
13.11: Chapter Summary
promoter
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
proposed activity
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
proposed mechanism
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
protective clothing
2.3: Layers of Protection
5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
protective equipment
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
protective measures
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
protein
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations
protein abundance
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
protein assay
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
protein assays
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
protein concentration assay
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
protein detection
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization
protein extraction
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
protein measurement
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment

protein production
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
protein reduction
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
proteins
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
provenance
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
pseudoreplication
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
purification
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
purity
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
purpose
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure

Q

QA
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
QC
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
qPCR
14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
quality
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
quality assurance
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
15.13: Chapter Summary
15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
3.14: Chapter Summary
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
quality checks
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest
quality control
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
15.13: Chapter Summary
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
3.14: Chapter Summary
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
quality evaluation
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing
quality findings
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
quality management system
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
quality system
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
3.14: Chapter Summary
quality systems
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
quantitative assays
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results
quantitative PCR
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
quantitative polymerase chain reaction
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
quantitative study
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias
quarantine
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use

R

randomization
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning
13.11: Chapter Summary
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
raw counts
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
raw data
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
RCF
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
reasoning aid
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
receptors
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell
reconciliation
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels
record
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
record keeping
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
recorded intensity
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images
recovery
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?
recovery method
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
reference gene
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
refrigerators
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design
regenerative medicine
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
regulated drug products
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
regulation
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control
regulatory framework
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
regulatory pathway
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
16.13: Chapter Summary
regulatory requirements
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs
rejection
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
relative analysis
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
relative response
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
reliability
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
5.11: Testing For Contamination
reliability in counting
10.10: Checking Count Quality
reliable evidence
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
reliable results
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
remaining volume
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
repeated measurement
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity
repeated measurements
10.10: Checking Count Quality
replicate wells
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map
representative sample
10.13: Chapter Summary
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
reproducibility
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
research
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and Approved Use
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
research ethics
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
16.13: Chapter Summary
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy
research methodology
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
research methods
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute

research misconduct
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication
research oversight
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
research protocol
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
research protocols
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records
research reproducibility
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record
reserve storage
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest
resolution
11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization
11.15: Chapter Summary
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast
2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures
respect for persons
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
responsibilities
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
responsible people
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment
results
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
results interpretation
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
resuspension
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific
resveratrol
13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion
reverse transcriptase
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
reverse transcription
14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR
revision
3.14: Chapter Summary
revision approval
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
ribosomes
4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior
RIPA buffer
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
RISC
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message
risk
2.15: Chapter Summary
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
risk assessment
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
2.15: Chapter Summary
2.3: Layers of Protection
risk evaluation
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
risk management
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions
risks and benefits
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
RNA
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
RNA abundance
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
RNA analysis
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
RNA calculations
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
RNA extraction
14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
RNA integrity
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
RNA interference
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message
RNA purity
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
RNA quality
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
RNA recovery
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
RNA sample
14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question
RNA yield
14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality
RNAi
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message
RNase protection
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
roles and responsibilities
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
rotor
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
rotor loading
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
routine culture care
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
routine expansion
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act
routine survey
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias
rpm
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation

S

S phase
4.4: The Cell Cycle
safe handling
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
safety
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
2.15: Chapter Summary
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
5.2: What Counts as Contamination
safety data sheet
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
safety measures
9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety
safety practices
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
safety procedures
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
safety protocol
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready
safety testing
16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release
salvage pathway
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
sample analysis
10.10: Checking Count Quality
sample collection
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
sample data
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
sample dilution
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works
10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently
sample history
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
sample ID
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
sample identification
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
sample IDs
3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports
sample inspection
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care
sample interpretation
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
sample labeling
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
sample preparation
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
sample processing
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
sample size
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
sample standard deviation
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation
sample type
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
sample volume
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
sampling
5.11: Testing For Contamination

sampling bias
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias

sampling pattern
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias

sampling plan
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing

sampling time
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning

sampling volume
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result

sandwich ELISA
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA

sash
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization

saturation
11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images

scale bar
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size

scientific integrity
16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication

scientific method
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems

scientific methodology
3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record

scientific methods
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture

scientific notation
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations

scientific quality
16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture

scientific recording
3.5: Recording Work as It Happens

scientific reporting
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity

scientific research
5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems

scientific review
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries

scientist
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology

scope
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure

scratch assay
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure

scratch closure assay
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays

secondary antibody
11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization

