Supporting Information

to

Metalloregulator CueR biases RNA polymerase’s kinetic sampling of dead-end or open complex to repress or activate transcription

Danya J. Martella, Chandra P. Joshi, Ahmed Gaballa, Ace George Santiago, Tai-Yen Chen, Won Jung, John D. Helmann, Peng Chen

Departments of Chemistry and Chemical Biology, and Microbiology, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853

1 Present address: Department of Cell Biology, Duke University Medical Center, Durham, NC 27710

* Correspondence: pc252@cornell.edu

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1. Materials, methods, and experimental strategy

a. DNA design, fluorescent probe location, and preparation

Two different DNA labeling schemes were used to examine RNAP–PcpA interactions (Fig. S1). In both schemes, the DNA strands contain the complete promoter region of the copA gene regulated by CueR, including the dyad symmetric sequence recognized by CueR, the $-35$ and $-10$ RNAP recognition elements, as well as the entire DNA footprint region of CueR determined by Outten et al (1). Both DNAs also include the entire expected RNAP footprint region, determined by aligning the RNAP footprint at the promoter region of merTPAD operon that MerR regulates (2).

In one scheme, the DNA, referred to as PcpA$_{Cy3@-41}$, is 120 base-pairs long and spans from position $-59$ to +61 around the promoter. It is labeled with Cy3 at an amine modified T at position $-41$ of the nontemplate strand through NHS ester labeling (Lumiprobe, cat# 11320) (Fig. S1A). Biotin-TEG is attached to the 5′ end of the template strand; this labeling scheme ensures that only double-strand DNA was immobilized and fluorescently imaged in the experiments. The DNA was made via PCR using Cy3 and biotin-TEG labeled primers with AccuprimerPfx DNA Polymerase (Life Technologies, cat# 12344024). The primers, 5′-CCCGCCTGGTTTATTAAT/iAmMC6T/TCTTGACC-3′ (which was labeled by Cy3 first) and 5′-/5BioTEG/TCCAGGGTCAGGTCGATAGTTTGTGAC-3′, were purchased from Integrated DNA Technologies (IDT; Coralville, IA). The PCR product was purified using Wizard SV Gel and PCR Clean-Up System (Promega, cat# A9281). All DNAs were confirmed by gel electrophoresis, and stored in nuclease free water.

In the other scheme, the DNA, referred to as PcpA$_{Cy3@-5}$, is 100 base-pairs long and spans from position $-59$ to +41 around the promoter. It is labeled with Cy3 at an amine modified T at position $-5$ of the template strand through NHS ester linkage. Biotin-TEG is attached to the 3′ end of the nontemplate strand (Fig. S1B). Both strands of PcpA$_{Cy3@-5}$ were purchased from IDT, labeled with Cy3 (for the template strand), and annealed together.
Fig. S1. DNA sequences and structure model of RNAP-DNA-CueR complex. (A) Sequence of the P$_{copA}$Cy$_3$−41 DNA derived from *E. coli* *copA* gene promoter region. The −35 and −10 elements are underlined. The RNAP footprint at a MerR-regulated promoter is overlaid here (2), shown by the boxed region. The dyad symmetric sequence that CueR recognizes is shown in red. The CueR footprint (1) is shaded grey. The Cy5 dye is attached at the −41 position (green vertical arrow) via an amine modified T (denoted in green). The Biotin-TEG is attached to the 5′-end of the +61 position (shown in blue) for immobilizing the DNA. (B) Same as A but for the P$_{copA}$Cy$_3$−5 DNA. (C) A structural model of a RNAP–DNA–CueR complex, where CueR is shown in magenta, RNAP core enzyme is shown in purple, and σ$_{70}$ factor is shown in green. The position of the −41 or −5 Cy3 label is indicated by an arrow and shown as a green sphere on the DNA strand. The transcription start site (+1) is also noted on the DNA. The position of the Cy5 label on CueR is indicated by an arrow (labeled C129) and shown as a red sphere on CueR. The orange color on the DNA marks the positions of the dyad symmetric sequence recognized by CueR. The position of the Cy5 label on RNAP is indicated by an arrow (labeled C596) and shown as a red sphere on σ$_{70}$. The Cy3–Cy5 anchor-to-anchor distances for RNAP-P$_{copA}$ or CueR-P$_{copA}$ smFRET are denoted. (D) A cartoon representation of the structural model in C. For simplification, σ$_{70}$ is not separately drawn out in the cartoon representation of holo RNAP. (E) Gel image of RNA production from the *in vitro* transcription run-off assay with the 315-bp DNA fragment in the presence of wild type RNAP only, or in
the presence of wild type RNAP and 200 nM holo-CueR, or in the presence of RNAP
ty and 200 nM holo-CueR, demonstrating RNAP
ty is functional. (F) Gel image of RNA production from the in vitro transcription
run-off assay using PcopA
ty or PcopA
ty as templates in the presence of wild type
RNAP and 200 nM holo-CueR, demonstrating that both these two labeled DNA can act as transcription
templates. Due to the smaller transcript lengths here than those in E, the gel here was run for a shorter time,
resulting less separated bands.

b. Structural model of RNAP-DNA-CueR complex for selecting locations for fluorescent probes

The locations of the donor, Cy3, and acceptor, Cy5, fluorescent probes are shown on a structural
model of an RNAP–DNA–CueR complex in Fig. S1C. The model was generated by overlaying the DNA-bound
E. coli RNAP holoenzyme structure (pdb 3IYD) (3) and the holo-CueR structure (pdb 1Q05) (4)
on top of the structure of the MtAN–DNA complex (pdb 1R8D) (5, 6). MtAN is a homologue of CueR; it
responds to organic drugs instead of metal ions. The original RNAP-DNA structure consists of the RNAP
holoenzyme, the catabolite activator protein (CAP), a CAP-dependent promoter DNA fragment
containing positions −78 to +20, and a premelted transcription bubble (3). CAP was removed from our
model and so was the DNA upstream of position −59. The structure of MtAN–DNA complex was used to
determine the approximate location of CueR in the RNAP-DNA complex. The cartoon representation in
Fig. S1D is the basis of the cartoons used throughout the text to depict the RNAP–DNA–CueR complexes.

For the RNAP construct, RNAP
56C, the Cy5 was incorporated at the residue R596C of σ70
located in region 4, as previously described (7-10). Based on the structural model (Fig. S1C), the
Cy3–Cy5 anchor-to-anchor distance in the RNAP
Cy5–PcopA
Cy3 is about 17 Å, and the Cy5 on
PcopA
Cy5 is pointed away from RNAP and thus should not affect RNAP binding. It is also close to the
−50 position, which was labeled by Mukhopadhyay and Kapanidis et al. in studying RNAP interactions
with optimal promoters and was shown to be non-disruptive (11, 12).

