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2 Eliminating the Missing Cone Challenge through Innovative Approaches

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4 *Authors*

5 Cody Gillman^{1,2}, Guanhong Bu¹, Emma Danelius^{1,3}, Johan Hattne^{1,3}, Brent Nannenga^{4,5}, Tamir
6 Gonen^{1,2,3,6}

7

8 *Affiliations*

9 ¹ Department of Biological Chemistry, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA.

10 ² Molecular Biology Institute, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA.

11 ³ Howard Hughes Medical Institute, University of California, Los Angeles CA, USA.

12 ⁴Chemical Engineering, School for Engineering of Matter, Transport and Energy, Arizona State University,
13 Tempe, AZ, USA.

14 ⁵Center for Applied Structural Discovery, Biodesign Institute, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA.
15 brent.nannenga@asu.edu.

16 ⁶ Department of Physiology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA.

17

18 * To whom correspondence should be sent T.G. tgonen@g.ucla.edu

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22 pFIB, suspended drop crystallization, missing cone

23

24 **ABSTRACT**

25 Microcrystal electron diffraction (MicroED) has emerged as a powerful technique for unraveling molecular
26 structures from microcrystals too small for X-ray diffraction. However, a significant hurdle arises with
27 plate-like crystals that consistently orient themselves flat on the electron microscopy grid. If, as is typically
28 the case, the normal of the plate correlates with the axes of the crystal lattice, the crystal orientations
29 accessible for measurement are restricted because the grid cannot be arbitrarily rotated. This limits the
30 information that can be acquired, resulting in a missing cone of information. We recently introduced a novel
31 crystallization strategy called suspended drop crystallization and proposed that this method could
32 effectively address the challenge of preferred crystal orientation. Here we demonstrate the success of the
33 suspended drop crystallization approach in eliminating the missing cone in two samples that crystallize as
34 thin plates: bovine liver catalase and the COVID-19 main protease (Mpro). This innovative solution proves
35 indispensable for crystals exhibiting preferred orientations, unlocking new possibilities for structure
36 determination by MicroED.

37 **1. Introduction**

38 Microcrystal electron diffraction (MicroED) is a cryogenic electron microscopy (cryo-EM) method
39 in which vanishingly small crystals are used for structure determination by electron diffraction (Shi *et al.*,
40 2013). In MicroED, microcrystalline samples are prepared on cryo-EM grids and diffraction data are
41 collected as a movie on a fast camera in a transmission electron microscope (TEM) while the sample is
42 continuously rotated (Nannenga, Shi, Leslie *et al.*, 2014). This setup allows the data to be processed using
43 standard crystallographic software. The use of micro- and nanosized crystals provides new opportunities
44 for determining previously unattainable structures, and MicroED has been applied to small molecules,
45 natural products, materials, soluble- and membrane proteins, and is gaining popularity for various
46 applications (Bruhn *et al.*, 2021; Mu *et al.*, 2021). For highly symmetric crystals, MicroED routinely yields
47 complete data from single crystals, even for proteins as in the case for proteinase K (Martynowycz *et al.*,
48 2023) and the adenosine A2a receptor (Martynowycz *et al.*, 2023).

49 The experimental design of the sample stage in relation to the incoming electrons inherently limits
50 the rotation range that can be used for data collection. At high tilt angles, the electron path through the
51 sample is obstructed by grid bars or other crystals. Moreover, the grid holder itself blocks the electron beam
52 at angles above $\sim 70^\circ$ so the maximum rotation range is $\sim 140^\circ$ not the ideal 180° . To address this challenge,
53 numerous datasets must be collected, processed, and screened for merging statistics, aiming at completing
54 reciprocal space (Griner *et al.*, 2019; Gallagher-Jones *et al.*, 2018; Danelius *et al.*, 2023). Some examples
55 include triclinic lysozyme, where data from 16 crystals were merged into a 88% complete dataset (Clabbers

56 *et al.*, 2022) and the human G-protein coupled receptor vasopressin, also crystallized in P1, where 14
57 datasets had to be merged to yield 75% completeness (Shiriaeva *et al.*, 2023).

58 However, certain crystal morphologies pose specific challenges: when the crystals are flat and the
59 orientation of the crystallographic axes follows the orientation of the plane, the crystal lattice will assume
60 a preferred orientation because plate-like crystals tend to lie flat on the surface of the sample grid. In
61 combination with the limited rotation range of the stage, this renders a systematic cone of reciprocal space
62 inaccessible for data collection, irrespective of the number of datasets merged and the symmetry of the
63 crystal (Glaeser & Downing, 1993; Stahlberg *et al.*, 2015). This is the case for all examples of 2D crystals
64 since they can only adopt a single orientation on the EM grid. For such samples, the maximum achievable
65 completeness is ~86% even if the stage is rotated through the maximum possible range (Glaeser &
66 Downing, 1993). Thus, the missing cone creates a substantial bottleneck in structure solution for crystals
67 that adopt a preferred orientation. Missing wedges in reciprocal space result in artifacts in the density, such
68 as elongated and/or missing or irrecoverable disjoint volumes (Stahlberg *et al.*, 2015). Although common
69 for micro- and nanosized crystals, this challenge is not unique to MicroED; but is well-known in
70 transmission electron microscopy. For example, it manifests in cryotomography (Barth *et al.*, 1988), where
71 whole cells can align to the support grids. It should be noted that the incomplete crystal lattice sampling
72 due to the missing cone can be eliminated if data from multiple crystals that are randomly oriented on the
73 grid are combined.