secreted protein
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment

seeding
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells

seeding calculations
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery

seeding conditions
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery

seeding density
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density

seeding target
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume

seeding volumes
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations

segmentation
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements

senescence
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
8.12: Passage History and Culture Records

separation techniques
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation

serial dilution
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions

serological pipette
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer

serum
6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment
6.14: Chapter Summary
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage

service status
2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready

shape
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells

short tandem repeats
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence

signal
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation

signalassessment
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation

signaling
14.12: Chapter Summary
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control

signaling molecules
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues

signaling pathways
4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell

silencing machinery
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid

siRNA
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations

sister chromatids
4.4: The Cell Cycle

size
11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically

small interfering RNA
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid

small RNAs
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message

solution
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium

SOP
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs

SOP number
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control

sound decision
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment

spatial variation
11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias

specialization
4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells

specialized cells
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues

specialized descendants
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal

specialized function
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells

specimen observation
11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method

specimen preparation
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast

split ratio
8.13: Chapter Summary
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means

stability
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance

stable expression
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes

staff training
3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control

stage micrometer
11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size

stain
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure

staining method
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability

standard curve
14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA

standard deviation
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation

standard error of the mean
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars

standard operating procedure
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
3.14: Chapter Summary
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure

starting populations
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means

startup instructions
2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization

statistical analysis
10.10: Checking Count Quality
15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity

statistical comparison
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars

statistical comparisons
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
statistical methods
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
statistical power
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars
statistical significance
15.13: Chapter Summary
statistical test
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
stem cell division
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
stem cell identity
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
stem cell niche
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
stem cell properties
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
stem cell research
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
stem cells
14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis
14.12: Chapter Summary
4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells
4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells
4.14: Chapter Summary
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
sterile
5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated
sterile fluid path
5.3: Routes Into a Culture
sterile handling
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling
sterile packaging
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work
sterile technique
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
sterility
5.11: Testing For Contamination
6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium
sterility testing
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
sterilization
5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control
5.15: Chapter Summary
5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
stock concentration
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
stock solution
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
stock volume
12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration
storage
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
storage condition
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
storage considerations
2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness
storage information
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
storage methods
9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking
storage monitoring
9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery
storage procedures
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
storage requirements
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization
STR profiling
11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence
stress response
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
study design
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
study documents
16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent
study integrity
16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility
subculture
1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains
6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions
subculturing
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
suitability check
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means
supernatant
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
2.10: Centrifuges and Separation
supplements
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations
surface cleaning
5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection
surface coverage
11.12: Turning Images into Measurements
survival
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
survival curve
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
surviving fraction
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
suspension
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View
suspension cells
1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model
1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells
suspension culture
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking
suspension cultures
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
suspension mixing
10.2: Getting a Representative Sample
suspension volume
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
systematic selection
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning

T

Tangential flow filtration
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
target
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
target concentration
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume
target Cq
14.7: Relative RNA Abundance
target RNA
12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message
targetdetection
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
targeting sequences
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions
tasks
3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure
technical documentation
3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History
technical repeats
10.10: Checking Count Quality
technical replicate
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
technician
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
technician procedures
2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results
telomerase
12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
telomerase activity
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
telomeres
4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death
temperature
6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
temperature control
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment
test thaw
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest

testing
15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference
5.11: Testing For Contamination
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
testing controls
15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits
testing protocols
5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern
TFF
14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration
thawed
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
thawing
7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter
thawing cells
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer
therapeutic effect
16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine
tissue
1.11: Chapter Summary
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
tissue culture
1: Introduction to Cell Culture
1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map
tissue dissociation
7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells
7.13: Chapter Summary
7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue
tissue formation
4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues
tissue interaction
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
tissue maintenance
4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal
tissue stem cells
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
total cell yield
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations
total cells
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
total viable population
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
total volume
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
totipotent
4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types
toxic
2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk
toxicity
12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation
toxicity threshold
13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50}
traceability
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
3.8: Inventory and Material Status
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
trained personnel
15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control
training
5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination
training requirements
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control
transcription
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
transfection
12.1: Changing What Cells Make
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents
transfection efficiency
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
transfer error
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
transfer volumes
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
transient expression
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes
translation
12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection
12.14: Chapter Summary
12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence
transplant suitability
16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries
treatment
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining
14.2: Collection Records and Preservation
treatment assignment
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
treatment comparison
13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays
13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome
treatment comparisons
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
13.4: Replication and Plate Layout
treatment concentration
15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report
treatment details
11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record
treatment dose
13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time
treatment effect
13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure
15.13: Chapter Summary
treatment effects
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
treatment group
15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
treatment groups
1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models
treatment method
13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival
treatment plan
5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute
treatment response
13.11: Chapter Summary
4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture
treatment study
14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means
treatment testing
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed
treatments
8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map
troubleshooting
11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation
trypan blue
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests
10.13: Chapter Summary
10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability
11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure
trypsin
8.13: Chapter Summary
8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage
tube racks
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design
tumor interactions
16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models
tumor specimen
7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow
tumor suppressor genes
4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth
tumor tissue
7.2: Two Routes Into Culture
turbidity
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible

