

xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit

Processing sequence data with unique molecular identifiers (UMIs)



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Table of contents

Introduction	3
Referenced software packages	9
Perform analysis	10
Prepare sequencing reads	10
1. Construct an unmapped BAM	10
2. Extract UMIs and add to the RX tag	10
3. Align reads	10
Deduplication or error correction	12
A. Deduplicate by start-stop position	12
B. Deduplicate by UMI	12
C. Error correct by collapsing single read families	13
D. Error correct by collapsing combined read families	15
Variant calling	18
Clip overlap between read pairs	18
Call variants	18
References	19



Introduction

This guideline outlines example workflows for processing next generation sequencing (NGS) data from the xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit, starting from FASTQ files through making variant calls. The xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit is designed specifically for 1–250 ng of degraded samples, such as cell-free DNA (cfDNA) or DNA extracted from formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded (FFPE) samples. The method features a proprietary single-stranded ligation strategy that maximizes conversion, suppresses adapter-dimer formation, and reduces chimera rates (**Figure 1**). Since dimer formation is negligible, a fixed concentration of adapter can be used, and aggressive size selection is no longer required post-ligation. Altogether, this strategy delivers higher conversion and library complexity than conventional TA ligation-based methods, enabling highly sensitive detection of low-frequency variants. In addition, fixed single-stranded unique molecular identifier (UMI) sequences are added to the insert during Ligation 1 (shown in dark blue and light green in **Figure 1**). This unique single-stranded ligation to fixed UMIs enables strand-specific molecular indexing by independently tagging the top and bottom strands. After conversion to fully double-stranded products, libraries are amplified by PCR (**Figure 1**). Because the UMI sequences are fixed, even if there are sequencing or PCR errors in the UMI, it is possible to identify and correct these errors. This prevents artificial inflation of library complexity due to errors in the UMI sequence. Depending on your sample type or experimental goals, you can choose to use the UMIs in different ways or to ignore them altogether. This guide walks you through the rationale and methods for the various approaches. **Figure 2** provides an overview of the analysis method.

