

FoldSeek: Fast search and comparison of protein structures

INTRODUCTION

For today's workshop, we're going to be running through an example of how to create a database of protein structures and query the database for structural similarity to a desired protein. We'll also be going over how to directly compare the structure of two proteins directly against each other, and display the results in tab-delimited and HTML format.

SET UP [## Estimated runtime: < 2 minutes]

1. Login to Atlas Open OnDemand using your web browser (<https://atlas-ood.hpc.msstate.edu/>) and navigate to your working directory for this workshop. Mine, for example, is in the shared directory under my username (Files > /90daydata > Change directory > /90daydata/shared/olivia.haley)
2. Once in your working directory, select **Open in Terminal**. A new window should open.
3. Copy the shared directory containing the scripts and structures for this demo to your working directory, then activate the conda environment for this workshop.

```
# Copy the shared directory from the shared folder
cp -r /90daydata/shared/protein_structure_workshop/FoldSeek/ .

# Activate the workshop conda environment
module load miniconda3
source activate /90daydata/shared/protein_structure_conda/foldseek_env

#Navigate into the directory and view its contents
cd FoldSeek
ls -ltr
```

The directory's contents should look like the following:

```
drwxr-s--- 2 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4096 Nov 7 14:56 log
drwxr-s--- 16 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4096 Nov 7 15:01 tmp
drwxr-s--- 2 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4096 Nov 7 15:01 databases
drwxr-s--- 2 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 139264 Nov 7 15:02 viridiplantae_PDB_structures
drwxr-s--- 2 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4096 Nov 7 15:02 scripts
drwxr-s--- 2 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4096 Nov 7 15:02 query_structures
drwxr-s--- 2 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4096 Nov 7 15:02 examples
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 721547 Nov 7 15:02 AF-Q6XFQ4-F1-model_v4.pdb
```

TUTORIAL

The first step is to create the target database, which will contain the structures that you will search against using your query protein(s). Target databases can be established using a directory of protein structure files or fasta files. Some pre-compiled databases are available for downloading directly. In this tutorial, we'll be looking for structural homologs of proteins with potential applications in agriculture, such as:

- KWL1, a defense protein in maize with antifungal properties [6FPG]
- GST-I, an enzyme contributing to herbicide detoxification in maize [1AXD]
- PPO, an enzyme which leads to browning in apple [6ELS]

For simplicity, our target database will be a subset of experimentally-determined structures from the *Viridiplantae* (or 'green plants') clade.

Step 1. Create the target database [## Estimated runtime: < 1 minute]

```
#Run the script to create the target database of Viridiplantae structures
sbatch scripts/s0_create_database.sh
```

```
#View the files generated while creating the database
ls -ltr databases
```

```
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 36002 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_ss.index
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_ss.dbtype
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 677295 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_ss
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 27330 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb.source
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 38070 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb.lookup
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 36002 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb.index
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 28310 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_h.index
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_h.dbtype
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 18960 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_h
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb.dbtype
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 40066 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_ca.index
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_ca.dbtype
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 4146149 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb_ca
-rw-r----- 1 olivia.haley proj-maizegdb 677295 Oct 28 14:19 viridiplantae_PDBdb
```

Step 2. Run FoldSeek (TSV output) to get initial query matches [## Estimated runtime: < 1 minute]

```
#Run the script
sbatch scripts/s1_foldseek_run_initial_query.sh
```

```
#View the output tab-delimited file
head initial_query_results.tsv
```

6ELS_A	6ELS_A	1.000	459	0	0	1	459	1	459	0.000E+00	4154
6ELS_A	4Z13_A	0.461	466	246	0	1	458	40	505	8.126E-57	1958
6ELS_A	6HQJ_A	0.454	461	250	0	1	459	11	471	7.796E-58	1926
6FPG_D	6FPG_D	1.000	153	0	0	1	153	1	153	3.613E-33	1415
6FPG_D	6TI2_E	0.593	160	62	0	1	153	1	160	2.563E-23	942
6FPG_D	4PMK_A	0.569	149	60	0	3	151	18	158	2.299E-20	794
6FPG_D	4X9U_A	0.572	150	60	0	2	151	41	182	4.488E-20	786
6FPG_D	1N10_A	0.158	121	101	0	31	151	6	126	5.000E-04	109
6FPG_D	7KSN_A	0.134	121	101	0	35	152	1	121	3.146E-03	96
6FPG_D	4JP7_A	0.128	116	99	0	38	152	3	118	1.133E-02	92