74 Recently, we reported a new method for crystal growth called suspended drop crystallization
75 (Gillman *et al.*, 2023). With this approach crystals grow in suspension directly on a grid without any support
76 film layered over the grid bars. Before data collection, the crystal and the surrounding material is FIB-
77 milled to a thickness amenable to MicroED. Because no grid support film is present, we postulated that
78 preferential orientation of crystals would be greatly reduced and that this approach could therefore eliminate
79 the missing cone problem. Here, we demonstrate this by collecting complete datasets from two samples
80 that are known for preferred orientation, namely bovine liver catalase, and the COVID-19 main protease
81 (Mpro).

82 **2. Methods and Materials**

83 *2.1. Protein expression and purification of Mpro*

84 The gene encoding the full-length SARS-COV-2 Mpro was designed into the pGEX-6P-1 vector.
85 The construct was fused with an N-terminal self-cleaving GST tag and a C-terminal His affinity tag
86 downstream of a Precision protease cleavage site. *E. coli* strain Rosetta2 (DE3) was transformed with the
87 expression plasmid for protein expression. An overnight culture was grown in terrific broth at 37 °C and

88 used for inoculating 1 L of culture, which was incubated at 37 °C and 225 rpm. Protein expression was
89 induced by 0.5 mM isopropyl β -d-1-thiogalactopyranoside (IPTG) when the OD₆₀₀ reached 0.7. Expression
90 was allowed for 16 h at 18 °C. The cell pellet was harvested at 8,000 g and kept at -20 °C until use. The
91 frozen cell pellet was thawed at 4 °C in lysis buffer (50 mM HEPES-NaOH pH 7.5, 2 mM DTT, 2 mM
92 EDTA, 2 mM EGTA, 0.1 mg/mL lysozyme and 0.1 mg/mL DNase I). Cells were lysed by sonication at
93 70% amplitude for 5 min. The cell debris and unbroken cells were removed by centrifuging at 12,000 g and
94 4 °C. The supernatant was directly loaded into a gravity column filled with 1 mL TALON resin (TaKaRa)
95 pre-equilibrated with the binding buffer (20 mM HEPES-NaOH pH 7.5, 100 mM NaCl and 1 mM DTT).
96 The column was washed with 25 mL wash buffer (20 mM HEPES-NaOH pH 7.5, 100 mM NaCl, 1 mM
97 DTT and 10 mM imidazole), then washed with 10 mL Precision protease cleavage buffer (50 mM Tris-
98 HCl pH 8.2, 150 mM NaCl and 1 mM DTT). Approximately 0.2 mg Precision protease in 3 mL cleavage
99 buffer was directly added into the TALON resin slurry. The resin slurry was incubated at 4 °C for over 16
100 h with gentle shaking. The tag-cleaved Mpro was collected in fractions while flowing off the resin. The
101 purified protein was concentrated to 0.6 mL using a 10 kD cut-off Amicon Ultra centrifugal filter
102 (Millipore). The sample was then loaded into a Superdex 200 Increase 10/300 GL column (Cytiva) pre-
103 equilibrated with the SEC buffer (20 mM Tris pH 7.8, 100 mM NaCl, 1 mM DTT and 1 mM EDTA). The
104 collected Mpro fractions were pooled, concentrated using an Amicon Ultra centrifugal filter with 10 kD
105 cut-off (Millipore), and stored at -80 °C until use.

106 2.2. Crystallization assays

107 Catalase was crystallized using procedures based on previously reported methods (Nannenga et al.,
108 2014). First, a crystalline suspension of catalase from bovine liver (C100; Sigma-Aldrich) was centrifuged
109 to pellet the crude catalase crystals. The supernatant was decanted and the pelleted crystals were washed in
110 water and centrifuged again to recollect the catalase crystals. The supernatant was decanted and a solution
111 of 1.7 M NaCl was added to solubilize the crystalline catalase. Solubilization was performed at room
112 temperature for 1 h. The freshly solubilized catalase was dialyzed overnight at 4 °C against a solution of 50
113 mM sodium phosphate (pH 6.3) to allow recrystallization. The catalase crystals were collected and stored
114 in tubes at 4 °C for an additional 24 h before being washed with water as described above. Catalase crystals
115 were stored at 4 °C until used for MicroED sample preparation.

116 The Mpro fraction was thawed and the concentration was adjusted to 5 mg/mL. The mixture was
117 diluted 1:1 with crystallization mother liquor (0.1 M MES pH 6.5, 20% PEG 3,350 and 5% DMSO).
118 Crystals grew as plate clusters after 1 to 3 days when incubating at 20 °C using hanging vapor diffusion.
119 Approximately 10 μ L of the crystal drops were combined and used for preparation of a micro seeding stock.
120 1 μ L of 2.5 mg/mL Mpro was mixed with 0.1 μ L seeding stock and 1 μ L of the crystallization condition.