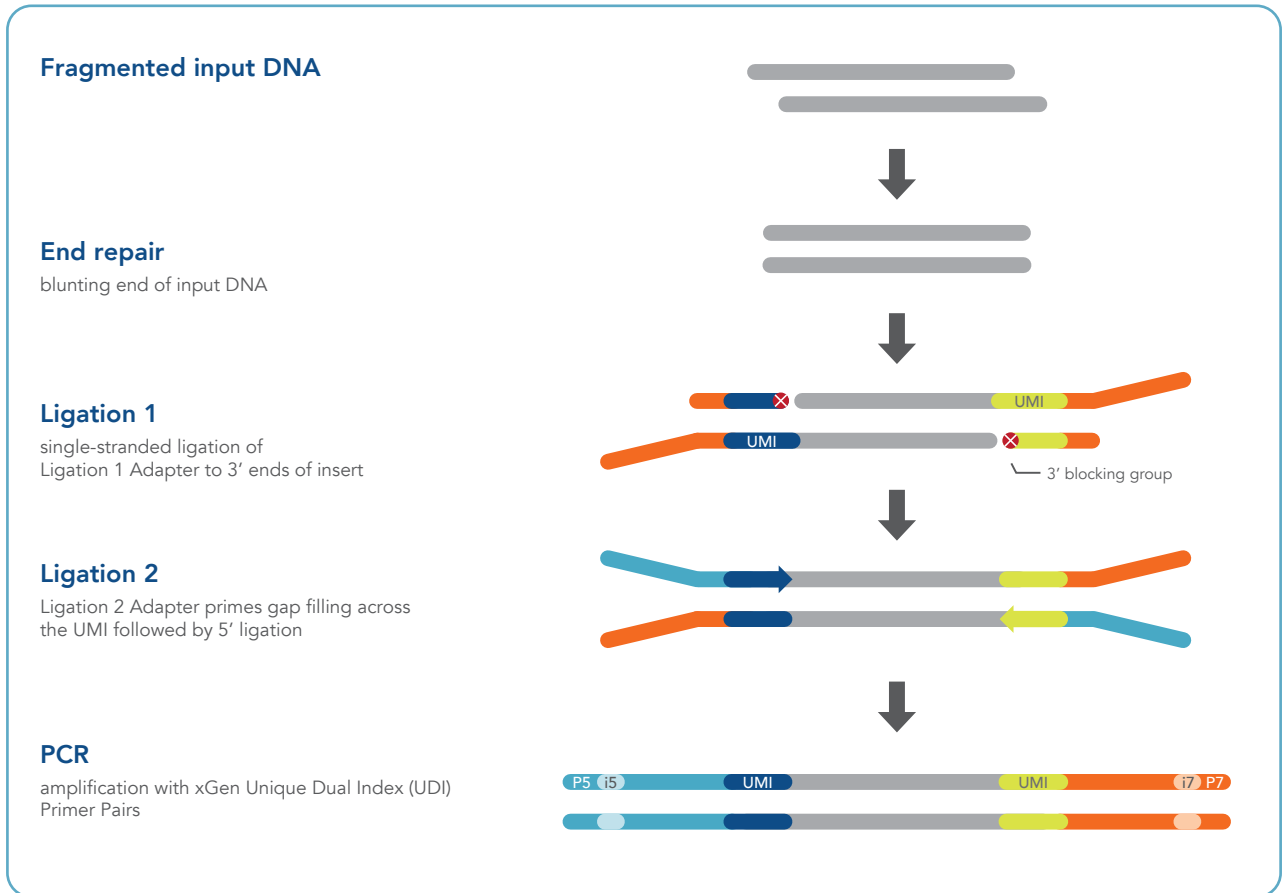


Figure 1. Overview of the xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit process.

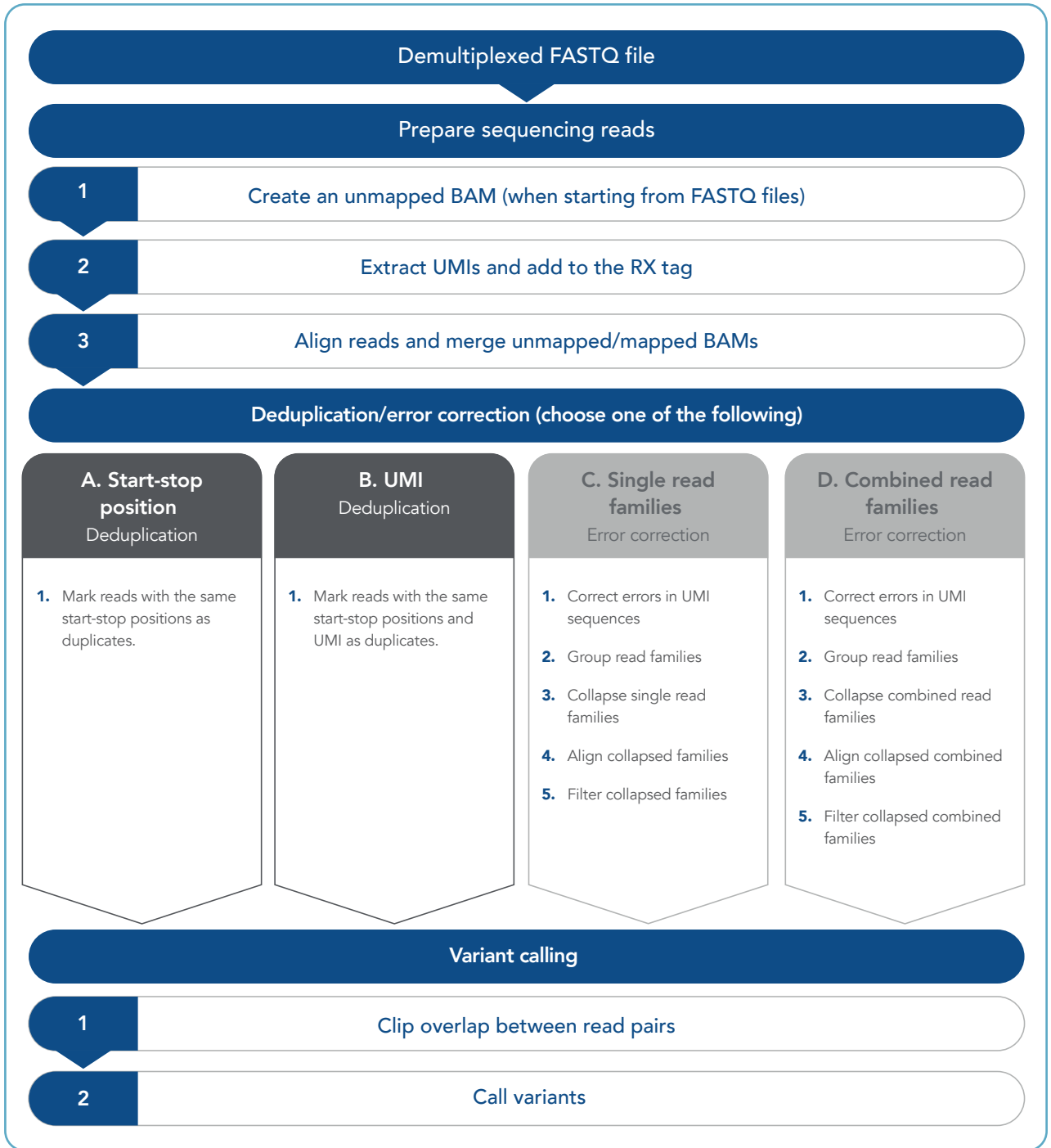


Figure 2. Outline of deduplication and error correction strategies compatible with libraries generated with the xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit.

