Modeling Protein- RNA complexes



Protein – RNA interactions

Many RNA functions require interactions with proteins:

- Genes regulation
- Signal transduction
- Protein synthesis
- Replication of RNA viruses





A 3D representation of the interface allows to:

- Understand protein/RNA function
- Predict mutations effect
- Compute binding energy
- Design drugs to target the interface
- Design a protein to taget an RNA
- Design an RNA to target a protein (*"aptamer"*)





Protein – RNA interfaces : Experimental data Main features

The docking problem: Sampling Evaluation of docking models Scoring

Flexibility: Flexible docking Fragment-based docking

Data-driven docking: Contact/interface -driven Fitting in 3D shape

Other docking paradigms

Modeling pipeline

Experimental structures

Protein-RNA Interactions in an Icosahedral Virus at 3.0 Å Resolution

ZHONGGUO CHEN, CYNTHIA STAUFFACHER, YUNGE LI, TIM SCHMIDT, WU BOMU, GREG KAMER, MICHAEL SHANKS, GEORGE LOMONOSSOFF, JOHN E. JOHNSON*



Science, Jul 1989









One static view, no dynamics Most flexible parts not visible Artefacts from crystallisation (incl. false interfaces !)

0 0

Experimental structures



Multiple conformations => info on dynamics



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Protein – RNA interfaces

Main characteristics of macro-molecular interfaces



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Shape complementarity
 Large
 Compact
 Desolvation effect
 Favourable contacts



Protein – RNA interfaces





Protein – RNA interfaces

Main characteristics of macro-molecular interfaces

- Shape complementarity
 Large
 Compact
 Desolvation effect
 Favourable contacts
- Electrostatic complementarity

Ionic bridges hydrogen bonds Water bridges

Examples of protein – RNA interfaces

- sequence (non-)specificity *pymol : toxin antitoxin*
- electrostatic-driven (*Phosphate groups*)
- stacking *pymol : RRM poly U*

Dec. 2018:

137,000 protein structures1,400 RNA structures2,400 protein-RNA structures

Much lower than what has been experimentally proved to exist in vivo

The structure of a complex is more difficult to solve experimentally than a single protein or RNA

=> We often need to model the complex from the structures of the single molecules.



Experimental data on protein – RNA interfaces

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The Docking Problem

Predicting *in silico* the most probable 3D structures of a complex at the thermodynamic equilibrium, using the 3D structures of its individual components.

! It is assumed that the 2 molecules do bind !

The thermodynamically most stable conformation is called **native conformation**. It is assumed to be the one observed experimentally (and carrying the biological function).

The docking is mainly based on geometrical and chemical properties.



The rigid approximation:

- The 2 molecules are kept (mostly) rigid
- One molecule being fixed, the other has 6 degrees of freedom
- We neglect intra-molecular energies
- We minimize the intermolecular interaction energy



The Docking Problem













How can we increase the probability to end-up in the global minimum?



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Allow some increases of energy : Monte-Carlo procedure
 Computationally demanding, Stochastic results

pos2 = pos1 + random(δθ) Accept move with proba P $-\frac{E2-E1}{k_bT}$ P = e



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How can we increase the probability to end-up in the global minimum?

- Allow some increases of energy : Monte-Carlo procedure
 Computationally demanding, Stochastic results
- Start from many multiple starting positions
- Reduce the number of local minima



lysine



cytosine

uracil





Coarse-grained model : replace few atoms by one pseudo-atom

- \rightarrow Faster pairwise computations: O(N²) => 36x faster
- \rightarrow Smoother energy landscape => less local minima
- $\ \ \rightarrow \ \$ Account for some inaccuracies in the structures







Parametrization

2 parameters x 31 amino-acid beads x 17 RNA beads



attraction

$$U_{ij}^{\text{attr}}(r) = \epsilon_{ij} \left(\frac{\sigma_{ij}}{r^8} - \frac{\sigma_{ij}}{r^6} \right)$$

$$repulsion \quad U_{ij}^{rep}(r) = \begin{cases} U_{ij}^{attr}(r) + 2U_{ij}^{m} & \text{for } r \leq r_{ij}^{m} \\ -U_{ij}^{attr}(r) & \text{for } r > r_{ij}^{m} \end{cases}$$

Adjust parameters based on known structure, so as to give better score to models close to known structures

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To assess the quality of a solution, we compute the **Root mean squared deviation** (RMSD): Average deviation of the atoms in the **docking solution** vs in the **experimental structure**.

$$RMSD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} \left(\left(x_{i}^{a} - x_{i}^{b} \right)^{2} + \left(y_{i}^{a} - y_{i}^{b} \right)^{2} + \left(z_{i}^{a} - z_{i}^{b} \right)^{2} \right)}{N}}$$





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Ligand-RMSD (L-RMSD) RMSD of docked vs bound ligand, after fitting the model on the bound receptor





We put ourselves in the artificial case were the real structure of the complex is known

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RMSD of docked vs bound ligand, after fitting the model on the bound receptor

interface-RMSD (i-RMSD)

RMSD unbound vs bound of only the <u>interface</u> (receptor and ligand atoms at < 10A distance from each-other), after fitting on the bound interface the equivalent atoms of the model.