Step 3. Run FoldSeek (HTML output) to explore the initial query-target matches

[## Estimated runtime: < 1 minute]

We have some matches from each of our proteins, but let's explore one of the matches for maize kiwelin defense protein (6FPG_D). In particular, let's look at the alignment between the kiwelin and 4PMK_A. This script will output the alignment's results in HTML form as a file called **6FPGD_4PMKA.html**. To move the file to your local machine using the Atlas Open On Demand interface, click on the open tab, then Refresh > FoldSeek). Next to the file name there should be a drop-down box, click the drop-down then select Download.

```
#Run the script
sbatch scripts/s2_view_query_target_alignment.sh
```

6FPG_D.pdb

Visualization

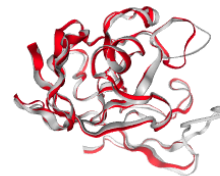


Results

Target	Sequence Id.	Score	E-Value	Query Pos.	Target Pos.
4PMK_A.pdb	0.569	794	1.59e-21	3-151 (153)	18-158 (158)

TM-Score: 0.95313

```
Q  3  QP3SGSIQGRSGNCECKNGRRYTTYGCSPPVVGSTR3RAVLTLNSFAEG--GGGAAACTGK3FYDDSKVVALSTG3WYNGGS
+PSG++  +      G+ + TY CSPPVT ST A LT N F+EG  GGG + C  ++ +++++VALSTG3WYNGGS
T  18  KPSGTLTCQ-----GKSHPTYDCSPPVTSSTPAKLTNND3FSEGGDGGPSECDESYHSNNERIVALSTG3WYNGGS
```



As it turns out, this protein 4PMK_A is also a kiwelin! It comes from *Actinidia chinensis* var. *chinensis* (the Chinese soft-hair kiwi) where it was first identified as an allergen (Tamburrini et al., 2005). Its homolog in maize was later found to have antifungal properties (Han et al., 2019).

Bonus Question: What insights can you make from the other proteins?

Step 4. Expand the search to other clades [## Estimated time: < 2 minutes]

Until this point, we've been using a database of experimentally-determined protein structures. But less than 10% of the structures in the Protein Data Bank come from plants! For this exercise, we'll expand our structural homology search by using a database of computational protein structures in FoldSeek. FoldSeek has pre-compiled databases such as AlphaFoldDB, PDB, and ESMAtlas. In this example we'll use the AlphaFold database of Swiss-Prot proteins. This script will create an HTML file that you'll need to transfer to your local computer with Atlas Open On Demand.

```
#Generates the database files for the AlphaFold/Swiss-Prot database
#Runs the query protein against the AlphaFold/Swiss-Prot database
sbatch scripts/s3_create_and_query_AF2_database.sh
```

Looking at the results, many of the top hits are kiwellins in plant species like rice (*Oryza sativa*) and kiwi. What's interesting is that we do see structural homology for our maize kiwellin and a protein from *Streptomyces mobaraensis*, a spore-forming bacterium that is known to produce antimicrobial compounds (Zindel et al., 2013; P86242).

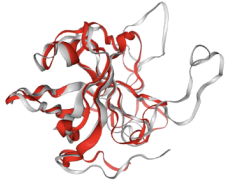
Results Toggle Alignments

Target	Sequence Id.	Score	E-Value	Query Pos.	Target Pos.	
AF-A0A1D6GNR3-F1-model_v4	0.955	1140	1.45e-27	1-151 (153)	41-198 (198)	☰
AF-Q9FWT5-F1-model_v4	0.683	948	6.41e-23	1-151 (153)	53-213 (213)	☰
AF-P84527-F1-model_v4	0.578	817	3.89e-20	2-151 (153)	72-213 (213)	☰
AF-Q7XVA8-F1-model_v4	0.557	807	1.66e-19	1-151 (153)	29-183 (183)	☰
AF-Q9FWU1-F1-model_v4	0.546	806	5.44e-20	2-151 (153)	56-216 (216)	☰
AF-Q9M4H4-F1-model_v4	0.568	803	3.68e-20	1-151 (153)	77-220 (220)	☰
AF-Q6H5X0-F1-model_v4	0.577	798	1.19e-19	2-151 (153)	40-192 (192)	☰
AF-P85261-F1-model_v4	0.565	786	1.19e-19	2-151 (153)	72-213 (213)	☰
AF-Q7XD66-F1-model_v4	0.492	578	2.96e-14	30-151 (153)	51-167 (167)	☰
AF-Q8LN49-F1-model_v4	0.462	465	2.37e-14	1-153 (153)	26-170 (276)	☰
AF-Q7XD65-F1-model_v4	0.429	409	3.51e-11	35-151 (153)	45-162 (162)	☰
AF-Q42799-F1-model_v4	0.227	192	0.0000038	1-151 (153)	140-270 (270)	☰
AF-P86242-F1-model_v4	0.227	190	0.0000145	29-152 (153)	32-143 (143)	☰