The most common method for removing PCR duplicates before variant calling is based on retaining only the highest quality read of all reads with the same start-stop coordinates (**Figure 3A**). Tools like *MarkDuplicates* (Picard) use this approach. However, sometimes this approach can remove reads that originated from different original molecules. To minimize the removal of reads originating from different molecules, both the start-stop position and UMI sequence can be used to deduplicate reads (**Figure 3B**). This can be accomplished by choosing the highest quality read from reads that share the same start-stop coordinates and UMI, as is done by tools like *MarkDuplicates* with the `BARCODE_TAG` option enabled. This deduplication method chooses the read with the highest read quality, which may or may not contain PCR errors or low-frequency variants.

On the other hand, UMIs can also be used to correct errors in sequencing data at the same time as removing duplicate reads. For example, all reads with the same start-stop position and UMI can be grouped as a single read family, then collapsed (**Figure 3C**). Rather than simply choosing the highest quality read, this method uses all reads within the single read family to choose the most likely base at each position from beginning to end. This process yields a collapsed single read family that can be used for variant calling. This approach is taken by the tools *GroupReadsByUmi* plus *CallMolecularConsensusReads* (fgbio).

Finally, a more stringent method of error correction is also enabled by the xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit. During Ligation 1, UMIs are added to the top and bottom strands by single-stranded ligation, which are subsequently added to the other strand by gap filling during Ligation 2. Thus, both strands can be tracked back to the same original molecule. This approach makes use of start-stop position and a combination of single read families originating from the same original molecule (**Figure 3D**). Again, rather than simply choosing the highest quality read, this method uses all reads within a combination of both single read families to choose the most likely base at each position from beginning to end. This process yields a collapsed combined read family that can be used for variant calling, which greatly decreases the chances of false positives. Tools like *GroupReadsByUmi* plus *CallDuplexConsensusReads* can be used for this analysis.



Note: Using UMIs for error correction analysis usually requires significantly deeper sequencing and may not be appropriate for damaged samples like low-quality FFPE samples.