U

uncertainty
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results
uncertainty estimation
15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis
unique identifier
3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability
unique vial ID
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure
unit yield
3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information
unresolved issue
16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment

untreated control
12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions

untreated culture
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations

unusual vibrations
2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care

upright microscope
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast

useful result
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning

V

valid results
15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results

validated conditions
6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization

validation
5.11: Testing For Contamination

validity
15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results

variability
15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars

variance
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels

variation
15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation

vehicle control
13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations

verification
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks

version control
3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control

vessel
10.12: Documenting and Using the Result

viability
1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion
1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology
11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells
13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal
6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations
6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question
7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture
7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use
7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently
8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating
8.2: Inspecting Before You Act
9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking

viability assays
10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests

viability assessment
8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment

viability tests
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations

viable cell concentration
10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You
10.13: Chapter Summary

viable cell number
12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents

viable cell numbers
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume

viable cell recovery
12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures

viable cells
10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations
10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume
12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health
12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment
7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures
7.8: Choosing a Starting Density
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture
8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer
8.8: What a Split Ratio Means
9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest
9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View

viable concentration
10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells

viable yield
10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations
10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield
8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing

vial arrangement
9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer

vial label
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure

vials
9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest

virus research
1.3: How Cell Culture Developed

visual pH signal
6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You

vitamins
6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies
6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium

volume
6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations

volume calculation
8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture

volume conversion
10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works

volume percent
9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View

volume transfer
2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks

volumetric measurement
2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer

W

waste
5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work

waste production
6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density

water
9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes?

water baths
2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design

water movement
6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation

western blotting
14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization

withdrawals
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels

workbench management
5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling

working cell bank
9.12: Chapter Summary
9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure

working distance
11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast

wound healing
16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications
16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence

Y

yeast cultures
2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment

yeasts
5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible

yield
3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels

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Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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    - TitlePage - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - InfoPage - *Public Domain*
    - Table of Contents - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - Licensing - *Public Domain*
  - 1: Introduction to Cell Culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.1: A Culture Is a Living Model - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.2: Cells Tissues and Organs - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.3: How Cell Culture Developed - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.4: Primary Cultures Cell Lines and Cell Strains - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.5: Adherent and Suspension Growth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.6: What Cells Need Outside the Body - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.7: Cell Models Used In Lab - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.8: Cell Culture in Research and Biotechnology - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.9: Strengths and Limits of Culture Models - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.10: From Observation to Supported Conclusion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.11: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 2: Laboratory Safety Equipment and Workspace - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.1: Safe Work Supports Reliable Results - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.2: Recognizing Hazards and Assessing Risk - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.3: Layers of Protection - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.4: Chemical Information and Emergency Readiness - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.5: Choosing the Correct Enclosure - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.6: Cabinet Checks and Workspace Organization - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.7: Microscopes for Observing Cultures - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.8: Pipettes and Accurate Liquid Transfer - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.9: Accuracy Precision and Pipette Checks - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.10: Centrifuges and Separation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.11: Centrifuge Loading and Care - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.12: Incubators and the Culture Environment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.13: Supporting Equipment and Workspace Design - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.14: Deciding Whether Equipment Is Ready - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.15: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 3: SOPs Laboratory Records and Quality Systems - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.1: Why a Healthy Culture Needs a Reliable Record - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.2: The Purpose of a Standard Operating Procedure - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.3: Keeping Instructions Under Control - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.4: Instructions and Records Have Different Jobs - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.5: Recording Work as It Happens - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.6: Correcting an Entry Without Hiding Its History - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.7: Labels and Sample Traceability - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.8: Inventory and Material Status - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 3.9: Reconciling Materials and Labels - *CC BY-*