TM-Score: 0.71608

```

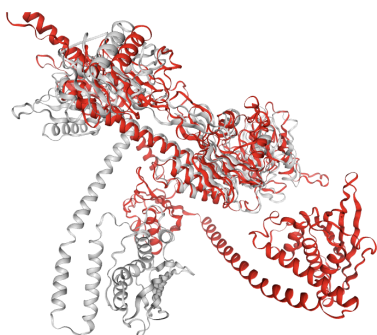
Q 29 GCSPPVTGSTRAVLTLNSFAEGGGAAACTGKFYDDSK-KYVALSTGK---YNGGS--RCR-KHIMIHAGNGNSYALVV
      ++  ++  ++  +  G +AC G  D S  ++*+ *#  N  +  CR  ++  ++  NG ++  V
T 32 SADIPIGKMTGKHTYTYDK----GYGAC-GTPIDASSQDLVAIPAAWHTTPNPNNDPLCRGVSVEV-SYNGRTIRVPR
          
```



Step 4. When might FoldSeek not perform as expected? [## Estimated time: < 2 minute]

FoldSeek performs a rigid structural alignment, meaning that it doesn't account for the flexibility of protein backbones during the structural similarity search. There are cases (particularly when using computational protein structures) where this can lead to inaccurate conclusions. For example, let's compare the experimental structure of a maize photosystem I protein, with its AlphaFold2 structure. Run the script, and then download the HTML output file ([maize-phytochrome-comparison.html](#))

```
#Generates the database files for the AlphaFold/Swiss-Prot database
#Runs the query protein against the AlphaFold/Swiss-Prot database
sbatch scripts/s4_compare_protein_structures.sh
```



Although these two are the same protein, this is not a great alignment. The TM-score is < 0.50 (indicating they're not assuming the same general fold). In this case, it looks like we have a protein domain in our computational structure (red) that is not in the same orientation as the domain in the experimental structure (gray).

Bonus Question: What can we use to perform the structural alignment and 'fix' the domain orientation?

Step 5 (Optional). Flexible structure alignment [## Estimated time: < 5 minute]

Often, these cases can be corrected by using a flexible structural alignment program. We'll use one such program, called FATCAT to perform the flexible alignment. For a small set of alignments, it'll likely be easier to use their web interface https://fatcat.godziklab.org/fatcat/fatcat_pair.html. However, FATCAT does have a local implementation (<https://github.com/GodzikLab/FATCAT-dist>) if you have a larger set of structural alignments to perform. On the web platform, you can use PDB codes to upload structure files directly from the PDB, or input your own .pdb files. Note that this may not perform as intended for mmCIF files, or for structures in the PDB which only have mmCIF files available.

Under 'Enter the 1st structure' provide the PDB code **8ISK** and input **A** under Chain. Alternatively, you can download the structure from our workshop directory and upload it. Make sure to select 'Upload PDB file:'

Under 'Enter the 2nd structure', select 'Upload PDB file:' and upload the AlphaFold2 structure file of Q6XFQ4 (AF-Q6XFQ4-F1-v4.pdb)

Enter the 1st structure	Enter the 2nd structure
Enter a name for your structure: <input type="text" value="Experimental"/> (optional)	Enter a name for your structure: <input type="text" value="Computational"/> (optional)
<input type="radio"/> Upload PDB file: <input type="button" value="Choose File"/> no file selected Chain: <input type="text"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Upload PDB file: <input type="button" value="Choose File"/> AF-Q6XFQ4...el_v4.pdb Chain: <input type="text" value="A"/>
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Provide PDB code: <input type="text" value="8isk"/> Chain: <input type="text" value="A"/>	<input type="radio"/> Provide PDB code: <input type="text"/> Chain: <input type="text"/>
<input type="radio"/> Provide SCOP domain code: <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/> Provide SCOP domain code: <input type="text"/>

FATCAT will provide a couple of outputs. Of note is the P -value which indicates the statistical similarity of the structural alignment (testing the hypothesis if the alignment score occurred randomly). It will also give a breakdown of the number of residues included in the alignment, the RMSD, and how many 'twists' were needed to align the structures. To view the alignment, download the superimposed structures (.pdb file), and then drag the file into the Mol* viewer (<https://molstar.org/viewer/>).