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Fraction of native contacts (Fnat)

A <u>contact</u> is a pair of RNA-protein atoms at <5 A from each other. Fnat is the % of contacts recovered by the model.



Evaluation of docking models



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Scoring



Sampling : Producing models as close as possible from the native structure **Scoring** : Discriminating good ("near-native") solutions from wrong solutions ("decoys")

To discriminate the wrong solution from the good ones, all solutions are scored (approximation of the energy) and **ranked** from the smallest to highest score.

Scoring



Sampling : Producing models as close as possible from the native structure **Scoring** : Discriminating good ("near-native") solutions from wrong solutions ("decoys")

To discriminate the wrong solution from the good ones, all solutions are scored (approximation of the energy) and **ranked** from the smallest to highest score.


The first good model is typically in the ~10-100 top-ranked model

=> You have to consider as many models to not throw away all good ones!

How to check if any "predicted good structure" is really good ?



The first good model is typically in the ~10-100 top-ranked model

- => You have to consider as many models to not throw away all good ones!
- => What about a **real case**, where we don't have access to the RMSD ? *(there is no reference structure)*

How to check if any "predicted good structure" is really good ?

> Visualization: large interface good shape complementarity (no holes at interface) clustering at same area



How to check if any "predicted good structure" is really good ?

Antibodies are large proteins synthesized by the immune system to identify and neutralize pathogens such as bacteria and viruses. PDB code 1E6J is a complex between the HIV capsid protein and a large antibody that binds to it.

pymol : HIV capsid - antibody



How to check if any "predicted good structure" is really good ?

> Visualization: large interface good shape complementarity (no holes at interface) clustering at same area

> Correspondence to biological function

G protein-coupled receptor kinase 2 (GRK2). However, during chronic heart failure GRK2 is upregulated and believed to contribute to disease progression. We have determined crystallographic structures of GRK2 bound to an RNA aptamer that potently and selectively inhibits kinase activity. Key to the mechanism of inhibition is the positioning of an adenine nucleotide into the ATP-binding pocket and interactions with the basic α F- α G loop region of the GRK2 kinase domain.

Tesmer, Lennarz, Mayer, Tesmer (2012) Structure 20(8):1300-9.

pymol : GPCR + aptamer

How to check if any "predicted good structure" is really good ?

> Visualization: large interface good shape complementarity (no holes at interface) clustering at same area

> Correspondence to biological function

- > Mutagenesis on amino-acids at the interface
 - $\rightarrow\,$ should change the binding affinity
 - \rightarrow should not disrupt the individual structures !!

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Conformational changes upon binding occurs by (a combination of) 2 ways :





Proteins

Side chain (protein surface) Backbone in loop regions Secondary structures Domains



RNA

Base flipping Backbone in loop regions Secondary structures Unstructured regions (single-strand)





Proteins

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Base flipping

Backbone in loop regions Helices bend / twist Unstructured regions (single-strand)



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amplitude

Undefined in solution





The perfect superpositions of unbound structures on the bound complex gives the upper limit of model quality that can be obtained by rigid body modeling.

If the perfect fit brings atomic clashes, it will not be found by docking.



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Harmonic modes

Energetically favorable directions of deformation, orthogonal to each-other.

- Computed based on the structure of each molecule and its inter-atomic forces.
- Added as additional DOF along the minimization.

Hopefully one or few modes will bring the unbound RNA closer to the bound form (but it is not guaranteed !).





ATTRACT: harmonic modes



Conformational ensemble

Ensemble of unbound conformations docked in parallel.

Can be obtained from Molecular Dynamics, NMR ...

Increase the probability to be close enough to the bound form (but it is not guaranteed !),



Refinement

After docking, use MD with all-atom force-field to refine models

=> Only small ajustements. Needs to have already a quite correct solution

!! time-consuming

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- 12 DOF per nucleotide => combinatorial explosion
- Protein-induced conformations

Approximation : discrete **local** conformations => structural fragment library







=> 10²⁵⁻⁴⁸ chains

Main difficulties :

- All frag must be correctly sampled
- Scoring problem => lot of false positive





Total: 5 . 10^5 poses







Chain sampling with mean-rank constrain

Filter connections by dead-end elimination

- Starting backward, consider the best-case meanrank at each pose
- For next pose, eliminate connections that cannot lead to correct meanrank
- Eliminate non-connected poses if needed
- Retain at each new pose the best-case meanrank

Ex : ($\prod rank_i$) threshold = 5000


Chain sampling with mean-rank constrain

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Walk the filtered tree w. dead-end elimination

Ex : $(\prod rank_i)$ threshold = 5000



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Contact / interface data

Experimental:

NMR Mutagenesis FRET

Biological: Existing mutation Concerved contact in homologs

. . .

. . .

Ambiguous interaction restraints



Experimental structures

class averages

Cryo-Electron Microscopy







For very large systems *e.g. Ribosomes* Multiple conformations



Not for small systems Resolution often > 4 A

Shape data => Fitting in 3D map

SAXS, Cryo-EM ...

Cryo-electron microscopy generates electron density maps. The resolution varies a lot!





=> Fitting in 3D map

Shape data => Fitting in 3D map

SAXS, Cryo-EM ...

Sampling: Voxel-based atom density mask



Fitting in 3D map

ATTRACT-EM



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