Based on the same model, the Cy3–Cy5 anchor-to-anchor distance in the RNAP
Cy5–PcopA
Cy3 complex is about 59 Å, and the Cy5 at −5 position on PcopA should also not affect RNAP binding based
on the structural model. Moreover, this −5 position is close to the −3 position, which was previously
labeled by Robb et al. and shown to be functionally non-disruptive for RNAP interactions with optimal
promoters (13). As the −5 location is within the transcription bubble region, its FRET with Cy5 on RNAP
should thus be sensitive to open complex formation. Bubble formation in the open complex is expected to
pull the two DNA strands toward opposite directions, and based on the structural model in Fig. S1C, in
the transcription bubble, the strand containing Cy3 is closer to the Cy5 on RNAP than the other strand,
suggesting that bubble formation would bring Cy3 closer to the Cy5. Both the −41 and −5 position are
outside the region where CueR binds, and thus should not affect CueR binding.

For CueR
5, Cy5 is attached to the surface-exposed C129 of one monomer of the dimeric CueR,
as we previously reported (14); this labeling position is located near the C-terminal within the metal-
binding domain of CueR (Fig. S1C). This labeling scheme makes a singly-labeled CueR homodimer
asymmetric, giving rise to two different binding orientations on DNA. Based on the structural model (Fig.
S1C), the Cy3–Cy5 anchor-to-anchor distances in a CueR
Cy5–PcopA
Cy3 complex are about 69 Å and
42 Å for the two binding orientations. One of the two binding orientations could be readily resolved in the
FRET histogram at FRET ~ 0.81 (Fig. 5A), corresponding to the shorter-distanced orientation; the
orientation with longer anchor-to-anchor distance is buried by the free DNA state in the FRET histogram
(Fig. 5A), but can be seen in the FRET vs. time trajectories (FRET ~ 0.18; Fig. S12A).

c. σ70 mutant, expression, purification, and fluorescence labeling
The pGEMD(-Cys) derivative plasmid, containing the $\sigma^{70}$ mutant with a single Cys residue at position 596 (i.e., R596C), was provided by R. Ebright (Rutgers University). It was expressed, purified, and labeled as previously described (11). The transcriptional activity of holo RNAP containing this labeled $\sigma^{70}$ mutant was confirmed by Ebright and coworkers to be indistinguishable from unlabeled *E. coli* RNAP (11). Briefly, the pGEMD(-Cys) vector was transformed into and expressed in BL21(DE3). Cells were harvested by centrifugation and lysed by sonication. Cell lysate was centrifuged and precipitate was washed with lysis buffer containing 0.2 mg/ml lysozyme and 0.5% Triton X-100 and then 0.5% Triton X-100 and 1 mM DTT lysis buffer. The washed precipitate was solubilized in a buffer containing 6 M guanidine-HCL, 50 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.9), 10 mM MgCl$_2$, 10 $\mu$M ZnCl$_2$, 1 mM EDTA, 10 mM DTT, and 10% glycerol and then dialyzed against a buffer containing 20 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.9), 0.1 mM EDTA, 0.1 mM DTT, and 5% glycerol at 4°C for 20 hours. The sample was then purified through Mono Q anion exchange column and fractions containing the $\sigma^{70}$ mutant were identified by SDS-PAGE. The purified $\sigma^{70}$ mutant was then labeled with Cy5-maleimide (Invitrogen) at the targeted cysteine. The Cy5 was added to purified $\sigma^{70}$ ([dye]:[$\sigma^{70}$] = 3:1) in 100 mM phosphate buffer solution at pH 7. The reaction mixture was kept on shaker at 4°C for ~16 hours. Labeled $\sigma^{70}$ was then purified by a gel filtration column (HILOAD 26/60 Superdex 200 PR, GE Healthcare), and by an anion exchange column (Mono Q 5/50 GL, GE Healthcare). The dye:protein ratio of the labeled $\sigma^{70}$ was determined to be ~0.9. The extinction coefficient of 250,000 M$^{-1}$cm$^{-1}$ at 650 nm was used for determining the Cy5 concentration. Similarly, the calculated extinction coefficient of 41,370 M$^{-1}$cm$^{-1}$ at 280 nm (determined from the sequence using Lasergene, DNASTAR) was used for determining the $\sigma^{70}$ concentration. The labeled $\sigma^{70}$ was stored at −80°C in 20 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.9), 100 mM NaCl, 0.1 mM EDTA, 0.1 mM DTT, and 50% glycerol.

To form the labeled holo RNAP (i.e., RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$), wild type (WT) *E. coli* RNA polymerase core enzyme (Epicenter) was mixed with a 3× molar excess of $\sigma^{70}_{\text{Cy5@R596C}}$ and incubated at 25°C for 20 minutes. The unlabeled holo RNAP was purchased commercially (Epicenter, cat# S90050).

d. *CueR* expression, purification, fluorescence labeling, and copper removal

The CueR variant, CueR$_{C129}$, was created, expressed and purified to be labeled with a single FRET acceptor, Cy5, at the specific cysteine at position 129, as we reported previously (14). The variant is functionally active as we previously showed (14). Briefly, CueR$_{C129}$ was cloned in a pET30a vector and expressed in BL21(DE3) strain. The cell lysate was purified by precipitation and then HiPrep gel filtration. The collected fractions were further purified through a Heparin affinity column followed by a Superdex gel filtration column, and lastly an anion exchange Mono Q column. CueR was metallated by adding CuSO$_4$ solution in the presence of excess TCEP. The Cu$^+$ binding protects the metal-binding cysteines of CueR from dye labeling. The protein was then labeled. CueR is encoded as a monomer but it is purified as a stable homodimer, thus the labeling reaction generates a mixture of unlabeled, mono-labeled and bi-labeled species. The labeled protein was purified using an anion exchange column (Mono Q 5/50 GL) to obtain the mono-labeled fraction. The dye:protein ratio of the resulting holo-CueR protein of ~0.8. The labeled holo-CueR could be converted to the apo form by removing the bound copper using KCN (at 1000× excess) (4). Extracted copper and excess KCN were then removed by a desalting column (HiTrap, GE Healthcare). The dye:protein ratio of the resulting apo-protein was ~0.9. The copper content of the apo-protein was confirmed to be <4% via BCA copper quantification assay (15). The labeled holo and apo proteins were stored at −80°C in 50 mM pH 7.0 Tris Buffer with ~250 mM NaCl and 30% glycerol.

