

THIS WEEK IN SCIENCE

edited by PHIL SZUROMI

Binds and winds

Although it is known that transcription activators stimulate transcription, the structural basis for this regulation has been elusive. Uesugi *et al.* (p. 1310) describe the secondary structure that is induced in the activation domain of the herpes simplex virus VP16 protein when complexed to its target protein, hTAF_{II}31 (a subunit of the human general transcription factor TFIID). Upon binding, VP16 undergoes an induced transition from random coil to α -helix. Sequence similarities in the acidic activation domains of VP16 and other proteins suggest a general recognition element of acidic activation domains for hTAF_{II}31.