



**Politecnico
di Torino**

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Master's Degree in Mathematical Engineering

Material for Thesis

b– Data Pre-processing Pipeline in GSE69914
— Illumina 450K

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Abstract

**MANCA L'ABSTRACT, LO SCRIVO DOPO.
AGGIUNGI I LINK AI NOTEBOOK - GITHUB SIA PER DATASET CONSTRUCTION AND STORAGE CHE PER IL DATASET PRE PROCESSING.**

1 Dataset construction and storage

I constructed the working methylation matrix in three stages, prioritizing speed, low memory usage, and reproducible I/O.

1. **Ingestion and transposition.** I parsed the GEO Series Matrix for GSE69914, skipping the 73-line metadata header. The source table is organized as $CpG \times sample$ with ID_REF as CpG identifiers; I coerced all sample columns to numeric (invalid entries set to NaN) and then transposed the matrix to the analysis layout $sample \times CpG$. After transposition, I promoted the original column names (GSM accessions / basenames) to a dedicated identifier column named `id_tissue` and kept CpG probe columns only (prefix `cg` or `ch`).

2. **Label derivation and append-only write.** I derived the class label directly from GSM metadata by parsing the field *status* (*0=normal*, *1=normal-adjacent*, *2=breast cancer*, *3=normal-BRCA1*, *4=cancer-BRCA1*), producing a numeric `label` in $\{0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}$. To avoid an in-memory join on a very wide table ($\sim 485k$ CpGs), I streamed through the transposed file once and appended `label` row-wise, preserving row order and ensuring constant memory usage.
3. **Columnar storage and typed schema.** For long-term access, I wrote the labeled table to columnar **Parquet** with a fixed schema: `label` as `Int8` and probe intensities as `Float32`. I applied a lazy, regex-based column projection (`cg|ch`) to cast all probe columns in one pass and compressed the file with lossless LZ4. This yields fast full-table reads and efficient column projection (both in Polars and pandas) without repeatedly parsing large CSV text.

This procedure produces a compact, typed matrix that enables rapid downstream preprocessing (technical filtering, normalization) and modeling without incurring large RAM overhead or costly re-ingestion steps.

2 Import and Data Structure

The processed dataset is imported from the LZ4-compressed `.parquet` file generated in the previous step. The structure is already optimized for analysis.

- **File format:** columnar **Parquet** (LZ4 compression) for fast I/O.
- **Rows:** samples (one per tissue).
- **Columns:**
 - `id_tissue`: unique sample identifier.
 - `label`: numeric class code (`Int8`).
 - `cg`, `ch`: methylation probes (`Float32`).
- **Import method:** read via **Polars** (or **pandas**) with column projection for efficient partial loading.

Precision and data representation. Because β -values are strictly bounded within $[0, 1]$ [1], and methylation differences of biological interest typically occur at magnitudes between 10^{-2} and 10^{-3} , single-precision floating point (`float32`, machine $\epsilon \approx 10^{-7}$) provides more than adequate numerical accuracy while significantly reducing memory usage and I/O time. This representation is further supported by recent large-scale genomics frameworks that process molecular features, including DNA methylation data, entirely in `float32` precision [2].

Moreover, this format ensures minimal memory usage and extremely fast access for all downstream preprocessing and analysis tasks.

3 Data Validation and Integrity Check

Data Validation. I validated the structural integrity of the processed dataset to ensure that its layout, types, and values were correctly preserved after conversion and compression.

- **Dimensions:** the dataset contains (407, 485.514) entries, corresponding to **samples \times CpG loci**. ✓ confirmed as expected: 407 samples and 485.514 probes.
- **Data types:** `id_tissue` is stored as `String`, `label` as `Int8`, and probe intensities as `Float32`, ensuring **compact representation** and sufficient precision for β -values. ✓ verified: `String`, `Int8`, `Float32` schema detected.
- **Value range:** all β -values fall within the valid range $0 \leq \beta \leq 1$, confirming their correct interpretation as methylation proportions. ✓ The observed range was $[0.000000, 0.997110]$.

Missing Value Analysis. Next, I performed a comprehensive check for missing values (NaN), as these can severely impact model performance and must be addressed before training.

- No missing entries (NaN) were detected across any CpG probe. ✓ Total NaN count: 0 — Overall missing rate: 0%.
- The methylation matrix is therefore **complete**, requiring **no filtering or imputation** procedures. ✓ Dataset confirmed fully complete.

- For future datasets:
 - If the overall missing rate is $< 1\%$, imputation may be considered as an optional step.
 - If probe missingness exceeds 5% or sample missingness exceeds 10%, the affected entities should be discarded, following standard preprocessing practices [3].