e. *In vitro transcription run-off assay demonstrates that RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ is functional and both PeopAC$_{\text{Cy3@−5}}$ and PeopAC$_{\text{Cy3@−41}}$ are functional transcription templates.*
An in vitro transcription run-off assay was performed by following previously reported procedures (2, 4, 16) in order to confirm that the labeled RNAP variant, RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$, is transcriptionally active. Using the primers 5'-TCTTTACGGGACTTTTACCCGCCTGG-3' and 5'-CCTTTGGGTGGCTTACAGATGCGTC-3' with PCR, a 315-bp DNA fragment was copied out of the E. coli genome that spans the promoter and part of the E. coli copA gene. This fragment was used as the template for in vitro transcription. RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ is prepared by mixing wild type (WT) E. coli RNAP core enzyme (Epicenter) with a 3× molar excess of $\sigma^{70}_{\text{Cy5}@R596C}$ and incubating the mixture at 25°C for 20 minutes. Transcription reactions were performed by incubating either 50 nM of E. coli RNAP holoenzyme (Epicenter) or 50 nM of E. coli RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ with 20 μg/mL of the 315-bp DNA template, and 200 nM of apo CueR$_{\text{C129}}$ in a buffer solution (100 mM potassium glutamate, 10 mM pH 8 Tris-base, 1 mM MgCl$_2$, 0.1 mM EDTA, 100 μg/mL of acetylated-BSA, 1 mM CaCl$_2$, 5% glycerol, 2 mM dithiothreitol, 10 μM BCA) and 1 μM [Cu(CH$_3$CN)$_4$]PF$_6$ for 10 minutes at 37°C in a total volume of 20 μL. Heparin, at a concentration of 100 μg/mL, was then added to the reaction followed by the addition of 2.5 μL of an NTP mixture (containing 500 μM of ATP, GTP, CTP, UTP, and 0.5 μL of [$\alpha$-32P]UTP) and 0.25 μL of RNase inhibitor. The reaction mixture was then incubated at 37°C for another 20 minutes. Following incubation, a mixture of 70 μL of water, 10 μL of 3M NaOAc (pH 5.2, adjusted with acetic acid), and 2 μL of 0.5 M EDTA was added to the reaction mixture. The RNA product was precipitated overnight at −20°C after the addition of 2 μL of glycogen blue and 330 μg of ethanol. RNA was re-suspended in 10 μL of 80% formamide, 1X TBE buffer, 0.05% SDS and 0.025% bromophenol blue and kept at 100°C for 2 minutes. RNA samples were loaded onto a 6% urea polyacrylamide gel and electrophoresed at 1000 V.

Fig. S1E shows the results of in vitro transcription assay. With WT RNAP but without CueR, some RNA product was detected (Fig. S1E, left), consistent with the well-known leakage transcription from the weakly repressed P$_{\text{copA}}$ promoter. In the presence of WT RNAP and holo CueR, much more RNA product was detected, reflecting the transcription activation (Fig. S1E, middle). In the presence of our labeled RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ and holo-CueR, a comparable amount of RNA was detected (i.e., about ~73 ± 5%, which is in agreement with previously reported activity of $\sigma^{70}_{R596C}$ at the merTPAD operon in the presence of holo-MerR (17)) to that using WT RNAP (Fig. S1E, right). Therefore, our labeled RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$, where Cy5 is attached to $\sigma^{70}_{R596C}$, is transcriptionally active, although slightly less active than the wild type RNAP.

In order to confirm that transcription could still occur on both of our labeled P$_{\text{copA}}$ strands, P$_{\text{copA}}$$_{\text{Cy3@−41}}$ and P$_{\text{copA}}$$_{\text{Cy3@−5}}$, the same transcription run-off assay was performed as described above using these two as templates with WT RNAP and holo-CueR. RNA products were detected in both cases, indicating that our two Cy3-labeled P$_{\text{copA}}$ templates are both functional templates (Fig. S1F).

f. Single-molecule FRET imaging and data analysis

The single-molecule FRET imaging experiments were performed at room temperature using a prism-type total internal reflection microscope, based on an Olympus IX71 inverted microscope, and the data were analyzed as previously described (14, 18). Briefly, immobilized Cy3-labeled DNA was excited directly by a continuous-wave circularly polarized 532-nm laser at ~4 mW over an area of ~150 × 75 μm$^2$. The Cy3 and Cy5 fluorescence was collected, split into two channels, projected onto two halves of an EMCCD camera, operated continuously at 30 ms time resolution. Individual Cy3 and Cy5 fluorescence intensity trajectories for proteins interacting with single immobilized DNA molecules were extracted from the recorded fluorescence movies using a custom IDL program. The $E_{\text{FRET}}$ was approximated as $I_{\text{Cy5}}/(I_{\text{Cy5}}+I_{\text{Cy3}})$, where $I_{\text{Cy3}}$ and $I_{\text{Cy5}}$ are the fluorescence intensities. A forward-backward nonlinear filter was used to reduce the noise in the fluorescence trajectories (19-21). The $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms were compiled from hundreds of trajectories at each condition. The $E_0$ peaks were fit with a Voigt
distribution while the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ peaks from the various DNA-protein complexes were fit with Gaussian
distributions. This was done in order to achieve the best fit.

A microfluidic channel formed by a quartz slide and a borosilicate cover slip fixed together using
double-sided tape was used to contain the samples. Quartz slides were amine-functionalized with (3-
Aminopropyl) triethoxysilane (Sigma-Aldrich) (22), followed by PEG coating (polyethylene glycol
polymers) (Nanocs, 100 mg/mL m-PEG-SPA-5000 and 1 mg/mL biotin-PEG-NHS-3400) in order to
minimize nonspecific protein/DNA adsorption on the quartz surface. A biotinylated terminal group, to
form biotin-neutravidin linkages for immobilizing biotinylated DNA molecules, comprised one percent
of the PEG polymers. A 500 µL solution of 0.2 mg/mL neutravidin (Invitrogen) was introduced to the
microfluidic channel and incubated for 15 minutes. Any remaining non-functionalized quartz and
borosilicate surfaces were blocked using 3 mL BSA (0.1 mg/ml). A 500 µL solution of 10 pM Cy3-
labeled biotinylated P$\text{copA}$ DNA in 50 mM Tris, 2 mM MgCl$_2$ buffer at pH 7.35 was flowed through
the channel for immobilization. In imaging protein-DNA interactions, the labeled RNAP solutions of 2 to 5
nM or labeled CueR solutions of 0.5 to 10 nM were flowed continuously at a rate of 10 µL/min in a
buffer containing 50 mM Tris (pH 7.35), 100 mM Potassium Glutamate, 1 mg/ml BSA, 2 mM MgCl$_2$, 1
mM CaCl$_2$, 2 mM DTT, 0.1 mM EDTA, 5% glycerol (2, 11, 23) and an oxygen scavenging system (1mM
Trolox, 2.5 mM PCA, 50 mM PCD) (24). Depending on the experimental conditions, varying
concentrations of unlabeled RNAP or unlabeled CueR were added accordingly.

2. RNAP-P$\text{copA}$ complex population increases with [RNAP]

In $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram of RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$-P$\text{copA}_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ interactions, the three $E_{\text{FRET}}$ states ($E_0 \sim 0.07$, $E_1 \sim 0.78$, and $E_2 \sim 0.95$) correspond to the free P$\text{copA}$ ($E_0$) and two RNAP-P$\text{copA}$ complexes ($E_1$, dead-end
complex; and $E_2$, open complex) (Fig. S2A), as described in the main text (see Fig. 2D). Increasing
RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ concentration results in an increase of the relative populations of the two complexes relative to
that of the free P$\text{copA}$ state (Fig. S2B). On the other hand, the relative stabilities of the two complexes are
independence of RNAP concentration, as expected as well (Fig. S2C).