121 Monodisperse Mpro microcrystal plates were grown after 1 day when incubating at 20 °C using hanging
122 vapor diffusion.

123 2.3. *EM sample preparation*

124 EM samples were prepared following previously published protocols (Martynowycz *et al.*, 2021).
125 Typically, carbon-coated (Quantifoil R 2/2) 200-mesh copper grids (Electron Microscopy Sciences) were
126 negatively glow-discharged at 15 mA for 45 s using a PELCO easiGlow (Ted Pella). The grids were then
127 loaded into a Leica EM GP2 plunge freezer (Leica Microsystems) set to 20 °C and 95% humidity. Using a
128 micropipette, 2 µL of the crystal drop was transferred to the grid, which was then blotted for 20 s, and
129 finally plunged into liquid ethane.

130 For the suspended-drop grids, the crystal slurry was added directly to a 150 mesh count support-
131 free gold gilder grid (Ted Pella) that was clipped into an autogrid cartridge (Thermo-Fisher). To transfer a
132 minimal amount of catalase sample to the grid, the sample was first aspirated into a pipet tip, which was
133 gently dragged across the surface of the grid to deposit the sample. Sample transferred to the grid bars and
134 was retained by surface tension. For MPro, the grids supporting the suspended crystal drops were blotted
135 with filter paper from the edge for 2 s. The grids were finally plunged into liquid ethane and stored under
136 liquid nitrogen until further use.

137 2.4. *Milling lamellae of catalase suspended crystals*

138 Focused ion beam (FIB) milling followed procedures similar to suspended drop crystallization
139 (Gillman *et al.*, 2023). The frozen sample containing suspended crystals was loaded into a Thermo-Fisher
140 Helios Hydra plasma beam FIB (pFIB)/scanning electron microscope (SEM) operating at cryogenic
141 temperature. The crystal drop was coated with platinum by beam-assisted GIS coating (argon beam at 4
142 nA, 5 kV) for 1 min to protect the sample from ion and electron beams. A whole-grid atlas of the drop was
143 acquired with the SEM operating at an accelerating voltage of 0.5 kV and beam current of 13 pA using the
144 latest version of MAPS software (Thermo-Fisher). The pFIB milling angle was set to 10° from the grid
145 surface. For the first milling step, in the pFIB view, two 20×20 µm boxes (cleaning cross section milling
146 pattern) separated by 5 µm were drawn and centered about the site of interest. Bulk material was removed
147 using the xenon plasma beam set to a current of 4 nA for rough milling, which produced a 10-15 µm long
148 lamella. The lamella trenches were inspected to ensure that the top and bottom of the lamella were exposed
149 for subsequent MicroED data acquisition. The second lamella milling step used 1 nA of xenon plasma
150 current to reach 3.5 µm thickness and 15 µm width. The third milling step was performed with a 0.3 nA
151 xenon plasma current to narrow the lamella down to 2 µm thickness and 10 µm width. The fourth milling
152 step was done at 0.1 nA to reach 1 µm thickness. Lastly, the milling ion current was set to 30 pA for final

153 thickness milling and polishing. A 10 μm wide and roughly 300 nm thick lamella was generated through
154 the drop of suspended crystals. The lamellae were visualized at 385 nm excitation wavelength with the
155 iFLM on the Hydra dual-beam instrument.

156 2.5. *Milling lamellae of Mpro preferred orientation crystals and suspended crystals*

157 The vitrified grids were transferred into a Thermo-Fisher Aquilos FIB/SEM instrument operating
158 at cryogenic temperature. Whole-grid atlases were recorded with the SEM at 5 kV and 1.6 pA using MAPS
159 software. To protect the samples from the damaging ion and electron beams, the grids were coated with
160 platinum by sputter coating (Martynowycz *et al.*, 2019b). Individual crystals from blotted grids and
161 suspended drops were identified and aligned to eucentric height using MAPS software. FIB-milling
162 proceeded as described (Martynowycz *et al.*, 2019b,a). A typical crystal identified on the blotted grids was
163 tilted to a milling angle of 33°. Rough milling used an ion beam current of 300 pA to produce a 4 μm thick
164 and 5 μm wide lamella. For fine milling, a FIB current of 100 pA was used to reduce the thickness of lamella
165 to 1 μm . Polishing proceeded at an ion beam current of 50 pA until the thickness reached approximately
166 350 nm. The final lamella was approximately 3 μm wide. Milling suspended drop samples was similar to
167 the previously mentioned steps with slight modifications: the sample was tilted to a milling angle of 13°,
168 and the ion beam current for rough, fine, and final milling was set to 3 nA, 500 pA, and 100 pA, respectively.