The alignment of these two proteins is much better once we allow for flexibility in the protein backbone!

These two structures are **significantly similar** with P-value $0.00e+00$ (raw FATCAT score is 2074.01)
They have 819 equivalent positions with an RMSD of 3.83Å and 3 twists

Detailed results:

- FATCAT alignment file
- Graph of FATCAT chaining result (postscript version)
- Superimposed structures (a pdb file with structure 8ISKA and modified structure.pdb2 stored as chains A and B)
- Transformation matrices for alignment blocks
- Differential Distance Matrix
- Interactive viewer (structures, alignment, contact map)



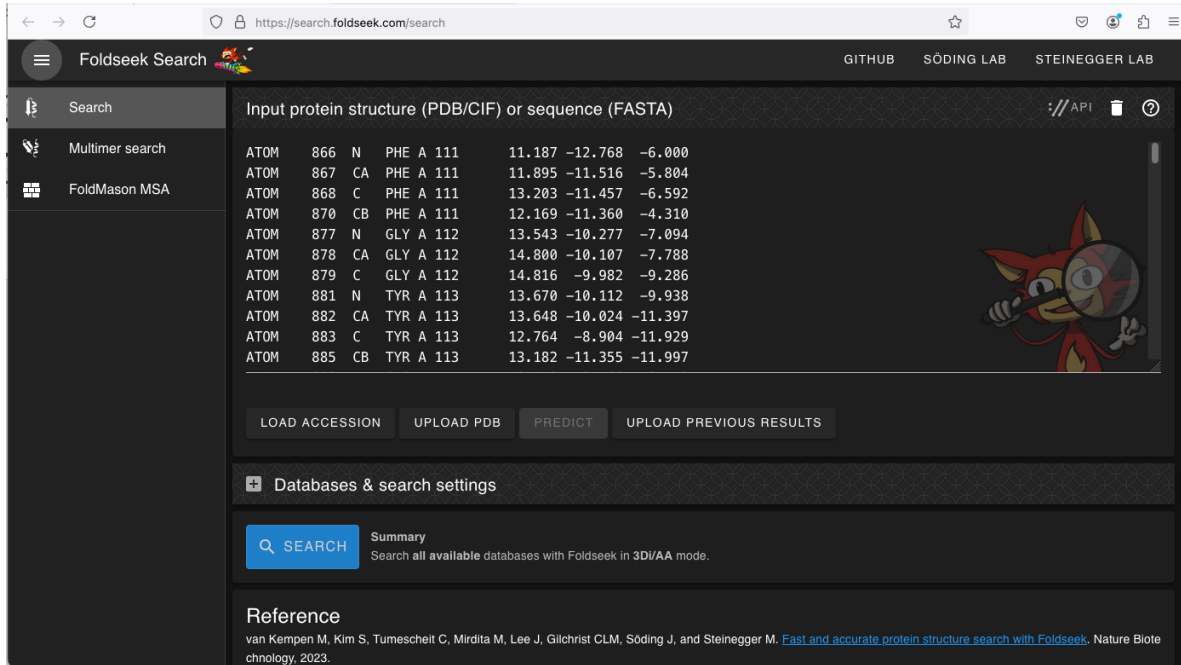
Step 6. Deactivate the environment

```
conda deactivate
```