NC-SA 4.0
- 3.10: Deviations and Documented Decisions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 3.11: Quality Assurance and Quality Control - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 3.12: Raw Data Electronic Files and Reports - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 3.13: Evaluating a Record With Missing Information - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 3.14: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 4: Cell Growth Development and Stem Cells - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.1: More Cells Does Not Always Mean Better Cells - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.2: Cell Structures Support Cell Behavior - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.3: Growth Proliferation and Differentiation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.4: The Cell Cycle - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.5: Checkpoints and Growth Control - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.6: Signals Connect the Environment to the Cell - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.7: Development Builds Organized Tissues - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.8: Stem Cells and Self Renewal - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.9: Potency and Major Stem Cell Types - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.10: Directed Differentiation in Culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.11: Quiescence Senescence and Cell Death - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.12: Cancer Related Changes in Growth - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.13: Interpreting a Changing Culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.14: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 5: Aseptic Technique and Contamination Control - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.1: A Clear Culture Can Still Be Contaminated - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.2: What Counts as Contamination - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.3: Routes Into a Culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.4: Cleaning Disinfection and Sterilization - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.5: Contact Time and Disinfectant Selection - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.6: Preparing for Aseptic Work - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.7: Protecting Sterile Surfaces During Handling - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.8: Contamination That May Be Visible - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.9: Mycoplasma and Other Hidden Problems - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.10: Preventing Contamination Between Cell Lines - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.11: Testing For Contamination - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.12: Why Antibiotics Are Not a Substitute - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.13: Responding to an Error or Suspected Contamination - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.14: Interpreting a Contamination Pattern - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 5.15: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 6: Culture Media and the Cell Environment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.1: The Medium Is Part of the Experiment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.2: What a Basal Medium Supplies - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.3: From Basal Medium to Complete Medium - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.4: Serum and More Defined Formulations - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.5: pH and the Carbon Dioxide System - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.6: What Medium Color Can Tell You - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.7: Temperature Osmolality and Evaporation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.8: Oxygen Gas Exchange and Culture Density - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.9: Matching the Medium to the Cell and Question - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.10: Preparing and Filtering Medium - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.11: Calculating Final Concentrations - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.12: Dilution Factors and Serial Dilutions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.13: Storage Quality Checks and Medium Optimization - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 6.14: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 7: Establishing Cultures and Recovering Frozen Cells - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.1: A Living Cell Is Not Yet an Established Culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.2: Two Routes Into Culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.3: Releasing Cells From Tissue - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.4: The Culture Conditions Select Which Cells Grow - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.5: Preparing Before Frozen Recovery - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.6: Why Prompt Thawing and Gentle Transfer Matter - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.7: Cryoprotectant Removal Is Cell Specific - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.8: Choosing a Starting Density - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.9: Adherent and Suspension Cells Recover Differently - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 7.10: Viability Recovery and Growth Are Different Measures - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.11: Contamination Identity and Readiness for Use - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.12: Records and Investigation of Poor Recovery - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 7.13: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 8: Culture Maintenance Passaging and Plating - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.1: Choosing the Right Maintenance Task - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.2: Inspecting Before You Act - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.3: Growth Phase and Passage Timing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.4: Renewing Medium Without Losing Cells - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.5: Preparing Adherent Cells for Passage - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.6: Passaging Suspension Cells - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.7: Planning a Suspension Transfer - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.8: What a Split Ratio Means - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.9: Choosing Vessels and Preparing a Plate Map - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.10: Calculating and Dispensing a Plating Mixture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.11: Checking Readiness for an Experiment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.12: Passage History and Culture Records - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 8.13: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 9: Cryopreservation and Cell Banking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.1: Why Preserve Cells? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.2: What Happens When a Cell Freezes? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.3: Selecting a Culture for Banking - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.4: Plan the Batch Before Harvest - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.5: Calculating Vial Number and Final Volume - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.6: Keep the Final Formulation in View - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.7: Controlled Cooling and Transfer - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.8: Long-Term Storage and Cryogenic Safety - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.9: Labels, Inventory, and Bank Structure - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.10: Testing Recovery After Thawing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.11: Investigating Poor Recovery - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 9.12: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 10: Cell Counting Viability and Culture Calculations - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.1: What a Cell Count Tells You - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.2: Getting a Representative Sample - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.3: How the Hemocytometer Works - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.4: Using Trypan Blue to Estimate Viability - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.5: Loading and Counting Consistently - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.6: Turning Raw Counts into Concentrations - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.7: Keeping Track of Dilution Factors - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.8: Calculating Viable Cell Yield - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.9: Calculating a Seeding Volume - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.10: Checking Count Quality - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.11: Automated Counts and Other Viability Tests - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.12: Documenting and Using the Result - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 10.13: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