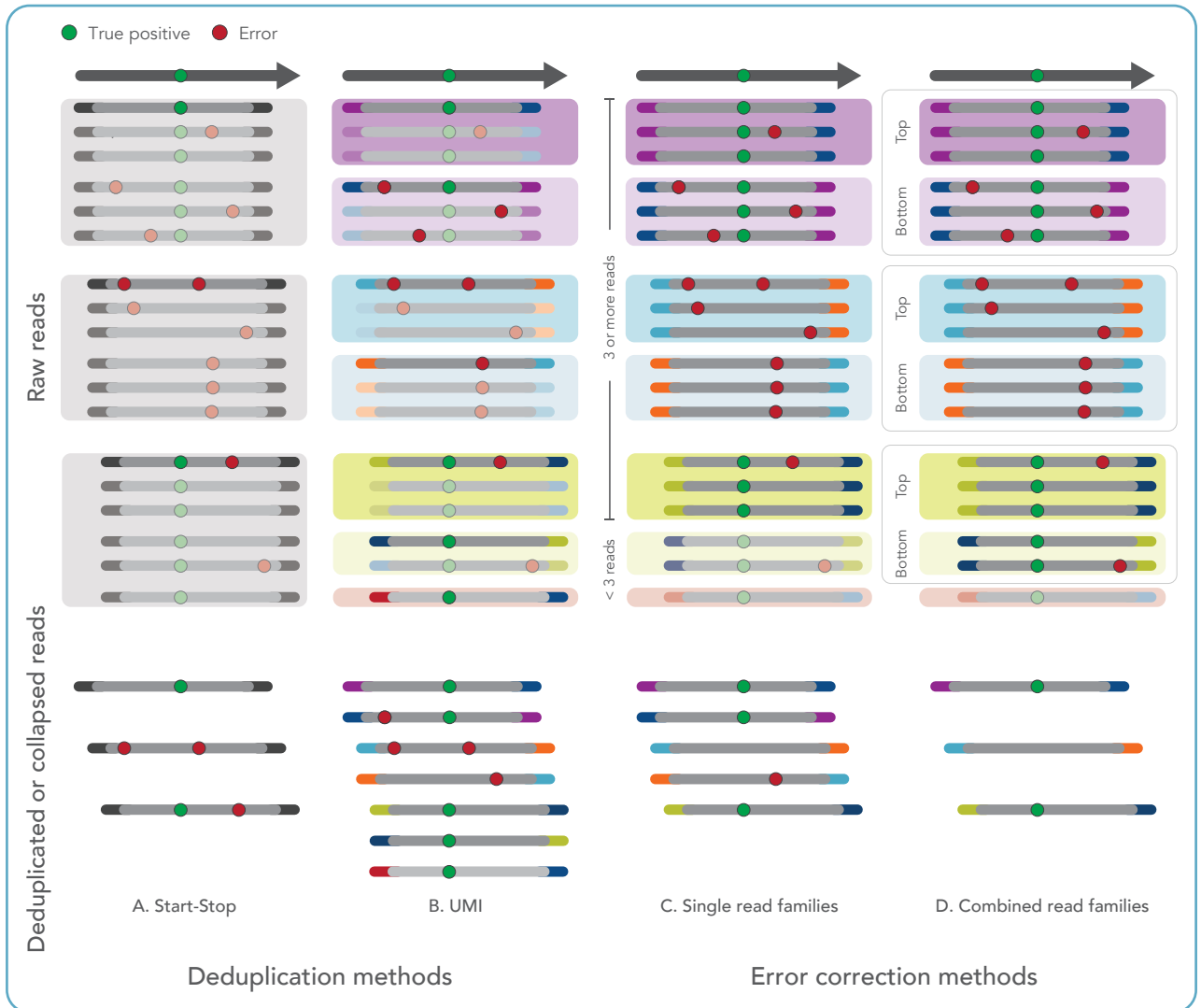


Figure 3. Deduplication and error correction strategies enabled by the xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit. The green circle represents a true positive mutation, while the red circles represent errors arising from artefacts in library prep or sequencing. Colored boxes at the ends of reads represent the inline UMIs added during xGen Prism DNA Library preparation. The shaded and boxed regions represent read families identified by their start-stop position and/or UMIs.

The most appropriate method for deduplication or error correction depends on the experimental goal and sample type. One important consideration is the source and quality of your input material. For example, DNA extracted from FFPE samples often has a variety of damage, including nicks, abasic sites, base substitutions, and thymine dimers. DNA damage can result in asymmetric amplification, where the less damaged strand is preferentially amplified. As a result, it can be challenging to use combined read families because sometimes one of the strands was too damaged to be amplified and sequenced. Therefore, if the goal of the experiment is sensitivity, it may be preferable to use single read families for error correction to minimize the influence of asymmetric amplification on variant calling. Conversely, if the most critical goal of the experiment is to minimize false positives, error correction using combined read families will give higher confidence results. Cell-free DNA (cfDNA) and DNA extracted from unfixed samples such as fresh frozen tissue, are less likely to encounter issues with DNA damage and can benefit from error correction using collapsed combined read families.

Other critical metrics are sequencing depth, and the closely linked variables of duplicate rate and panel size (target space). To effectively use UMIs to correct errors, PCR duplicates of the same original molecule need to be sequenced many times; and, when using combined read families, PCR duplicates of both top and bottom strands of the same original molecule should be sequenced many times. As a result, to effectively use these error correction strategies, libraries must be sequenced deeply enough to reach high duplicate rates. For whole genome sequencing (WGS) or capture panels with large target spaces like whole exome sequencing (WES), it is not likely feasible for sequencing depth to reach a duplicate rate high enough to correct sequencing errors.

The examples in [Table 1](#) can act as a starting point to choose the best analysis method for your experiment. Keep in mind these may not always produce the desired result because of variability in sample quality, sequencing runs, and analysis pipelines. The raw sequencing depth and duplicate rate recommendations are standard outputs from *CollectHsMetrics* (Picard) on start-stop duplicates marked data. In addition to the examples in [Table 1](#), duplicate rate can be a helpful indicator when determining if sequencing data is useful for a particular strategy. As a general rule, data with duplicate rates >80% are likely appropriate for error correction with combined read families, >70% for error correction within single read families, and >40% for deduplication by UMI. If you have significantly lower duplication rates than this, your chosen analysis may not be appropriate. On the other hand, although you may lose sensitivity using error correction without sufficient coverage or duplication rate, you may gain confidence in the variants that are identified. We recommend trying different methods to find the one that best suits your experimental goals.