The equilibrium constants for forming the RNAP-P$\text{copA}$ complexes can be determined from the
area ratios of the resolved peaks in the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms, as described by Eq [3] and Eq [4] in Section 11
later. From the RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$-P$\text{copA}_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ data in Fig. S2A-B, the obtained dissociation constants are $K_{1D}$ =
40 ± 3 nM and $K_{2D}$ = 147 ± 11 nM, which are consistent with $K_{1D}$ = 35 ± 5 nM and $K_{2D}$ = 126 ± 17 nM,
calculated from the rate constants (Table 1 in the main text) or $K_{1D}$ = 30 ± 3 nM and $K_{2D}$ = 105 ± 26 nM
obtained from EFRET histogram analysis (Table S1) for RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$-P$\text{copA}_{\text{Cy3@-5}}$ interactions.

The overall formation constant $K_A$ of RNAP-P$\text{copA}$ complexes is:
\[
K_A = \frac{[\text{RP}_{\text{DE}}] + [\text{RP}_{\text{O}}]}{[\text{P}][\text{R}]} \Rightarrow K_A[R] = \frac{[\text{RP}_{\text{DE}}] + [\text{RP}_{\text{O}}]}{[\text{P}]} = \frac{(E_1 + E_2) \text{ peak area}}{E_0 \text{ peak area}} \quad \text{Eq. [1]}
\]

Fitting the RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$-P$\text{copA}_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ data in Fig. S2B gives an overall formation constant $K_A \sim (32 \pm 2) \times 10^6$ M$^{-1}$, corresponding to an overall dissociation constant of $K_D = 31 \pm 2$ nM.
Fig. S2. RNAP–PcopA interactions in the absence of CueR. (A) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram of RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$–PcopA$_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ interactions at 5 nM [RNAP]. Red lines are resolved peaks centered at $E_{\text{FRET}}$ ~0.07, ~0.78, and ~0.95, with percentage areas of 85.0 ± 3.1%, 11.7 ± 1.8%, and 3.3 ± 0.3%, respectively. (B) [RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$] dependence of the $(E_2+E_1)/E_0$, $E_1/E_0$ and $E_2/E_0$ peak area ratios obtained from the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms as in A of RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$–PcopA$_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ or RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$–PcopA$_{\text{Cy3@-5}}$ interactions. The solid lines are linear fits with Eq [3] and Eq [4] from SI Section 11, and Eq. [1], respectively. Note that the data here have non-zero y-intercept, most likely an artifact of the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ trajectory selection, because only trajectories that had 2 or more transitions between the FRET states were analyzed (trajectories without transitions are difficult to differentiate from nonspecifically adsorbed dye molecules), resulting in an apparent complex formation even at [RNAP] → 0. We thus added a y-offset when fitting the data. (C) $E_1$ and $E_2$ peak area ratios from $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms with increasing [RNAP]. Solid line is a horizontal line at ~3.6.

3. RNAP does not form specific complexes with a nonspecific DNA lacking promoter recognition sequence.

As a control, we examined RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ interactions with a Cy3-labeled 100 bp nonspecific DNA, which does not contain the promoter sequence. This nonspecific DNA was copied out from the copA gene, spanning from position +161 to +251, and was labeled with biotin-TEG at the 5′ end of the template strand and labeled with Cy3 19 bp in from the 5′ end of the nontemplate strand (same distance from the 5′ end as in PcopA$_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$) (Fig. S3A).

Fig. S3B shows a single-molecule $E_{\text{FRET}}$ trajectory of this nonspecific DNA interacting with RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ at 2 nM in solution. RNAP binding to this nonspecific DNA was observed, reflected by the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ states higher than the free DNA state at $E_{\text{FRET}}$ ~ 0.07. This binding is expected, as RNAP is known to interact with nonspecific DNA as well and with weaker affinity. However, as this DNA does not contain the −10 and −35 elements, RNAP’s binding can occur anywhere along the DNA length. This nonspecific binding is reflected in the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram: aside from the dominant peak at ~0.07 from the free DNA state, the higher $E_{\text{FRET}}$ values are spread over the range of ~0.4 to 1 without a distinct peak (Fig. S3C), in contrast to RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$–PcopA$_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ interactions for which distinct higher $E_{\text{FRET}}$ states are clear (Fig. S3C).

Using the population ratio of bound vs. unbound states, we estimated the dissociation constant $K_D$ to be about 1.1 ± 0.4 μM, consistent with reported dissociation constants of RNAP interacting with non-promoter DNA ($K_D$ ~ 10$^{-3}$ M to 10$^{-6}$ M, depending on the solution salt concentrations) (25-28). Therefore, holo RNAP can interact with nonspecific DNA with weaker affinity, but does not form specific complexes.
Fig. S3. RNAP interactions with nonspecific DNA. (A) Sequence of the nonspecific Cy3 labeled DNA, copied from the copA gene spanning from +161 to +251 position. The Cy3 dye is attached at +169 position (green vertical arrow) via an amine modified T (denoted in green). The Biotin-TEG is attached to the 5’-end of the template strand (shown in blue) for immobilization. (B) Single-molecule $E_{\text{FRET}}$ trajectory of immobilized nonspecific Cy3 labeled DNA interacting with 2 nM RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$. The grey line is original data; the red line is after non-linear filtering. (C) Normalized $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram of RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ interactions with the nonspecific Cy3 labeled DNA (red); [RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$] = 2 nM. Superimposed is the normalized $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram of RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$–P$\text{copA}_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ interactions (grey, from Fig. 2D in the main text).

4. The shift of RNAP-P$\text{copA}$ interactions toward the initial minor open complex, caused by holo-CueR, is proportional to [holo-CueR]

Fig. S4. The shift of RNAP-P$\text{copA}$ interactions toward the initial minor open complex, caused by holo-CueR, is proportional to the [holo-CueR]. (A) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of P$\text{copA}_{\text{Cy3@-41}}$ interacting with 2 nM RNAP$_{\text{Cy5}}$ in the absence or presence of varying concentrations of unlabeled holo-CueR. The maximum concentration (200 nM) of holo-CueR used here is well above the previously determined $K_D$ (~ 122 ± 63 nM) for holo-CueR binding to P$\text{copA}$ (14). (B) $E_2/E_1$ area ratio vs. [holo-CueR] from A, showing the population shift toward the $E_2$ complex (i.e., open complex) is proportional to [holo-CueR]. (C) Absolute area percent of $E_1$, $E_2$ and $E_1 + E_2$ vs. [holo-CueR] from A, showing that this population shift results from the continuous stabilization of the open complex ($E_2$) and the destabilization of the
dead-end closed-like complex ($E_1$), and the overall RNAP-P$_{copA}$ complexes ($E_1 + E_2$) are stabilized slightly.