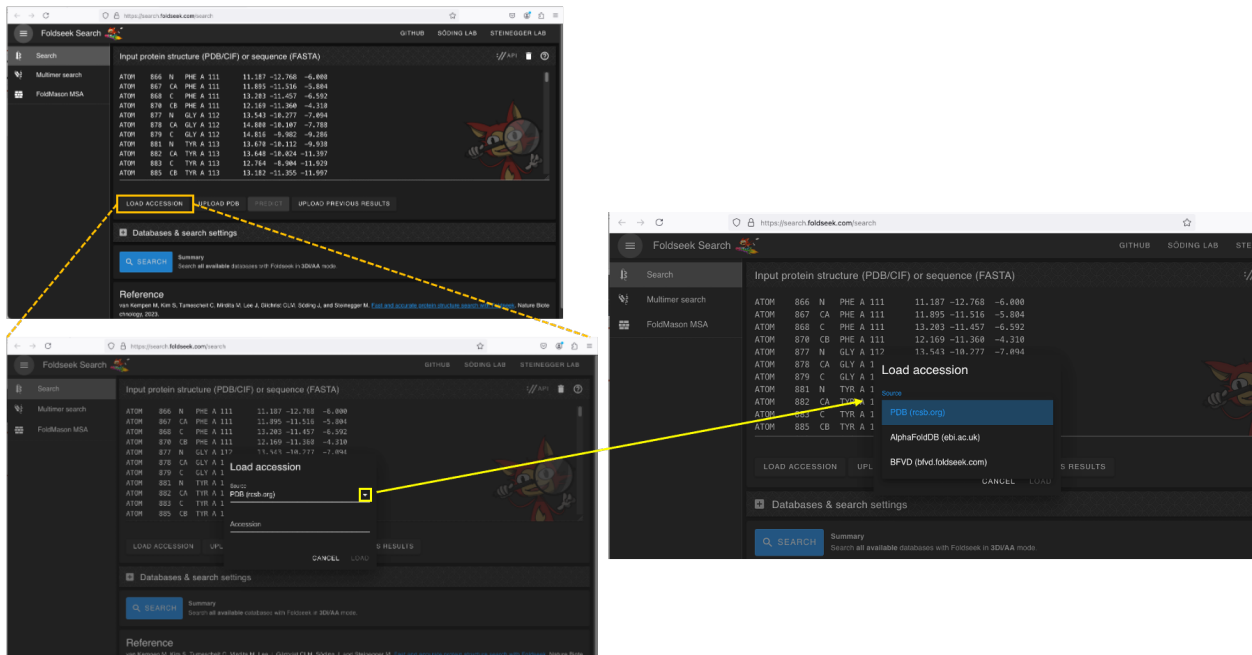
Foldseek (Online Server)

Foldseek Search online server can be accessed here: <https://search.foldseek.com/search>

Following the link opens to the search portal.



Data can be uploaded from a local machine in either PDB or CIF formats using the “UPLOAD PDB” button. The “LOAD ACCESSION” button allows you to import a PDB from a repository (e.g. RCSB Protein Data Bank).



Results from a previous analysis can be uploaded using the “UPLOAD PREVIOUS RESULTS” button.

The screenshot shows the Foldseek Search web interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Input protein structure (PDB/CIF) or sequence (FASTA)". Below this, a table displays search results for 10 atoms. The table has columns for atom ID, chain, residue name, and three numerical values representing structural metrics.

Atom ID	Chain	Residue Name	Value 1	Value 2	Value 3
ATOM 866	N	PHE A 111	11.187	-12.768	-6.000
ATOM 867	CA	PHE A 111	11.895	-11.516	-5.804
ATOM 868	C	PHE A 111	13.203	-11.457	-6.592
ATOM 870	CB	PHE A 111	12.169	-11.360	-4.310
ATOM 877	N	GLY A 112	13.543	-10.277	-7.094
ATOM 878	CA	GLY A 112	14.800	-10.107	-7.788
ATOM 879	C	GLY A 112	14.816	-9.982	-9.286
ATOM 881	N	TYR A 113	13.670	-10.112	-9.938
ATOM 882	CA	TYR A 113	13.648	-10.024	-11.397
ATOM 883	C	TYR A 113	12.764	-8.904	-11.929
ATOM 885	CB	TYR A 113	13.182	-11.355	-11.997

Below the table, there are four buttons: "LOAD ACCESSION", "UPLOAD PDB", "PREDICT", and "UPLOAD PREVIOUS RESULTS". The "UPLOAD PDB" and "UPLOAD PREVIOUS RESULTS" buttons are highlighted with yellow boxes. Below these buttons is a section for "Databases & search settings" with a "SEARCH" button. At the bottom, there is a "Reference" section with a citation: van Kempen M, Kim S, Tumescheit C, Mirdita M, Lee J, Gilchrist CLM, Söding J, and Steinegger M. [Fast and accurate protein structure search with Foldseek](#). Nature Biotechnology, 2023.

If desired, the databases and search settings can be modified (e.g., alignment and taxonomic filtering).