169

170 2.6. *MicroED data collection*

171 The grids hosting the milled lamellae were rotated 90° and transferred to a cryogenically cooled Thermo-
172 Fisher Scientific Titan Krios G3i TEM. The Krios was equipped with a field emission gun operating at an
173 accelerating voltage of 300 kV, a Falcon 4i direct electron detector, and a Selectris energy filter (Thermo-
174 Fisher). A low magnification atlas of the grid was acquired using EPU (Thermo-Fisher) to locate all milled
175 lamellae. The stage was moved to the lamella position and while in the “View” settings (SA 3,600 \times) of
176 SerialEM (Mastrorade, 2003), the eucentric height was set. The lamellae were manually scanned by
177 sequentially evaluating electron diffraction (Figure 1) until a crystal site was located. In the “Record”
178 settings, the following parameters were set for the electron beam in diffraction mode: a beam size of 20 μm
179 in diameter, a spotsize of 11, and a C2 aperture of 50 μm . These settings resulted in an electron dose rate of
180 approximately 0.0025 e-/($\text{\AA}^2\cdot\text{s}$). Electron-counted MicroED datasets were collected using a Falcon 4i with
181 the “Record” mode of SerialEM following the protocol described in previously published work (Shiriaeva
182 *et al.*, 2023). An in-house developed script was applied to insert the Selectris energy filter and automatically
183 collect continuous-rotation MicroED datasets for 420 s with a slit width of 20 eV and a selected area
184 aperture diameter of ~ 2 μm . Autodoc and log files were generated after each data collection to provide
185 metadata and parameters to use for data processing. For catalase, MicroED data were collected by

186 continuously rotating the stage at $0.14^\circ / \text{s}$ for 420 s, resulting in a rotation range of 60° . For Mpro, typical
187 datasets from blotted crystals and suspended-drop grids were collected by continuously rotating the stage
188 at $0.19^\circ / \text{s}$ for 420 s, resulting in a rotation range of 80° .

189 2.7. *MicroED data processing and structure determination*

190 Movies were converted to SMV format using the latest version of MicroED tools (Martynowycz *et*
191 *al.*, 2019a; Hattne *et al.*, 2015; Hattne *et al.*, 2023). The converted MicroED datasets were processed with
192 XDS (Kabsch, 2010b). The catalase diffraction dataset was indexed and integrated in space group $P 2_1 2_1$
193 2_1 and unit cell dimensions 68.65, 173.30, 182.78 (a, b, c) (Å) and 90, 90, 90 (α , β , γ) ($^\circ$), and the Mpro
194 dataset was indexed and integrated in space group $C 2$ with the unit cell parameters of 115.54, 55.53, 45.37
195 (a, b, c) (Å), 90, 101.07, 90 (α , β , γ) ($^\circ$). High quality datasets including the missing cone were scaled and
196 merged in XSCALE (Kabsch, 2010a) and converted to MTZ format with supplemental 5% free R column
197 in XDSCONV (Kabsch, 2010b). Phases for the MicroED reflections were determined by molecular
198 replacement in MOLREP and Phaser (McCoy *et al.*, 2007) using Protein Data Bank (PDB) 3J7B (Nannenga
199 *et al.*, 2014) as the search model for catalase, and PDB 7K3T (Andi *et al.*, 2022) as the search model for
200 MPro. The refinement was performed with REFMAC and phenix.refine (Afonine *et al.*, 2012) using
201 electron scattering factors without restoring missing reflections. Refinement was followed by manual
202 curation in Coot (Emsley *et al.*, 2010).

203 3. Results

204 3.1 *Sample preparation and MicroED data collection*

205 To collect data covering all of reciprocal space, sample preparations were screened for randomly
206 oriented crystals. In addition, the samples were kept at minimal volume to reduce the FIB-milling time and
207 thereby prevent damaging the crystals in the suspended drops. Initially, 0.3–0.5 μL of crystal slurry was
208 pipetted onto the support-free grid and spread with a micro-brush. However, pipetting such small volumes
209 gave inconsistent results using standard micropipettes. The second application method explored was
210 preparing a droplet of the crystal slurry on a siliconized coverslip and gently touching a support-free grid
211 to the surface of the crystal slurry, which transferred a fraction of the drop to the grid bars. Although this
212 improved the consistency of sample preparation, spreading the drop with a micro-brush was still required.
213 It was finally discovered that gently touching a pipet tip filled with the crystal slurry to the grid bars allows
214 a minimal volume of the slurry to transfer by capillary motion. This method was highly reproducible and
215 efficient leading to very small volume. We further evaluated careful blotting from the side with filter paper
216 to reduce the volume of the sample, which also proved to be successful. The thickness of the samples from
217 both methods was estimated to be similar to the height of the gold grid bars (10–20 μm thick), as the grid

218 bars were clearly visible when imaged in SEM. These sample preparations substantially reduced the FIB-
219 milling times while maintaining the random orientations of the crystals, as illustrated by the improvement
220 of reciprocal space sampling (Figure 2).