Table 1: Example deduplication and error correction strategies for variant calling applications.

Sample type	Panel size	Variant allele frequency	Suggested analysis mode	Raw coverage	Duplicate rate*
Cell-free DNA or genomic DNA	Small (<250 kb)	0.25%	Combined read families	20,000X	>80%
	Large (WGS, exome)	50%	Start-stop	100X	>5%
FFPE or degraded samples	Medium (<2500 kb)	1%	UMI	1500X	>40%
	Small (<250 kb)	1%	Single read families	7500X	>70%

* Duplicate rate is a standard output from *CollectHsMetrics* on start-stop duplicates marked data. Following these examples may not always produce the desired results because sample quality, sequencing runs, and analysis pipelines may vary.



Referenced software packages

The following software packages are used in the examples within this document:

Package	Version	License	URL
Picard	2.18.9	MIT	https://github.com/broadinstitute/picard
bwa	0.7.15-r1140	GPL3	https://github.com/lh3/bwa
fgbio	0.7.0	MIT	https://github.com/fulcrumgenomics/fgbio
VarDict Java	1.5.8	MIT	https://github.com/AstraZeneca-NGS/VarDictJava



Note: Input of parameters for every tool within each package will affect analysis results. We recommend that you start running individual tools with the **help** option to view a full list of parameters which you can tune.



Perform analysis

Prepare sequencing reads

1. Construct an unmapped BAM

Using a demultiplexed FASTQ file, generate an unmapped BAM with *FastqToSam* (Picard).

Example invocation:

```
java -jar picard.jar FastqToSam \
  FASTQ=unmapped_R1.fastq.gz \
  FASTQ2=unmapped_R2.fastq.gz \
  O=unmapped.bam \
  SM=sample
```



Tip: Demultiplexing from Illumina BCL can also generate unmapped BAMs instead of FASTQ files using *IlluminaBasecallsToSam* (Picard). This avoids the generation of intermediate FASTQ files.

2. Extract UMIs and add to the RX tag

ExtractUmisFromBam (fgbio) processes unmapped BAM files, extracting in-line UMIs contained within read 1 or read 2 sequences and adds them into the RX tag.



Note: Read 1 and read 2 of the same pair should have the same value stored in the RX tag, regardless of which read contains the UMI sequence. The read structure in the *ExtractUmisFromBam* command represents the positions of the UMIs within each read (see the supporting documentation for details).

Example invocation:

```
java -jar fgbio.jar ExtractUmisFromBam \
  --input=unmapped.bam --output=unmapped.withUMI.bam \
  --read-structure=8M143T 8M143T --molecular-index-tags=ZA ZB --single-tag=RX
```

In this invocation, both reads are 151 bases long with the first “8M143T” representing the structure of the first read, and the second “8M143T” representing the structure of the second read:

- “8M” represents 8 UMI bases
- “143T” represents 143 bases in the read

3. Align reads

When you have an unmapped BAM file with RX tags, use a combination of an aligner and *MergeBamAlignment* (Picard) to generate a mapped BAM that includes all necessary metadata including the UMIs. In this example, we use BWA to align the reads to hg38, but other aligners and genome builds can be used, as appropriate.

Example invocation:

```
java -jar picard.jar SamToFastq I=unmapped.withUMI.bam F=/dev/stdout \  
INTERLEAVE=true \  
  | bwa mem -p -t 4 hg38.fa /dev/stdin \  
  | java -jar picard.jar MergeBamAlignment \  
    UNMAPPED=unmapped.withUMI.bam ALIGNED=/dev/stdin O=mapped.bam R=hg38.fa \  
    SO=coordinate ALIGNER_PROPER_PAIR_FLAGS=true MAX_GAPS=-1 \  
    ORIENTATIONS=FR VALIDATION_STRINGENCY=SILENT CREATE_INDEX=true
```



Note: *MergeBamAlignment* requires the unmapped BAM file to be in “queryname” sort order. In this case, the BAM file output by *ExtractUmisFromBam* is already in the correct sort order.



Deduplication or error correction

Choose the deduplication or error correction strategy appropriate for your experimental design. The examples in [Table 1](#) can help inform this decision. Follow instructions for either A-D, as appropriate, then proceed to variant calling.

A. Deduplicate by start-stop position

Mark reads with the same start-stop positions as duplicates using *MarkDuplicates* (Picard). *MarkDuplicates* will first identify a group of reads as being duplicates based on start-stop position. Then, it will pick a representative unique read and flag the rest of the reads as duplicates (using the bit flag 0x0400). By default, the unique read will have the highest sum-of-base qualities across all the candidate duplicate reads.