5. In the presence of holo-CueR, ATP further stabilizes the RNAP–P$_{copA}$ open complex; by itself, it has no effect; and in the presence of apo-CueR, it exerts no effect on RNAP–P$_{copA}$ interactions either.

a. In the presence of the activator holo-CueR, addition of the initiating nucleotide ATP further stabilizes slightly the RNAP–P$_{copA}$ open complex while destabilizing slightly the dead-end complex

Fig. S5. In the presence of the activator holo-CueR, addition of the initiating nucleotide ATP further stabilizes slightly the RNAP–P$_{copA}$ open complex while destabilizing slightly the dead-end complex. (A) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of RNAP$_{\text{Cys5–P}copA_{\text{Cys38–5}}}$ interactions at 2 nM RNAP in the presence of 200 nM holo-CueR (top panel, same as Fig. 4A in the main text) or of 200 nM holo-CueR and 1 mM ATP (bottom panel). In each panel, the resolved peaks center at $E_{\text{FRET}}$ ~0.07, ~0.58, and ~0.87. (B) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of RNAP$_{\text{Cys5–P}copA_{\text{Cys38–41}}}$ interactions at 2 nM RNAP in the presence of 200 nM holo-CueR (top panel), or of 200 nM holo-CueR and 1 mM ATP (middle panel), or of 200 nM holo-CueR, 1 mM ATP and 1 mM GTP (bottom). In each panel, the resolved three peaks center at $E_{\text{FRET}}$ ~0.07, 0.78, and ~0.95. (C-E) $E_1/E_2$ (C), $E_2/E_0$ (D), and $E_1/E_0$ (E) area ratios from A-B. These area ratios show that the addition of the initiating nucleotide ATP further shifts the RNAP–P$_{copA}$ interaction complexes toward the $E_2$ open complex (C), and this shift is from both further stabilization of the $E_2$ open complex (D) and further destabilization of the $E_1$ dead-end complex (E) relative to the $E_0$ free P$_{copA}$ form. Further addition of the next nucleotide, GTP, does not cause any discernable changes (C-E). Part of data in (C) are presented in Fig. 4A in the main text.
b. No discernable change is observed in RNAP-PcopA interactions with the addition of ATP only

Fig. S6. No discernable change is observed in RNAP-PcopA interactions with the addition of ATP only. (A) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram of RNAP$_{Cy5}$-PcopA$_{Cy3@5}$ interactions at 2 nM [RNAP] (top panel, same as Fig. 2C in the main text) and in the presence of 1 mM ATP (bottom panel). Resolved peaks center at $E_{\text{FRET}}$ ~0.07, ~0.58, and ~0.87. (B) Area percent of $E_1$ and $E_2$ from A. Inset: $E_1/E_2$ area ratio from A. These data show no discernable change in the relative stabilities of the two RNAP-PcopA complexes, as reported by the relative peak areas.

c. Apo-CueR reinforces the dead-end RNAP-PcopA complex, and addition of the initiating nucleotide ATP has no additional effect on the formed RNAP–PcopA complexes
Fig. S7. Apo-CueR reinforces the dead-end RNAP-P copA complex, and addition of the initiating nucleotide ATP has no additional effect on the formed RNAP–P copA complexes. (A) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of RNAP Cy5–P copA Cy3@ interactions at 2 nM RNAP Cy5 only (duplicate of main text Fig. 2C), or further in the presence of 200 nM apo-CueR (duplicate of main text Fig. 4B) or of 200 nM apo-CueR and 1 mM ATP. Resolved peaks center at $E_{\text{FRET}} \sim 0.07, \sim 0.58$, and $\sim 0.87$. (B) Same as A, but with P copA Cy3@-41. Resolved peaks center at $\sim 0.07, \sim 0.78$, and $\sim 0.95$. (C-E) Area ratio of $E_1/E_2$, $E_2/E_0$, and $E_1/E_0$ obtained from the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms in (A) and (B). These area ratios show that the apo-CueR reinforces RNAP-P copA interactions toward the $E_1$ dead-end complex (C); the reinforcement comes from the slight stabilization of the $E_1$ dead-end complex relative to the $E_0$ free P copA state (E), while the stability of the $E_2$ open complex increases slightly (change is very small here). Further addition of ATP does not cause significant changes (C-E). Part of data in (C) are presented in Fig. 4B in the main text.

6. RNAP can bind to apo-CueR-P copA complex
Fig. S8. RNAP can bind to apo-CueR–PcopA complex. (A) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram of apo-CueR$_{\text{Cy5}}$–PcopA$_{\text{Cy3}@-41}$ interactions at 10 nM apo-CueR$_{\text{Cy5}}$. Resolved peaks center at $E_0 \sim 0.07$ and $E_{\text{CueR-P}} \sim 0.81$, with percentage peak areas of 93.8 ± 6.1% and 6.2 ± 2.6%, respectively. (B) Same as A, but with 5 nM unlabeled RNAP. Resolved peaks center at $E_0 \sim 0.07$, $E_{\text{CueR-RP}} \sim 0.68$, and $E_{\text{CueR-P}} \sim 0.81$, with percentage peak areas of 92.7 ± 1.8%, 5.3 ± 0.9%, and 2.0 ± 0.6%, respectively. The peak $E_{\text{CueR-RP}} \sim 0.68$ is from a ternary RNAP-(apo-CueR)-PcopA complex, similar to the case of RNAP binding to holo-CueR-PcopA complex in Fig. 5 in the main text.

7. $E_{\text{CueR-RP}}$ peak of the ternary RNAP-(holo-CueR)-PcopA complex increases in population while the $E_{\text{CueR-P}}$ peak of the holo-CueR-PcopA complex decreases with increasing [RNAP]

Fig. S9. RNAP binding effects on holo-CueR$_{\text{Cy5}@C129}$–PcopA$_{\text{Cy3}@-41}$ interactions. (A) $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of PcopA$_{\text{Cy3}@-41}$ interactions with 2 nM holo-CueR$_{\text{Cy5}@C129}$ in the absence and presence of unlabeled RNAP at 2, 20, 60, and 100 nM. Resolved peaks center at $E_{\text{FRET}} \sim 0.07$ ($E_0$ state), $0.68$ ($E_{\text{CueR-RP}}$ state), and $0.81$ ($E_{\text{CueR-P}}$ state). The 0 nM and 100 nM RNAP panels are duplicated from main text Fig. 5A and B. (B) Area percent of $E_{\text{CueR-P}}$ and $E_{\text{CueR-RP}}$ states from A. These data show that the $E_{\text{CueR-RP}}$ state increases in population while the $E_{\text{CueR-P}}$ state decreases in population with increasing [RNAP], as well as that RNAP can bind to the holo-CueR-DNA complex to form a ternary complex comprised of RNAP, PcopA and CueR.
8. In the absence of $\sigma^{70}$, the core RNAP does not bind to the (holo) CueR-P_{copA} complex

Fig. S10. The core RNAP does not bind to the (holo) CueR-P_{copA} complex. $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of P_{copA}_{Cy3@-41} interactions with 2 nM holo-CueRCy5 in the absence (bottom panel, reproduced from Fig. 5A) or presence of 20 nM holo RNAP (top, reproduced from Fig. S9A) or 20 nM core RNAP (middle). The ternary RNAP-CueR-P_{copA} complex at $E_{\text{CueR-RP}} \sim 0.68$ does not appear in the presence of core RNAP only.

9. RNAP locks CueR into the specific binding mode on P_{copA}.

a. Background: CueR has two binding modes on specific DNA (e.g., P_{copA}), one specific and the other nonspecific binding mode; and at the specific binding mode, CueR can undergo assisted dissociation and direct substitution on DNA.