221 For the catalase suspended crystal sample, a cryogenically cooled Helios pFIB/SEM (Thermo-Fisher) was
222 used for lamellae milling. Specifically targeting the crystals using an integrated fluorescence microscope
223 (iFLM) and correlative light electron microscopy (CLEM), as in suspended drop crystallization (Gillman
224 *et al.*, 2023), was unnecessary because the catalase crystals were at a high concentration in the stock, and
225 capturing a randomly oriented crystal within the lamella was straightforward. During all milling steps, the
226 lamella was imaged using the iFLM set to the 385 nm LED to ensure the presence of randomly oriented
227 crystals. Crystals that appeared as thin rectangles when imaging normal to the grid bars were taken to be in
228 an ideal orientation for capturing the missing cone of data. For the Mpro suspended crystal sample, a
229 cryogenically cooled Aquilos FIB/SEM (Thermo-Fisher) was used for lamellae milling. Because the
230 suspended drop of Mpro crystals was briefly blotted, only a minimal volume of sample was retained by the
231 grid bars, which allowed for crystal morphological features to be observed and targeted. In contrast to the
232 instrumental setup used for catalase, the Aquilos used for the Mpro sample does not have the ability to
233 image the samples using fluorescence. We chose to evaluate our sample using this instrument since it is
234 more generally accessible. To capture as many crystals as possible, several long lamellae expanding over
235 the whole grid square were milled, generally containing 2–5 crystals each.

236 3.2. *Eliminating the missing cone in the MicroED structures of catalase and Mpro*

237 Catalase was the second protein determined by MicroED (Nannenga, Shi, Hattne *et al.*, 2014). A single
238 crystal yielded relatively high completeness, however, even merging data from five additional crystals could
239 not eliminate the missing cone. This is because catalase forms flat rectangular plate-like crystals that, when
240 dispensed on the grid, align with the c^* -axis of their lattices normal to the plane of the grid. MicroED data
241 were collected from a suspended crystal of catalase and merged with the previously published data showing
242 preferred orientation (Nannenga, Shi, Hattne *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, Mpro yields flat plate-like crystals
243 with preferred orientations on the grids. In addition, the crystal symmetry of the Mpro crystals is low,
244 leading to low completeness of our initially collected supported crystals (~60%). These preferred
245 orientation data were combined with Mpro data collected of the sample in suspension. We produced two
246 separate datasets for each protein: one “preferred orientation” dataset and one “missing cone eliminated”.
247 These datasets were processed and refined separately, and the observed reflections, statistics, and refined
248 maps were subsequently compared. Data processing statistics for both “preferred orientation” and “missing
249 cone eliminated” catalase and Mpro datasets are presented in Table 1.

250 The zone at $k = 0$ clearly illustrates that a significant amount of the missing cone of reciprocal space
251 was recovered (Figure 2a, b) for catalase, consistent with the total number of unique reflections increasing
252 from 15,070 to 18,157 (Table 1) within 4 Å resolution. For Mpro, viewing 2D slices along the l -axis, the
253 missing cone of data was also clearly recovered (Figure 2c, d), increasing the number of unique reflections
254 from 9,189 to 14,825 (Table 1). As expected, the completeness across the resolution shells of catalase
255 improved after merging the missing cone dataset with the preferred orientation dataset (Figure 3a),
256 increasing the overall dataset completeness from 78.8 to 94.9% (Table 1). Similarly, the completeness for
257 Mpro significantly improved (Figure 3c) from 59.1 to 95.5% (Table 1).

258 Finally, the density maps resulting from the preferred orientation datasets and the missing cone
259 eliminated datasets were compared for each protein (Figure 4). Once the missing cone is eliminated, many
260 regions that were originally poorly resolved show contiguous densities that are easily interpretable. For
261 each protein sample, several instances are illustrated wherein the improved maps facilitated more precise
262 positioning of amino acid sidechains during the construction of the molecular models.

263 4. Conclusions

264 Here, we report a method that enables direct targeting and capturing of the critical missing cone of
265 MicroED data for crystals that systematically adopt a preferred orientation on the EM grid. Suspended
266 crystals of both bovine liver catalase and the COVID-19 main protease Mpro were used as test samples. In
267 both cases, crystals grew as rectangular plates that would normally lie flat on the carbon support film of the
268 grid, such that their crystallographic axes would preferentially orient with the normal of the grid. However,
269 the absence of a support film precluded these crystal plates from having a surface to align with and were
270 effectively frozen in random orientations as postulated in earlier studies (Gillman et al. 2023). Whereas
271 typically no amount of data collection and merging can recover the missing cone due to preferred
272 orientation, crystals of catalase and Mpro were here suspended in essentially random orientations by
273 removing the support film. Crystals are left exposed for FIB-milling and MicroED collection of complete
274 datasets, which yield densities that are interpretable and further facilitate modeling and refinement.

275 Crystals with a systematic preferential orientation are not common, and we estimate that less than 10% of
276 all protein crystals would fall under this category. The majority of samples will likely adopt random
277 orientations on the grid and may also have higher crystal symmetry. In such cases, even a single nanocrystal
278 can be sufficient for a complete structure by MicroED. However, the missing cone creates a substantial
279 bottleneck in structure solution for crystals that adopt a preferred orientation, and this phenomenon might
280 be more prevalent for smaller crystal sizes. While the suspended drop crystallization approach described
281 here eliminated the preferential orientation problem for MicroED, the missing cone problem remains a

282 prevalent issue in cryotomography (Barth *et al.*, 1988). Even for single particle reconstructions, the sample
283 may preferentially orient at the water-air interface (Glaeser & Han, 2017) and innovative approaches may
284 be needed to eliminate the preferential orientation problem.