Example invocation:

```
java -jar picard.jar MarkDuplicates \  
  I=mapped.bam \  
  O=markduplicates.bam \  
  M=markduplicates.metrics.txt
```

B. Deduplicate by UMI

Mark reads with the start-stop positions and UMI as duplicates using *MarkDuplicates* (Picard). *MarkDuplicates* will first identify a group of reads as being duplicates based on start-stop position and UMI sequence. Then, it will pick a representative unique read and flag the rest of the reads as duplicates (using the bit flag 0x0400). By default, the unique read will have the highest sum-of-base qualities across all the candidate duplicate reads.

Example invocation:

```
java -jar picard.jar MarkDuplicates \  
  I=mapped.bam \  
  O=markduplicates.bam \  
  M=markduplicates.metrics.txt \  
  BARCODE_TAG=RX
```

C. Error correct by collapsing single read families

1. **Correct errors in the UMI sequences** stored in the tags of the BAM file using *CorrectUmis* (fgbio). Correction is controlled by the number of mismatches tolerated between the observed UMI and the fixed UMI “--max-mismatches”, and the number of mismatches the next best UMI must have “--min-distance”.

Example invocation:

```
java -jar fgbio.jar CorrectUmis \
  -i mapped.bam -o mapped.fixedumi.bam \
  --max-mismatches=3 \
  --min-distance=1 \
  -M metrics.txt \
  -r rejected.bam -t RX -u GAGACGAT TTCCAAGG CGCATGAT ACGGAACA CGGCTAAT GCTATCCT TGGACTCT \
  ATCCAGAG CTTAGGAC GTGCCATA TCGCTGTT TTCGTTGG AAGCACTG GTCGAAGA ACCACGAT GATTACCG GCACAACCT \
  GCGTCATT GAAGGAAG ACTGAGGT TGAAGACG GTTACGCA AGCGTGTT GATCGAGT TTGCGAAG CTGTTGAC GATGTGTG \
  ACGTTCAG TTGCAGAC CAATGTGG ACGACTTG ACTAGGAG
```

2. **Group read families** by identifying which reads come from the same source molecule using *GroupReadsByUmi* (fgbio), which assigns a unique source molecule ID to each applicable read, stores the ID in the MI tag, and outputs a BAM file that is sorted by the MI tag and ready for read collapsing. The source molecule is identified using a combination of UMI sequence and mapping positions from reads 1 and 2.

Example invocation:

```
java -jar fgbio.jar GroupReadsByUmi \
  --input=mapped.fixedumi.bam --output=grouped.bam \
  --strategy=paired --edits=0 --min-map-q=20
```

GroupReadsByUmi implements several strategies for matching UMIs to account for sequencing error. The paired method implements the directed adjacency graph method introduced by UMI-tools [1]. Parameters are available to control how many errors are allowed when matching UMIs at the same position and for filtering (i.e., ignoring) reads with low mapping quality.



Note: Reads with low mapping quality should be ignored to prevent multiple single read families from being generated from multiple mismapped copies of the same source molecule.


3. **Collapse single read families** by combining each set of reads using *CallMolecularConsensusReads* (fgbio). This step generates collapsed single read families as an unmapped BAM from the output of *GroupReadsByUmi*.



Tip: There are many parameters that affect single read family collapsing; for an up-to-date listing and supporting documentation, run *CallMolecularConsensusReads* with the -h option.

Example invocation (with recommended parameters):


```
java -jar fgbio.jar CallMolecularConsensusReads \
  --input=grouped.bam --output=consensus.unmapped.bam \
  --error-rate-pre-umi=45 --error-rate-post-umi=30 \
  --min-consensus-base-quality=40 --min-input-base-quality=30 --min-reads=1
```

 **Note:** This invocation produces collapsed single read families for all molecules that have at least 1 observation.


4. **Align collapsed families.** After you have generated collapsed single read families, you must remap the reads and merge mapped/unmapped BAMs to retain the appropriate metadata in the mapped file. The mapping procedure is the same as for raw reads described previously.


Example invocation (with recommended parameters):

```
java -jar picard.jar SamToFastq I=consensus.unmapped.bam \
  F=/dev/stdout INTERLEAVE=true \
  | bwa mem -p -t 8 hg38.fa /dev/stdin \
  | java -jar picard.jar MergeBamAlignment \
  UNMAPPED=consensus.unmapped.bam ALIGNED=/dev/stdin \
  O=consensus.mapped.bam R=hg38.fa \
  SO=coordinate ALIGNER_PROPER_PAIR_FLAGS=true MAX_GAPS=-1 \
  ORIENTATIONS=FR VALIDATION_STRINGENCY=SILENT CREATE_INDEX=true
```

 **Note:** Duplicate marking should not be performed on collapsed families because each represents a unique source molecule.