Our previous smFRET studies of CueRCy5-DNA_{Cy3} interactions showed that CueR, in both holo and apo forms, can bind to a specific DNA with two different binding modes: one in which CueR recognizes its specific dyad symmetric sequence and distorts the DNA structure (I in Fig. S11) and the other in which CueR likely interacts with the DNA in a nonspecific fashion (I' in Fig. S11) (14). These two different binding modes do not have resolvable differences in their $E_{\text{FRET}}$ values, and their presences are experimentally manifested by the distribution of dwell time ($\tau_{\text{bound}}$) of CueR at the bound state: this distribution follows a double-exponential decay behavior (e.g., Fig. 5C in the main text for the dwell-time distribution of the holo-CueRCy5-P_{copA}_{Cy3@-41} complex), instead of a single exponential distribution typically seen for a protein-DNA complex with a single binding mode.

At the specific binding mode, both holo- and apo-CueR can undergo assisted dissociation and direct substitution processes (Fig. S11). In the assisted dissociation process, an incoming CueR from solution helps carry away the incumbent CueR bound on DNA; in the direct substitution reaction, the incoming protein directly replaces the incumbent one on DNA. A characteristic experimental signature of these two processes is the dependence on CueR concentration of the average dwell time ($\langle \tau_{\text{bound}} \rangle$) on the bound CueR-DNA state. With increasing [CueR], $\langle \tau_{\text{bound}} \rangle^{-1}$ increases linearly, because both the assisted dissociation and direct substitution disrupt the existing CueR-DNA complex, making the dwell time of the incumbent protein on DNA shorter.
**Fig. S11.** The kinetic mechanism of CueR interacting with a specific DNA from reference (14), where the free DNA is designated as D and [CueR] stands for CueR concentration. CueR binds to DNA reversibly, where $k_1$ and $k_{-1}$ correspond to the binding and unbinding kinetic rate constants, respectively. CueR has two different binding modes on DNA: one in which CueR recognizes the promoter sequence and distorts the DNA structure (designated as I, the specific binding mode) and the other where CueR interacts with DNA in a nonspecific fashion (designated as I’), and they can interconvert ($k_3$ and $k_{-3}$). CueR can undergo flipping ($k_4$) on DNA at the specific binding mode, where the protein flips its binding orientation spontaneously without detaching from DNA completely. CueR can also undergo direct substitution ($k_{2a}$), where an incoming protein replaces the incumbent CueR on DNA to form a new CueR-DNA complex, or assisted dissociation ($k_{2b}$), where an incoming protein carries away the incumbent CueR, leading to free DNA.

**b. In the presence of RNAP, the assisted dissociation and/or direct substitution processes of CueR on PcopA still occur, indicating that the specific binding mode of CueR on PcopA persists.**

Here we also examined the [CueR] dependence of CueR’s dwell time on PcopA in the presence of RNAP by studying holo-CueRCy5–PcopACy3@41 interactions. In the presence of RNAP, the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram can be resolved to have two bound CueR-DNA state, $E_{\text{CueR-P}}$ and $E_{\text{CueR-RP}}$, where the $E_{\text{CueR-RP}}$ state is a ternary RNAP-CueR-PcopA complex, as we discussed in the main text (Fig. 5B). In the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ vs time trajectory, the dwell time on the $E_{\text{CueR-P}}$ and $E_{\text{CueR-RP}}$ states are difficult to separate (Fig. S12A). We thus combine them together, referring to the residence time as $\tau_{\text{bound}}$. Fig. S12B shows that in the presence of RNAP, $\langle \tau_{\text{bound}} \rangle^{-1}$ still shows a linear dependence on [holo-CueRCy5]. Therefore, in the presence of RNAP, the assisted dissociation and direct substitution processes still occur to CueR bound on PcopA.
Fig. S12. Dependence of $\tau_{\text{bound}}$, CueR’s dwell time on PcopA, on [CueR] in the presence of RNAP. (A) Single-molecule $E_{\text{FRET}}$ trajectory of immobilized PcopA$_{\text{Cy3–41}}$ interacting with 2 nM holo-CueR$_{\text{Cy5}}$ in the presence of 20 nM RNAP. The grey line is original data; the red line is after non-linear filtering. $\tau_{\text{bound}}$ designates the dwell times on the E$_{\text{CueR-P}}$ or E$_{\text{CueR-RP}}$ state. The E$_{\text{buried}} = 0.18$ state is the other CueR binding orientation on PcopA, where the acceptor on one of the CueR monomers is further away from the donor on PcopA. This E$_{\text{buried}}$ state is not resolved in the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histogram in Fig. 5A and B in the main text. (B) Dependence of $\langle \tau_{\text{bound}} \rangle^{-1}$ on [CueR] for holo-CueR$_{\text{Cy5–PcopA}}$$_{\text{Cy3–41}}$ interactions in the presence of 5 nM [RNAP]. Solid line is a linear fit.

c. Simulations show that the dominance of the specific binding mode will lead to a single-exponential distribution of dwell time distribution, supporting that RNAP locks CueR binding to PcopA into its specific binding mode.

In the absence of RNAP, the distribution of dwell time $\tau_{\text{bound}}$ for holo-CueR$_{\text{Cy5–PcopA}}$$_{\text{Cy3–41}}$ interactions shows a double-exponential decay behavior (Fig. 5C in the main text), reflecting the two binding modes of CueR on PcopA, as we showed previously (14). With the addition of RNAP, the distribution of $\tau_{\text{bound}}$ follows a single-exponential decay (Fig 5D), suggesting that the CueR-bound state is now dominated by one binding mode, while the other binding mode becomes insignificant. On the other hand, in the presence of RNAP, the assisted dissociation and/or direct substitution processes of CueR still exist on PcopA (Fig. S12, and Section 9b above). As these two processes only occur to CueR’s specific binding mode, we conclude that the remaining dominant binding mode is the specific mode; in other words, RNAP interactions locks CueR into its specific binding mode on PcopA.

To support that the dominance of the specific binding mode is indeed associated with the conversion of the double-exponential distribution of dwell time into a single-exponential distribution, we performed simulations of the dwell time distribution from the kinetic mechanism in Fig. S11. In this mechanism, the distribution of the dwell time on the CueR-bound state (on each of its binding orientations) follows:

$$f_{\text{bound}}(\tau)=\frac{D}{4M}\left[(M+C)\exp\left\{-\frac{(N-2M)\tau}{4}\right\}+(M-C)\exp\left\{-\frac{N\tau}{4}\right\}\right]$$

Eq. S[2]

Here $M = \sqrt{\left[2k_{-3} + 2k_{-1} + 2k_3 + 2k_4 + k_{2a}[\text{CueR}]\right]^2 - 8k_{-3} \left[2k_{-1} + 2k_4 + k_{2a}[\text{CueR}]\right]}$, $N = M + 2(k_{-3} + k_{-1} + k_3 + k_4) + k_{2a}[\text{CueR}]$, $C = \left[2(k_{-3} - k_{-1} - k_3 - k_4) - k_{2a}[\text{CueR}]\right]$, and $D = \left[2(k_{-3} + k_4) + k_{2a}[\text{CueR}]\right]$, as we previously derived (14); [CueR] is CueR concentration. This distribution is a double exponential decay function, as shown in Fig. S13A using kinetic rate constants determined from our previous studies (14). To make the specific binding mode (I in Fig. S11) dominate the bound state, we performed the following:
(1) Make the rate constants $k_3$ and $k_{-3}$ both zero, thus effectively eliminating the nonspecific binding mode ($I'$ in Fig. S11).