285 As the methodologies for MicroED sample preparation are improved and continue to evolve, we
286 anticipate the method to deliver structures for samples that remain beyond the technological reach of other
287 structural biology methods. The innovative solution presented here proves indispensable for crystals
288 exhibiting preferred orientations, unlocking new possibilities for structure determination in MicroED
289 workflows.

290

291 **Data availability**

292 Coordinates and maps were deposited in the protein data bank and the EM Data bank (XXXX and YYYY).

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298 **Figure Legends**

299 **Figure 1. MicroED of catalase and Mpro.** (a) Electron diffraction frame acquired from catalase. (b)
300 Ribbon model of catalase. (c) Electron diffraction frame acquired from Mpro. (d) Ribbon model of Mpro.

301 **Figure 2. Recovery of missing reflections in MicroED datasets of catalase and Mpro.** (a-b) Catalase.
302 (a) The $h0l$ zone of observed reflections to 8 Å resolution in the preferred orientation dataset viewed along
303 the k -axis. (b) The same zone as in (a) for the missing cone eliminated dataset. (c-d) Mpro. (c) The $hk0$ zone
304 of observed reflections to 2.5 Å resolution in the preferred orientation dataset viewed along the l -axis. (d)
305 The same zone as in (c) for the missing cone eliminated dataset viewed along the l -axis. All plots were
306 rendered with *ViewHKL* from the CCP4 suite.

307 **Figure 3. Completeness for preferred orientation data vs. missing cone eliminated data for catalase**
308 **and Mpro.** (a) Completeness (%) of catalase, (b) Completeness (%) of Mpro as functions of resolution (Å).
309 Preferred orientation data in orange, missing cone eliminated data in blue.

310 **Figure 4. Density improvements upon completion of the reciprocal space.** Several regions that exhibit
311 significant density improvement are presented. $2mF_o-DF_c$ maps are all contoured at 1.2σ above the mean
312 and carved at 2 \AA around the model. On the left in each panel, the preferred orientation map density is
313 compared to that for the missing cone eliminated on the right.

314 **Table 1. Preferred orientation vs. missing cone eliminated dataset statistics for catalase and Mpro**