This screenshot shows the "Databases & search settings" panel of the Foldseek Search interface. The panel is open, revealing a list of databases with checkboxes next to them. The "Mode" section has radio buttons for "3D/AA" (selected) and "TM-align". There is also a "Taxonomic filter" section. The "SEARCH" button is visible at the bottom of the panel. A yellow dashed arrow points from the "Databases & search settings" button in the main interface to this panel.

Databases & search settings

- BFVD 2023_02
- AlphaFold/UniProt50 v4
- AlphaFold/Swiss-Prot v4
- AlphaFold/Proteome v4
- BFMID 20240823
- CATH50 4.3.0
- MGnify-ESM30 v1
- PDB100 20240101
- GMGCL 2204

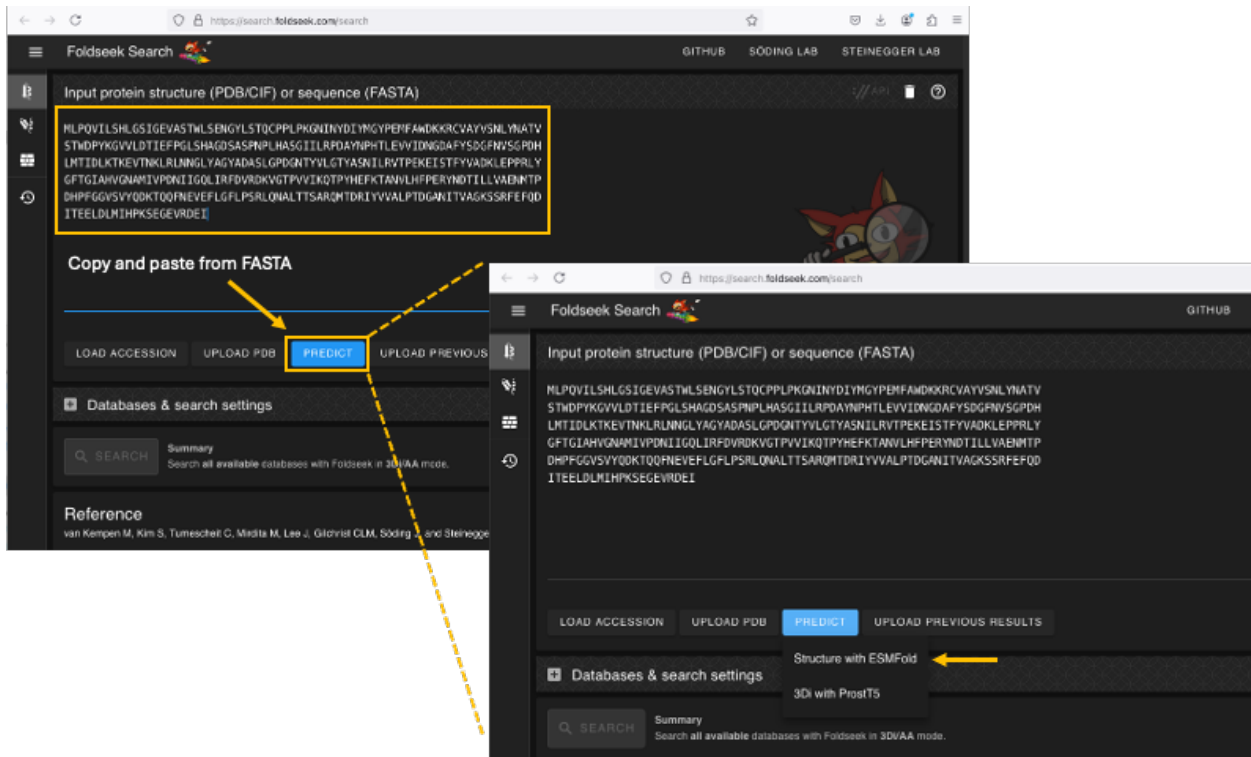
Mode

- 3D/AA
- TM-align

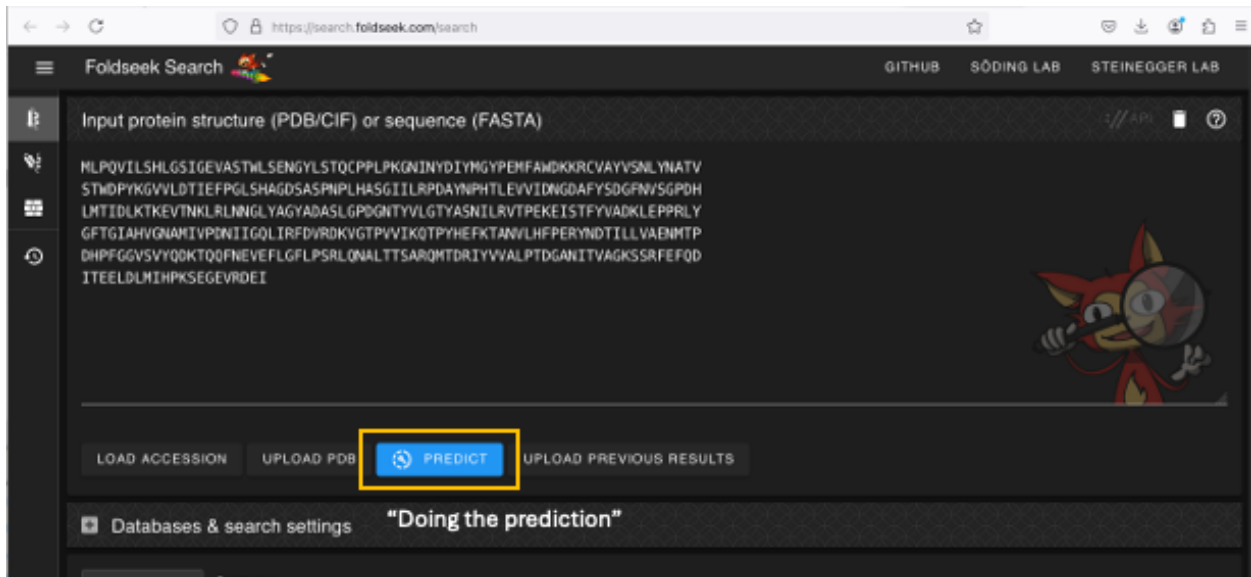
Taxonomic filter

Here we are going to open our FASTA file and past our protein sequence from a FASTA file directly into the input field, click predict, and use ESMFold.

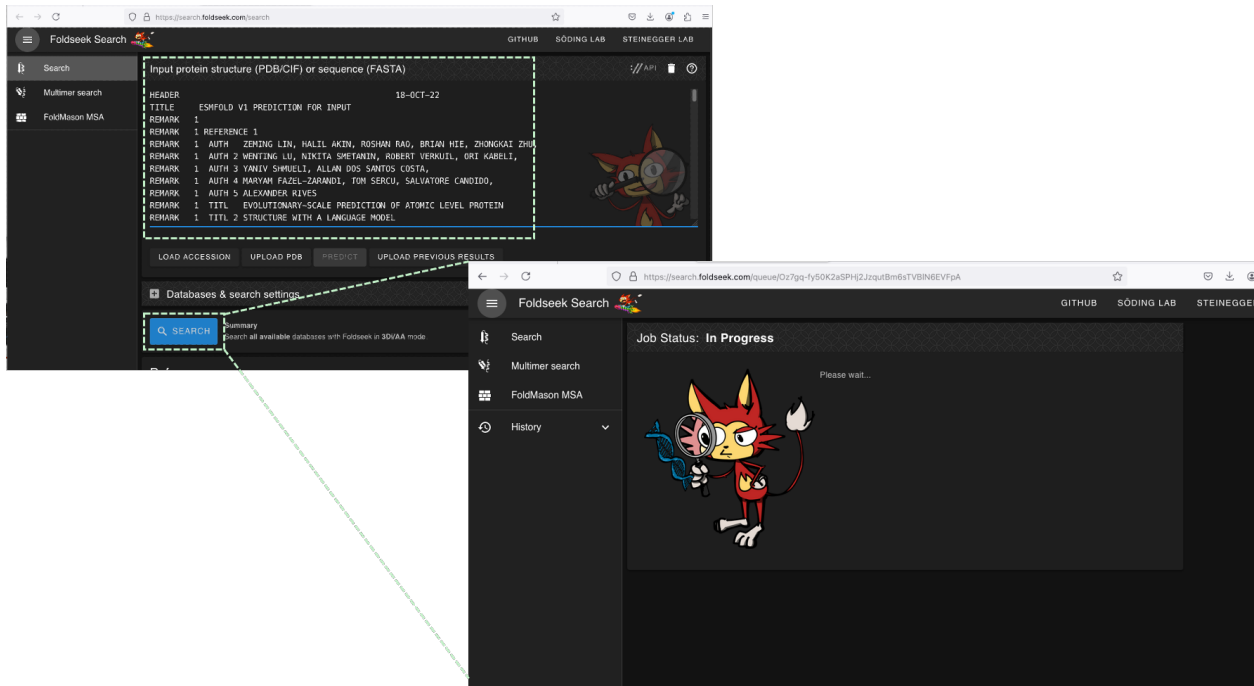
NOTE: FASTA input cannot be uploaded and must be pasted in