This validation confirms the dataset is structurally sound, numerically consistent, and complete, enabling unbiased downstream variance modeling, differential methylation testing, and batch correction without any further cleaning

4 Technical Filtering

Technical filtering aims to remove unreliable or biologically confounded probes before normalization and statistical modeling. This step reduces noise, improves downstream reproducibility, and ensures that only high-confidence CpG loci are retained for analysis.

Exclusion of technical probe sets. Next, I removed probes listed in curated exclusion sets that are known to produce biased or ambiguous signals:

- **SNP-affected probes:** excluded to avoid spurious methylation differences caused by underlying genetic polymorphisms.
- **Cross-reactive probes:** removed according to validated lists from Naeem et al. (2014) [4] and Pidsley et al. (2016) [5], which identify probes that hybridize to multiple genomic loci.
- **Sex chromosome probes:** optionally filtered if downstream analyses focus exclusively on autosomal loci.

[Results pending: number of probes removed by each list, remaining CpG count, updated dataset size.]

Detection p -value filtering. For each probe, the detection p -value measures the probability that its fluorescence intensity is indistinguishable from the background. Probes with detection p -value > 0.01 – 0.05 in more than 1–5% of samples were excluded, as they likely represent unreliable hybridization or poor signal quality [6]. This filtering step follows Illumina’s quality control recommendations and standard practices for methylation array preprocessing.

[Results pending: summary of removed probes, percentage excluded, post-filter matrix dimensions.]

Annotation-based filtering. Finally, I performed a cross-check with official Illumina annotation files and updated curated probe databases [3] to ensure that only valid, well-characterized loci were retained. This step allows harmonization between older 450K annotations and updated genome builds (e.g., hg19 \rightarrow hg38) and ensures consistent CpG naming across datasets.

[Results pending: number of probes retained after annotation matching, summary table or plot of final coverage.]

Outcome. After technical filtering, the dataset is expected to retain only high-confidence probes suitable for reliable normalization and subsequent biological interpretation.

[Results pending: summary of total retained CpGs, fraction of genome covered, histogram or density plot of detection p -values.]

5 Filtering of Invariant CpGs

Remove CpGs with very low variance (e.g., variance $< 1 \times 10^{-4}$), as they carry no discriminative information (Naeem et al., 2014).

6 Correction of Infinium I/II Probe Bias

Integrate probe design information (Type I / Type II) from Illumina annotation files and inspect density distributions. Apply **Peak-Based Correction (PBC)** when clear bimodal peaks (near 0 and 1) are visible (Teschendorff et al., 2013). In parallel, apply **BMIQ normalization** as a robust alternative and compare results across normalization strategies.

7 Transformation to M-values

Convert β -values to M-values using $M = \log_2 \left(\frac{\beta}{1-\beta} \right)$ to stabilize variance and improve suitability for linear modeling (Du et al., 2010).

CpG Variability Diagnosis (post M-value):

Compute variance or interquartile range (IQR) across samples for each CpG to obtain a diagnostic ranking of variable loci. Highly variable CpGs are typically more informative for distinguishing normal and normal-adjacent tissues. (Naeem et al., 2014; Phipson et al., 2014). Optionally, visualize the variance distribution or perform PCA on top-variable CpGs to assess early group separation.

8 Batch-Effect Correction

Remove inter-array technical variation using **ComBat** (Johnson et al., 2007) or its methylation-specific extension **ComBat-met** (Wang et al., 2025).

If batch effects are confounded with biological groups, include the batch variable as a covariate in linear modeling (e.g., *limma*).

9 Preliminary Statistical Filters

Levene / Brown–Forsythe test: assesses homogeneity of variances across groups.

DiffVar: empirical Bayes model for differential variance detection (Phipson et al., 2014).

limma: moderated linear model for differential methylation, suitable for M-values and inclusion of covariates (Ritchie et al., 2015).

iEVORA: extension of EVORA for identifying CpGs with increased epigenetic instability in pre-neoplastic or field-defect tissues (Teschendorff et al., 2012).

10 Correlation Pruning

Remove redundant CpGs with high inter-correlation (e.g., Pearson $|r| > 0.9$) within local genomic regions to reduce collinearity (Gatev et al., 2020; Bommert et al., 2022).

11 Feature Standardization for Machine Learning

Standardize features (e.g., z-score transformation or **StandardScaler**) on M-values to ensure comparable scales across CpGs. Fit the scaler on the training fold and apply it to the test fold to prevent data leakage. (Friedman et al., 2010; Aref-Eshghi et al., 2025).

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