315

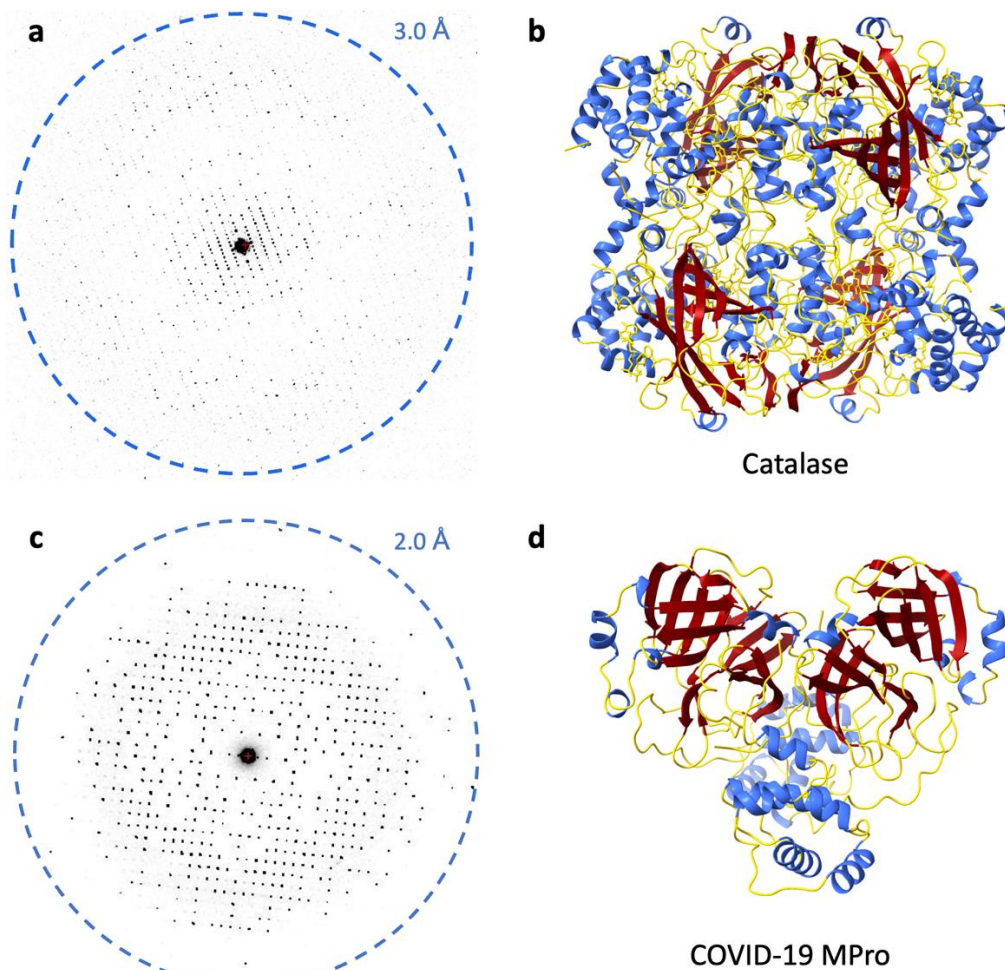
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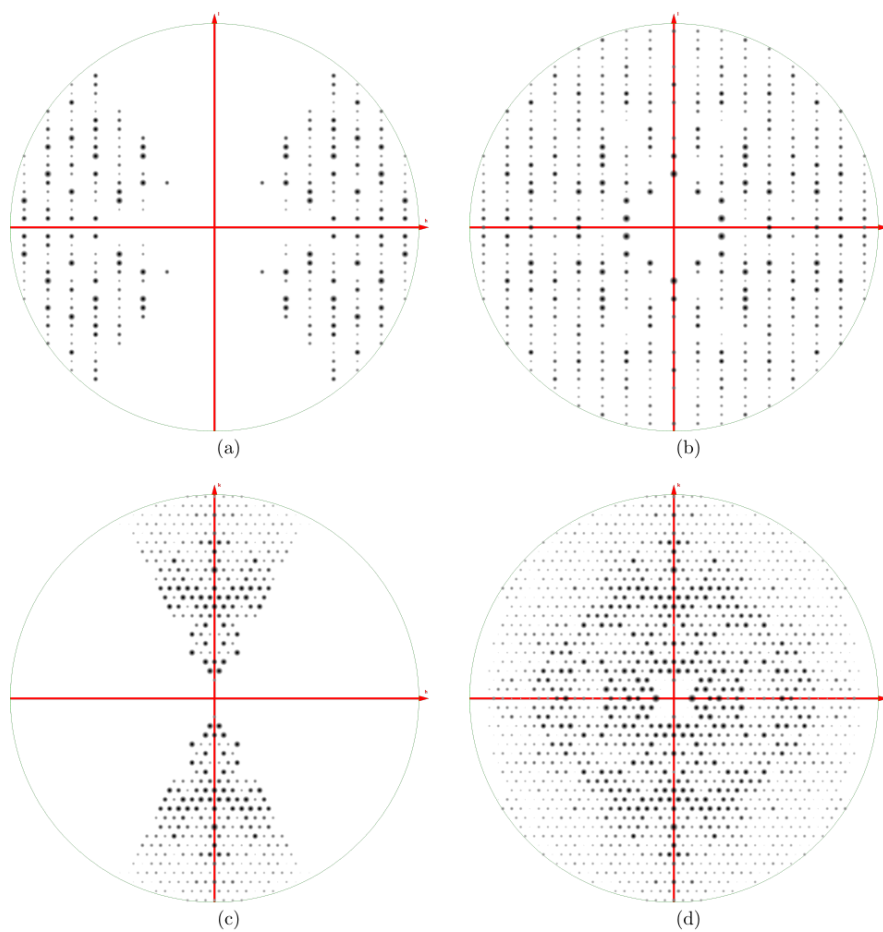
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Figure 1