5. **Filter collapsed families** using *FilterConsensusReads* (fgbio). There are 2 kinds of filtering: 1) masking or filtering individual bases in reads, and 2) filtering reads (i.e., not writing them to the output file). Base-level masking is only applied if per-base tags are present (see the [supporting documentation](#) for *CallMolecularConsensusReads* on tag descriptions). Read-level filtering is always applied.

 **Tip:** When filtering reads, secondary alignments and supplementary records may be removed independently if they fail one or more filters. If either read 1 or read 2 primary alignments fail a filter, all records for the template will be filtered out.

 **Tip:** There are many parameters that affect the filtering of the collapsed families. For an up-to-date listing and supporting documentation, run *FilterConsensusRead* with the -h option.

Example invocation (with recommended parameters):

```
java -jar fgbio.jar FilterConsensusReads \
  --input=consensus.mapped.bam \
  --output=consensus.mapped.filtered.bam \
  --ref=hg38.fa \
  --min-reads=3 \
  --max-read-error-rate=0.05 \
  --max-base-error-rate=0.1 \
  --min-base-quality=40 \
  --max-no-call-fraction=0.1
```



Note: This script produces a filtered BAM file for collapsed families that have at least 3 supporting reads.

D. Error correct by collapsing combined read families

1. **Correct errors in the UMI sequences** stored in the tags of the BAM file using *CorrectUmis* (fgbio). Correction is controlled by the number of mismatches tolerated between the observed UMI and the fixed UMI “--max-mismatches”, and the number of mismatches the next best UMI must have “--min-distance”.

Example invocation:


```
java -jar fgbio.jar CorrectUmis \
  -i mapped.bam -o mapped.fixedumi.bam \
  --max-mismatches=3 \
  --min-distance=1 \
  -M metrics.txt \
  -r rejected.bam -t RX -u GAGACGAT TTCCAAGG CGCATGAT ACGGAACA CGGCTAAT GCTATCCT \
  TGGACTCT ATCCAGAG CTTAGGAC GTGCCATA TCGCTGTT TTCGTTGG AAGCACTG GTCGAAGA ACCACGAT \
  GATTACCG GCACAAC TCGTCATT GAAGGAAG ACTGAGGT TGAAGACG GTTACGCA ACGGTGTT GATCGAGT \
  TTGCGAAG CTGTTGAC GATGTGTG ACGTTCAG TTGCAGAC CAATGTGG ACGACTTG ACTAGGAG
```

2. **Group read families** by identifying which reads come from the same source molecule using *GroupReadsByUmi* (fgbio), which assigns a unique source molecule ID to each applicable read, stores the ID in the MI tag, and outputs a BAM file that is sorted by the MI tag and ready for read collapsing. The source molecule is identified using a combination of UMI sequence and mapping positions from reads 1 and 2.


Example invocation:

```
java -jar fgbio.jar GroupReadsByUmi \
  --input=mapped.fixedumi.bam --output=grouped.bam \
  --strategy=paired --edits=0 --min-map-q=20
```

GroupReadsByUmi implements several strategies for matching UMIs to account for sequencing error. The paired method implements the directed adjacency graph method introduced by UMI-tools [1]. Parameters are available to control how many errors are allowed when matching UMIs at the same position and for filtering (i.e., ignoring) reads with low mapping quality.


 **Note:** Reads with low mapping quality should be ignored to prevent multiple combined read families from being generated from multiple mismapped copies of the same source molecule.


3. **Collapse combined read families** by combining each set of reads using *CallDuplexConsensusReads* (fgbio). This step generates collapsed combined read families as an unmapped BAM from the output of *GroupReadsByUmi*.

 **Tip:** There are many parameters that affect read collapsing; for an up-to-date listing and supporting documentation, run *CallDuplexConsensusReads* with the -h option.

Example invocation (with recommended parameters):

```
java -jar fgbio.jar CallDuplexConsensusReads \
  --input=grouped.bam --output=consensus.unmapped.bam \
  --error-rate-pre-umi=45 --error-rate-post-umi=30 \
  --min-input-base-quality=30
```


 **Note:** This invocation produces collapsed read families for all molecules that have at least 1 observation.

 **Note:** *CallDuplexConsensusReads* requires the input BAM file to be in “TemplateCoordinate” sort order. BAM file outputs by *GroupReadsByUmi* will have the correct sort order. If needed, use the *SortSam* function in fgbio with the argument “--sort-order=TemplateCoordinate” to format your BAM file.