(2) Make $k_3 \ll k_{-3}$, thus biasing the equilibrium toward the specific binding mode, making it dominant.

In both cases, the simulated dwell time distributions converts to a single-exponential decay behavior (Fig. S13A for case (1) and B for case (2)), thus supporting that this distribution is consistent with that RNAP locks CueR’s interactions with P$_{copA}$ into its specific binding mode.

**Fig. S13.** (A) Red: normalized distribution of $\tau_{\text{bound}}$ for holo-CueR$_{Cy5}$-DNA$_{Cy3}$ at 2 nM holo-CueR using equation Eq. S[2] and $k_{-1} = 1.1$ s$^{-1}$, $k_{2a} = 134 \times 10^6$ M$^{-1}$ s$^{-1}$, $k_4 = 0.13$ s$^{-1}$, $k_3 = 2.0$ s$^{-1}$ and $k_{-3} = 1.4$ s$^{-1}$ from our previous studies of CueR (14). Green: same as red, but with $k_3 = 0$ s$^{-1}$ and $k_{-3} = 0$ s$^{-1}$. (B) Red, same as the red curve in A. Green: same as red but with $k_3 = 1$ s$^{-1}$ and $k_{-3} = 1000$ s$^{-1}$.

10. **CueR increases the overall affinity of RNAP to P$_{copA}$, and RNAP also increases the overall affinity of CueR to P$_{copA}$, reflecting their synergistic interactions**

**Fig. S14.** RNAP and CueR increase each other’s overall affinity to P$_{copA}$. (A) Area ratio of $(E_1+E_2)/E_0$ obtained from the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of RNAP$_{Cy5}$-P$_{copA}$$_{Cy3@41}$ interactions in Fig. S4A in the presence of holo-CueR and from those in Fig. S7B in the presence of apo-CueR. The data here show that the overall RNAP-P$_{copA}$ affinity, represented by the combined populations of the $E_1$ and $E_2$ complexes relative to the free P$_{copA}$ state $E_0$, increases in the presence of holo-CueR or apo-CueR, by up to ~15% at 200 nM CueR.

(B) Area ratio of $(E_{\text{CueR-RP}}+E_{\text{CueR-RP}})/E_0$ obtained from the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms of holo-CueR$_{Cy5}$-P$_{copA}$$_{Cy3@41}$ interactions in Fig. S14B.
interactions in Fig. S9A in the presence of RNAP. Inset: Area ratio of \((E_{\text{CueR-P}}+E_{\text{CueR-RP}})/E_0\) obtained from the \(E_{\text{FRET}}\) histograms of apo-CueR \(\text{C35-P_copA}_{\text{Cy5-41}}\) interactions in Fig. S8A and B in the presence of RNAP. Note: the area of the buried \(E_{\text{CueR-RP}}\) and \(E_{\text{CueR-RP}}\) peaks have been subtracted from the \(E_0\) peak area and added to the unburied \(E_{\text{CueR-P}}\) and \(E_{\text{CueR-RP}}\) peak areas to account for both orientations of labeled CueR on \(\text{P_copA}\). The data here show that the overall holo- or apo-CueR-P\(\text{copA}\) affinity increases in the presence of RNAP, by up to ~70% at 100 nM RNAP.

11. Thermodynamic equilibrium cycle analysis results in dissociation constants that further support the synergistic effects of RNAP and CueR interactions with \(\text{P_copA}\).

Fig. S15 shows a simplified equilibrium cycle of interactions between CueR, RNAP (i.e., \(R\)), and \(\text{P_copA}\) (i.e., \(P\)). The cycle includes CueR-\(\text{P_copA}\) interactions, RNAP-\(\text{P_copA}\) interactions forming the open or dead-end complex, and ternary CueR-RNAP-\(\text{P_copA}\) complexes that stabilize the open or the dead-end complex. For simplification, this cycle omits that CueR can bind to \(\text{P_copA}\) in two different binding modes (i.e., the specific and nonspecific binding modes) and that CueR can undertake assisted dissociation and direct substitution processes on \(\text{P_copA}\).

This simplified equilibrium cycle allows for thermodynamic analysis of the population ratios of different species from the resolved \(E_{\text{FRET}}\) histograms of RNAP \(\text{Cy5-}\text{P_copA}_{\text{Cy3}}\) interactions and
CueR<sub>Cy5</sub>−P<sub>copA</sub>Cy3 interactions in the presence and absence of the other protein. The associated formation ($K_A$) and dissociation ($K_D$) equilibrium constants are defined as:

$K_{1A}$ and $K_{1D}$: RNAP binding to P<sub>copA</sub> to form the dead-end closed-like complex

$$K_{1A} = \frac{1}{K_{1D}} = \frac{[\text{RP}_{DE}]}{[\text{P}] [\text{R}]}$$  

Eq. [3]

$K_{2A}$ and $K_{2D}$: RNAP binding to P<sub>copA</sub> to form the open complex

$$K_{2A} = \frac{1}{K_{2D}} = \frac{[\text{RP}_O]}{[\text{P}] [\text{R}]}$$  

Eq. [4]

$K_{3A}$ and $K_{3D}$: CueR binding to the dead-end RNAP-P<sub>copA</sub> complex

$$K_{3A} = \frac{1}{K_{3D}} = \frac{[\text{CueR-RP}_{DE}]}{[\text{RP}_{DE}][\text{CueR}]}$$  

Eq. [5]

$K_{4A}$ and $K_{4D}$: CueR binding to the open RNAP-P<sub>copA</sub> complex

$$K_{4A} = \frac{1}{K_{4D}} = \frac{[\text{CueR-RP}_O]}{[\text{RP}_O][\text{CueR}]}$$  

Eq. [6]

$K_{5A}$ and $K_{5D}$: RNAP binding to the CueR-DNA complex to form a ternary open complex

$$K_{5A} = \frac{1}{K_{5D}} = \frac{[\text{CueR-RP}_O]}{[\text{CueR-P}][\text{R}]}$$  

Eq. [7]

$K_{6A}$ and $K_{6D}$: RNAP binding to the CueR-DNA complex to form a ternary dead-end complex

$$K_{6A} = \frac{1}{K_{6D}} = \frac{[\text{CueR-RP}_{DE}]}{[\text{CueR-P}][\text{R}]}$$  

Eq. [8]

$K_{7A}$ and $K_{7D}$: CueR binding to P<sub>copA</sub>

$$K_{7A} = \frac{1}{K_{7D}} = \frac{[\text{CueR-P}]}{[\text{P}][\text{CueR}]}$$  

Eq. [9]