◦ 11: Microscopy Staining and Cell Characterization - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.1: From Looking at Cells to Studying Cells - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.2: Magnification Resolution and Contrast - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.3: Choosing an Imaging Method - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.4: Describing a Culture Systematically - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.5: Field Selection and Observation Bias - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.6: Live-Cell Dyes and What They Measure - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.7: Fixing and Preparing Cells for Staining - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.8: Immunofluorescence and Molecular Markers - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.9: Controls That Support Interpretation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.10: Calibrating Images and Measuring Size - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.11: Acquiring Comparable Images - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.12: Turning Images into Measurements - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.13: Characterization Requires Several Kinds of Evidence - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.14: Building a Useful Imaging Record - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 11.15: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

- 12: Plasmid DNA and RNA Transfection - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.1: Changing What Cells Make - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.2: Three Types of Introduced Nucleic Acid - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.3: Temporary Expression and Persistent Changes - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.4: How siRNA Reduces a Target Message - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.5: Choosing a Delivery Method - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.6: Preparing Healthy Cells and Reliable Reagents - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.7: Controls for Different Experimental Questions - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.8: Calculating Cargo Amount and Final Concentration - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.9: Optimization and Replicate Planning - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.10: Measuring Delivery Expression and Cell Health - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.11: Interpreting an hTERT Knockdown Experiment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.12: Interpreting a NAMPT mRNA Experiment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.13: Troubleshooting and Documentation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 12.14: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 13: Experimental Design, Cytotoxicity, and Functional Assays - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.1: From a Question to a Measurable Outcome - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.2: Controls Separate Possible Explanations - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.3: Concentration, Vehicle, and Exposure Time - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.4: Replication and Plate Layout - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.5: Cell Number, Viability, and Cytotoxicity - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.6: Normalizing and Reporting a Cell-Health Signal - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.7: Concentration-Response Curves and IC_{50} - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.8: Colony Formation and Reproductive Survival - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.9: Scratch Assays- Measuring Gap Closure - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.10: Building a Supported Conclusion - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 13.11: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 14: Cell Derived Samples and Molecular Analysis - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.1: Choose the Sample to Match the Question - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.2: Collection Records and Preservation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.3: Extracellular Vesicles and What Enrichment Means - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.4: Tangential Flow Filtration - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.5: RNA Extraction and Quality - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.6: Reverse Transcription and qPCR - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.7: Relative RNA Abundance - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.8: Protein Extraction and SDS-PAGE - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.9: Immunoblotting and Protein Normalization - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.10: Cytokine Quantification by ELISA - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.11: Integrating Measurements Without Overstating Them - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 14.12: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 15: Quality Testing Statistics and Reporting Results - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.1: Quality Assurance and Quality Control - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.2: Culture and Sample Quality Before Analysis - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.3: Mycoplasma Testing - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.4: Microbial Growth Screens and Their Limits - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.5: Endotoxin and Sample Interference - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.6: Valid Invalid and Inconclusive Results - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.7: Replication and the Unit of Analysis - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.8: Mean Standard Deviation and Coefficient of Variation - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.9: Uncertainty Sample Size and Error Bars - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.10: Comparing Groups and Interpreting p Values - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.11: Graphs Outliers and Data Integrity - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.12: Writing a Clear Laboratory Report - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 15.13: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16: Ethics Regulation and Clinical Applications - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.1: Ethical Responsibilities in Cell Culture - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.2: Human Tissue Donation and Informed Consent - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.3: Cell Origins Traceability and Privacy - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.4: Stem Cell Research and Ethical Boundaries - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.5: Institutional Oversight and Shared Responsibility - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 16.6: Research Use Investigational Use and

Approved Use - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.7: Manufacturing Quality and Product Release - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.8: Translating a Laboratory Finding into Clinical Evidence - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.9: Cell Therapies and Regenerative Medicine - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.10: Cancer Research Drug Testing and Improved Models - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.11: Honest Reporting and Public Communication - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.12: Applying Ethical and Scientific Judgment - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 16.13: Chapter Summary - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*

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