4. **Align collapsed combined families.** After you have generated collapsed read families, you must remap the reads and merge mapped/unmapped BAMs to retain the appropriate metadata in the mapped file. The mapping procedure is the same as for raw reads described previously.

Example invocation (with recommended parameters):

```
java -jar picard.jar SamToFastq I=consensus.unmapped.bam \
F=/dev/stdout INTERLEAVE=true \
| bwa mem -p -t 8 hg38.fa /dev/stdin \
| java -jar picard.jar MergeBamAlignment \
UNMAPPED=consensus.unmapped.bam ALIGNED=/dev/stdin \
O=consensus.mapped.bam R=hg38.fa \
SO=coordinate ALIGNER_PROPER_PAIR_FLAGS=true MAX_GAPS=-1 \
ORIENTATIONS=FR VALIDATION_STRINGENCY=SILENT CREATE_INDEX=true
```

 **Note:** Duplicate marking should not be performed on collapsed combined families because each represents a unique source molecule.

5. **Filter collapsed combined families** using *FilterConsensusReads* (fgbio). There are 2 kinds of filtering: 1) masking or filtering individual bases in reads, and 2) filtering reads (i.e., not writing them to the output file). Base-level masking/filtering is only applied if per-base tags are present (see the [supporting documentation](#) for *CallDuplexConsensusReads* for tag descriptions). Read-level filtering is always applied.



Tip: When filtering reads, secondary alignments and supplementary records may be removed independently if they fail one or more filters. If either read 1 or read 2 primary alignments fail a filter, all records for the template will be filtered out.



Tip: There are many parameters that affect the filtering of collapsed combined families. For an up-to-date listing and supporting documentation, run *FilterConsensusRead* with the -h option.

Example invocation (with recommended parameters):

```
java -jar fgbio.jar FilterConsensusReads \
  --input=consensus.mapped.bam \
  --output=consensus.mapped.filtered.bam \
  --ref=hg38.fa \
  --min-reads=2 1 1 \
  --max-read-error-rate=0.05 \
  --max-base-error-rate=0.1 \
  --min-base-quality=50 \
  --max-no-call-fraction=0.05 \
  --require-single-strand-agreement=true
```



Note: This script produces a filtered BAM file for collapsed combined families that have at least 2 reads to support each single read family and have at least 1 single read family from each strand to support a combined read family.



Variant calling

Clip overlap between read pairs

Use *ClipBam* (fgbio) to eliminate overlap between read 1 and read 2 pairs to ensure that downstream processes, specifically variant calling, cannot double count evidence from the same template when both reads span a variant site in the same template. Clipping overlapping reads is only performed on “FR” read pairs and is implemented by clipping approximately half the overlapping bases from each read. By default, hard clipping is performed; soft-clipping may be substituted using the “--soft-clip” parameter. BAMs from deduplication or error correction can be used.

Example invocation:

```
java -jar fgbio.jar ClipBam \
  --input=consensus.mapped.filtered.bam \
  --output=consensus.mapped.filtered.clipped.bam \
  --ref=hg38.fa --soft-clip=false --clip-overlapping-reads=true
```

Call variants

You can produce variant calls from reads with the variant caller of your choice. The following example shows how to use *VarDictJava* (Astra Zeneca) in tumor-only mode to generate a VCF file, and *SortVcf* (Picard) to sort and index the resulting VCF.

Example invocation (with recommended parameters):

```
Vardict_Dir=VarDict-1.5.8/bin
min_af=0.01
tumor_name=tumor

${Vardict_Dir}/VarDict \
  -G hg38.fa \
  -N ${tumor_name} \
  -f ${min_af} \
  -b consensus.mapped.filtered.clipped.bam \
  -z -c 1 -S 2 -E 3 -g 4 -th 1 --nosv \
  target_regions.bed \
| ${Vardict_Dir}/teststrandbias.R \
| ${Vardict_Dir}/var2vcf_valid.pl -N ${tumor_name} -E -f ${min_af} \
| awk '{if ($1 ~ /^#/) print; else if ($4 !=5) print}' \
> ${tumor_name}.vcf
```



References

1. Smith T, Heger A, Sudbery I. (2017) **UMI-tools: Modeling sequencing errors in Unique Molecular Identifiers to improve quantification accuracy.** *Genome Res*, 27:491–499.

xGen Prism DNA Library Prep Kit

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