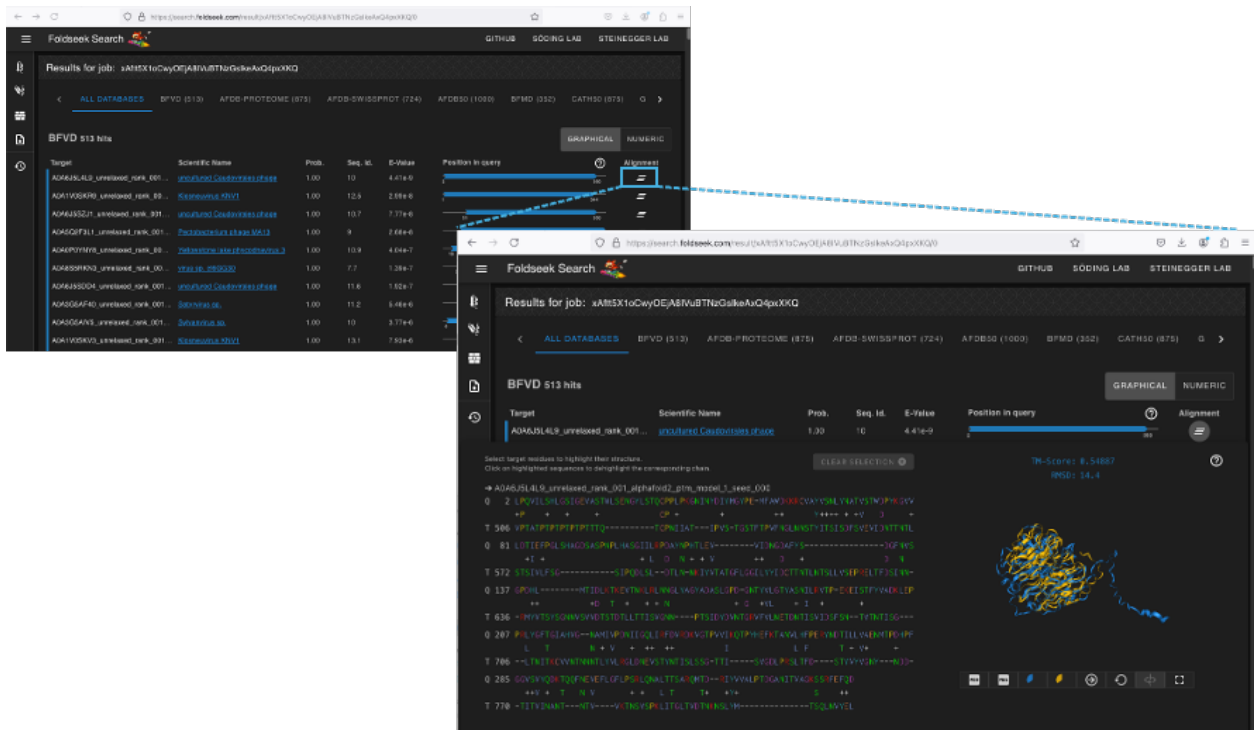
After selecting the method, generate the prediction by clicking “predict”.



Once the prediction completes, we can then search:



The hits from each database are made available, can now be explored, and saved.



RESULTS CAN BE SAVED IN EITHER PDB OR IMAGE FORMAT (PNG) BY CLICKING THE BUTTONS BELOW THE SUPERPOSITION.

The screenshot displays the Foldseek Search web interface. At the top, the search query is `xAlt5X1oCwyOEjA8IVuBTNzGskkAxQ4pxXKQ`. The search results are categorized by database, with 'BFVD' having 513 hits. The top result is 'A0A6J5L4L9_unrelaxed_rank_001...', identified as 'unrelaxed Casp10Sbs_rface' with a probability of 1.00, 10% sequence identity, and an E-value of $4.41e-9$. The interface shows a sequence alignment between the query and the target, with a TM-score of 8.54887 and an RMSD of 14.4. A 3D protein structure is visualized on the right, and a red box highlights the 'PDB' and 'Image' buttons below it, indicating where users can save the results.