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Figure 2

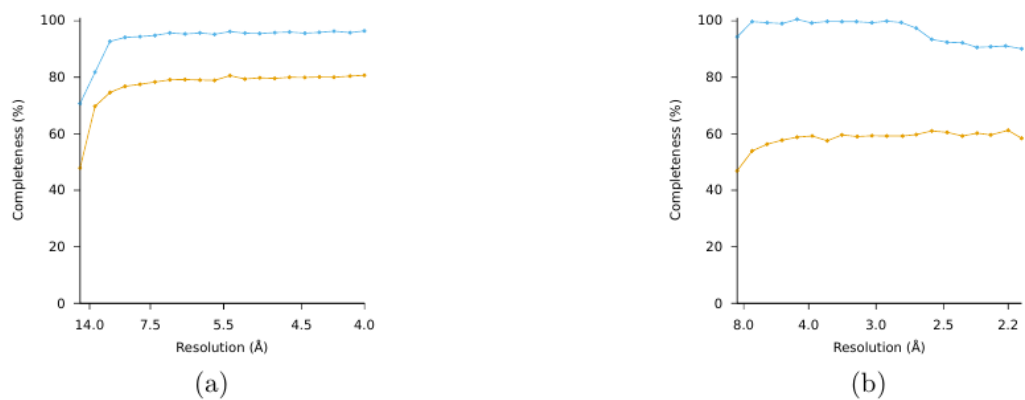
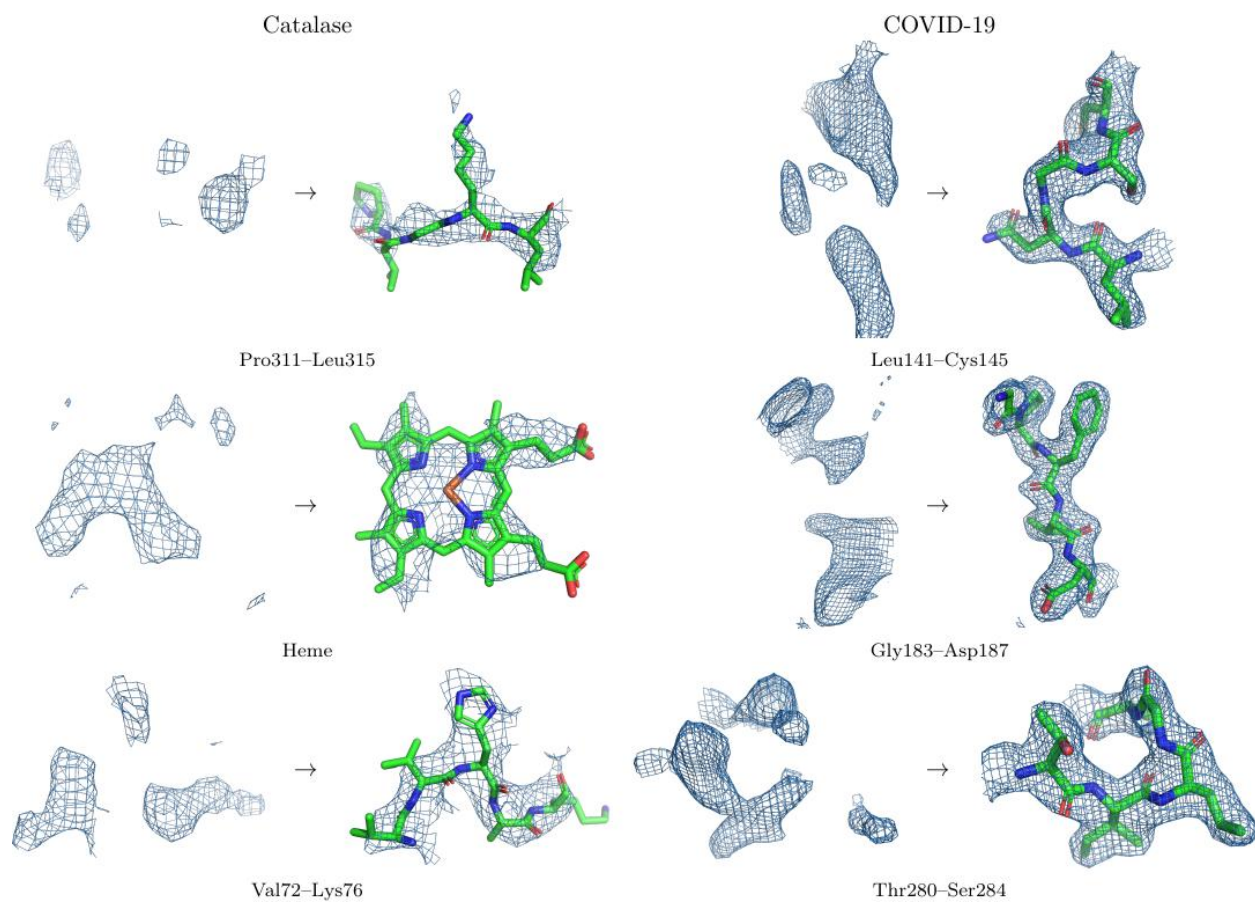


Figure 3

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Figure 4

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Table 1

Statistic	Catalase		COVID-19 MPro	
	Preferred orientation	Missing cone eliminated	Preferred orientation	Missing cone eliminated
# of crystals	1	2	1	4
Spacegroup	<i>P</i> 2 ₁ 2 ₁ 2 ₁	<i>P</i> 2 ₁ 2 ₁ 2 ₁	<i>C</i> 2	<i>C</i> 2
a, b, c (Å)	68.65, 173.30, 182.78	68.65, 173.30, 182.78	115.54, 55.53, 45.37	115.54, 55.53, 45.37
α, β, γ (°)	90, 90, 90	90, 90, 90	90, 101.07, 90	90, 101.07, 90
Resolution (Å)	4.0 (4.1–4.0)	4.0 (4.1–4.0)	2.15 (2.20–2.15)	2.15 (2.21–2.15)
# observations	45,664 (3,381)	89,263 (6,646)	27,905 (2,056)	123,734 (3,457)
Unique reflections	15,070 (1,366)	18,157 (1,317)	9,189 (673)	14,825 (1,038)
$\langle I / \sigma(I) \rangle$	4.19 (3.07)	2.63 (2.05)	4.86 (1.17)	5.63 (1.11)
$CC_{1/2}$ (%)	94.3 (82.2)	86.4 (58.1)	98.8 (51.6)	98.7 (56.2)
Completeness (%)	78.8 (80.7)	94.9 (96.4)	59.1 (58.4)	95.5 (90.1)
R_{work} (%)	20.96	31.66	22.81	22.63
R_{free} (%)	29.15	35.80	27.12	25.87
RMS bond (Å)	0.0039	0.0038	0.014	0.002
RMS angle (°)	1.0867	1.0391	1.556	0.477
Ramachandran favored / allowed / outlier (%)	91.0 / 8.2 / 0.8	92.0 / 7.2 / 0.8	93.6 / 3.7 / 2.7	94.2 / 3.4 / 2.4

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