In the $E_{\text{FRET}}$ histograms from RNAP<sub>Cy5</sub>−P<sub>copA</sub>Cy3 interactions in the absence or presence of unlabeled CueR:

$$\frac{E_{1}}{E_{0}} \text{ area ratio} = \frac{[\text{RP}_O] + [\text{CueR-RP}_O]}{[\text{P}] + [\text{CueR-P}]} = \frac{[\text{RP}_O] + K_{4A}[\text{RP}_O][\text{CueR}]}{[\text{P}] + K_{4A}[\text{P}][\text{CueR}]}$$  

Eq. [10]

$$= \frac{[\text{RP}_O]}{[\text{P}]} \frac{1 + K_{4A}[\text{CueR}]}{1 + K_{7A}[\text{CueR}]} = K_{2A}[\text{R}] \frac{1 + K_{4A}[\text{CueR}]}{1 + K_{7A}[\text{CueR}]}$$

Equation [10] can be used for solving for $K_{4A}$ (and subsequently $K_{4D}$) when $K_{2A}$ and $K_{7A}$ are known.

$$\frac{E_{1}}{E_{0}} \text{ area ratio} = \frac{[\text{RP}_{DE}] + [\text{CueR-RP}_{DE}]}{[\text{P}] + [\text{CueR-P}]} = \frac{[\text{RP}_{DE}] + K_{3A}[\text{RP}_{DE}][\text{CueR}]}{[\text{P}] + K_{7A}[\text{P}][\text{CueR}]}$$  

Eq. [11]

$$= \frac{[\text{RP}_{DE}]}{[\text{P}]} \frac{1 + K_{3A}[\text{CueR}]}{1 + K_{7A}[\text{CueR}]} = K_{1A}[\text{R}] \frac{1 + K_{3A}[\text{CueR}]}{1 + K_{7A}[\text{CueR}]}$$

Equation [11] can be used for solving for $K_{3A}$ (and subsequently $K_{3D}$) when $K_{1A}$ and $K_{7A}$ are known.
\[
\frac{E_{\text{area ratio}}}{E_1} = \frac{[\text{RP}_{\text{DE}}] + [\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{DE}}]}{[\text{RP}_{\text{DE}}] + [\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{DE}}]} = \frac{K_{2\alpha}[P][R] + K_{5\alpha}[\text{CueR-P}][R]}{K_{1\alpha}[P][R] + K_{6\alpha}[\text{CueR-P}][R]}, \quad \text{Eq. [12]}
\]

Equation [12] can be used for solving for \(K_{5\alpha}\) (and subsequently \(K_{5D}\)) when \(K_{1\alpha}, K_{2\alpha}, K_{6\alpha}, \text{and } K_{7\alpha}\) are known.

In the \(E_{\text{FRET}}\) histogram of CueRCy5-P\textit{PcapA\textsubscript{Cy3}} interactions in the absence or presence of unlabeled RNAP:

\[
\frac{E_{\text{Cue-RP}}}{E_{\text{Cue-RP}}\text{area ratio}} = \frac{[\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{DE}}] + [\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{DE}}]}{[\text{CueR-P}]} = \frac{K_{2\alpha}[\text{CueR-P}][R] + K_{6\alpha}[\text{CueR-P}][R]}{[\text{CueR-P}]} \quad \text{Eq. [13]}
\]

Equation [13] can be used for solving for \(K_{6\alpha}\) (and subsequently \(K_{6D}\)) when \(K_{5\alpha}\) is known.

Combining the above equations and earlier analysis, we could deduce all the thermodynamic equilibrium constants (e.g., dissociation constants), as summarized in Table S1. Note that the values of \(K_{7\alpha}\) for both holo- and apo-CueR interacting with \(P\textit{copA}\) are in agreement with our previously determined dissociation constants for CueR binding to a specific DNA (14).

More important, these dissociation constants directly demonstrate the synergistic effects of RNAP and CueR binding to \(P\textit{copA}\), i.e., one protein’s binding to \(P\textit{copA}\) increases the binding affinity of the other protein to \(P\textit{copA}\). For example, the dissociation constants for RNAP-\(P\textit{copA}\) dead-end and open complexes are \(K_{1\text{D}} (\text{RP}_{\text{DE}}) \sim 30 \text{ nM}\) and \(K_{2\text{D}} (\text{RP}_O) \sim 105 \text{ nM}\), respectively. When holo-CueR is bound at \(P\textit{copA}\), RNAP binding to the holo-CueR-\(P\textit{copA}\) complex to form the dead-end and open complexes have smaller dissociation constants, at \(K_{5\text{D}} (\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{DE}}) \sim 29 \text{ nM}\) and \(K_{6\text{D}} (\text{Cue-RP}_{\text{OP}}) \sim 34 \text{ nM}\), demonstrating that the bound holo-CueR enhances the affinity of the subsequent RNAP binding. Similar enhancement by apo-CueR to RNAP binding to \(P\textit{copA}\) is also observed.

When RNAP is bound at \(P\textit{copA}\), it also enhances the subsequent CueR binding to the RNAP-\(P\textit{copA}\) complexes. For example, the dissociation constant for holo-CueR binding to \(P\textit{copA}\) is \(K_{7\alpha}\) (CueR-\text{RP}) \sim 52 \text{ nM}, and holo-CueR binding to the \text{RP}_O complex has a smaller dissociation constant of \(K_{4\alpha}\) (CueR-\text{RP},\text{OP}) \sim 15 \text{ nM}, indicating the enhanced holo-CueR binding to \(P\textit{copA}\) by RNAP. Similar enhancement by RNAP to apo-CueR binding to \(P\textit{copA}\) is also observed.

**Table S1.** Thermodynamic equilibrium constants for interactions between \(P\textit{copA}\), RNAP, and (holo or apo) CueR as outlined in Fig. S15 from analyzing the population ratios determined from \(E_{\text{FRET}}\) histograms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissociation constants (nM)</th>
<th>RNAP-(P\textit{copA}) interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(K_{1\text{D}} (\text{RP}_{\text{DE}}))</td>
<td>30 ± 3^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K_{2\text{D}} (\text{RP}_O))</td>
<td>105 ± 26^0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CueR interactions with RNAP-(P\textit{copA}) complex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holo-CueR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apo-CueR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K_{3\text{D}} (\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{DE}}))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K_{4\text{D}} (\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{OP}}))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RNAP interactions with CueR-(P\textit{copA}) complex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holo-CueR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apo-CueR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K_{5\text{D}} (\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{DE}}))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(K_{6\text{D}} (\text{CueR-RP}_{\text{OP}}))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CueR-PeopA interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Holo-CueR</th>
<th>Apo-CueR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$K_{2D}$ (CueR-P)</td>
<td>52 ± 10</td>
<td>152 ± 66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aNote that the values of $K_{1D}$ and $K_{2D}$ from population analysis here are within error bar of those in Table 1 in the main text, which are determined from the kinetic rate constants.*

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### 12. Additional references