

¹ The SIRIUS API: Programmatic Access to Metabolite Annotation

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Software

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¹⁰ Summary

¹¹ Metabolomics plays a crucial role in understanding biological systems, with mass spectrometry¹² being the method of choice for analyzing complex metabolite mixtures, due to its high sensitivity¹³ and throughput. However, compound annotation remains a major bottleneck in metabolomics¹⁴ workflows, as for the majority of detected signals no reference spectra are found in spectral¹⁵ libraries. This so-called "dark metabolome" ([da Silva et al., 2015](#)) necessitates approaches that¹⁶ can annotate metabolites without relying on spectral library matching. SIRIUS ([Böcker et al., 2009; Dührkop et al., 2019](#)) is a comprehensive software framework for annotating metabolites¹⁷ and other small molecules from tandem mass spectrometry (MS/MS) data without the need of¹⁸ reference spectra, while still supporting spectral matching when reference spectra are available.

¹⁹ Here, we introduce a RESTful API for SIRIUS that adheres to the OpenAPI Specification. This²⁰ enables programmatic access and seamless integration of SIRIUS into computational workflows²¹ while future-proofing projects towards later changes by separating the storage layer from the²² access layer. Built on this foundation, we present *PySirius* and *RSirius*, client libraries for²³ Python and R available via conda-forge, alongside a SIRIUS Java SDK. These clients facilitate²⁴ integration into bioinformatics pipelines, statistical analyses, data visualization workflows,²⁵ and other software. Actively maintained on GitHub, the API and client libraries democratize²⁶ access to state-of-the-art metabolite annotation and enable reproducible research practices in²⁷ computational metabolomics.²⁸

²⁹ Statement of need

³⁰ Many specialized metabolomics tools, including SIRIUS for annotation of MS/MS spectra with³¹ molecular formulas, structures, and compound classes, are designed as standalone applications³² accessed through command-line or graphical interfaces. Clearly, a graphical user interface is³³ of massive value for allowing inexperienced user accessing a computational tool ([Ludwig et](#)³⁴ [al., 2020](#)). Yet, this architecture also creates barriers for the integration into automated³⁵ computational workflows and advanced data mining: Users must parse text outputs or³⁶ intermediate files, and cannot access granular results programmatically.

³⁷ This challenge was exemplified in SIRIUS 5, where a project directory of plain-text files served³⁸ as both the storage layer and the primary point of user access. This tight coupling created³⁹ a difficult dilemma: either break established user workflows by changing file formats to add⁴⁰ new features, or hinder innovation to maintain backward compatibility. The transition to an

41 embedded database in SIRIUS 6 solved the innovation bottleneck, but by removing direct file
42 access, it increases the barrier for users needing to programmatically integrate SIRIUS results.

43 The SIRIUS API addresses these limitations by providing programmatic access to all SIRIUS
44 capabilities through a standardized, storage-independent interface. This decoupled architecture
45 separates the data storage layer from the data access layer. It enables direct retrieval of
46 specific information at any granularity, and allows true integration into existing data analysis
47 environments while simultaneously permitting the internal storage formats to evolve without
48 breaking user-facing compatibility.

49 Furthermore, the SIRIUS API enables a more interactive data analysis paradigm. Users
50 are no longer required to load entire project spaces (which can be gigabytes in size) into
51 memory. Instead, they can fetch specific, fine-grained results on demand or selectively perform
52 (re-)computations with new parameters.

53 State of the field

54 Python and R dominate metabolomic data analysis, backed by libraries like *pyOpenMS* (Röst
55 et al., 2014), *matchms* (Huber et al., 2020), and the RforMassSpectrometry initiative including
56 *Spectra* and *Metabonaut* (Louail & Rainer, 2025). *PySirius* and *RSirius* bring SIRIUS into
57 these established ecosystems for the first time, enabling seamless workflows alongside statistical
58 analyses, visualizations, and machine learning models.

59 SIRIUS integrations for multiple widely used mass spectrometry tools such as *MZmine* (v4.8)
60 (Schmid et al., 2023), *Agilent MassHunter Explorer* (v2.0) and *RuSirius* (RforMassSpectrometry)
61 are already based on the SIRIUS API, further demonstrating community demand for
62 programmatic access to SIRIUS.

63 Software design

64 The SIRIUS Application Programming Interface (API), initially released with SIRIUS version
65 6.0.0, is a major architectural update that offers several strategic advantages:

66 Comprehensive programmatic access to functionality

67 The API exposes the complete spectrum of SIRIUS analytical capabilities through programmatic
68 interfaces, encompassing spectral library searching, computation of fragmentation trees (Böcker
69 & Dührkop, 2016; Böcker & Rasche, 2008), annotation of molecular formulas (Dührkop et
70 al., 2013) (orange in Figure 1), structure database search with CSI:FingerID (Dührkop et al.,
71 2015), compound class prediction with CANOPUS (Dührkop et al., 2021), *de novo* molecular
72 structure prediction with MSNovelist (Stravs et al., 2021) and additional methods. This avoids
73 the need to parse command-line interface outputs or manipulate intermediate file formats.

74 Fine-grained and direct data retrieval

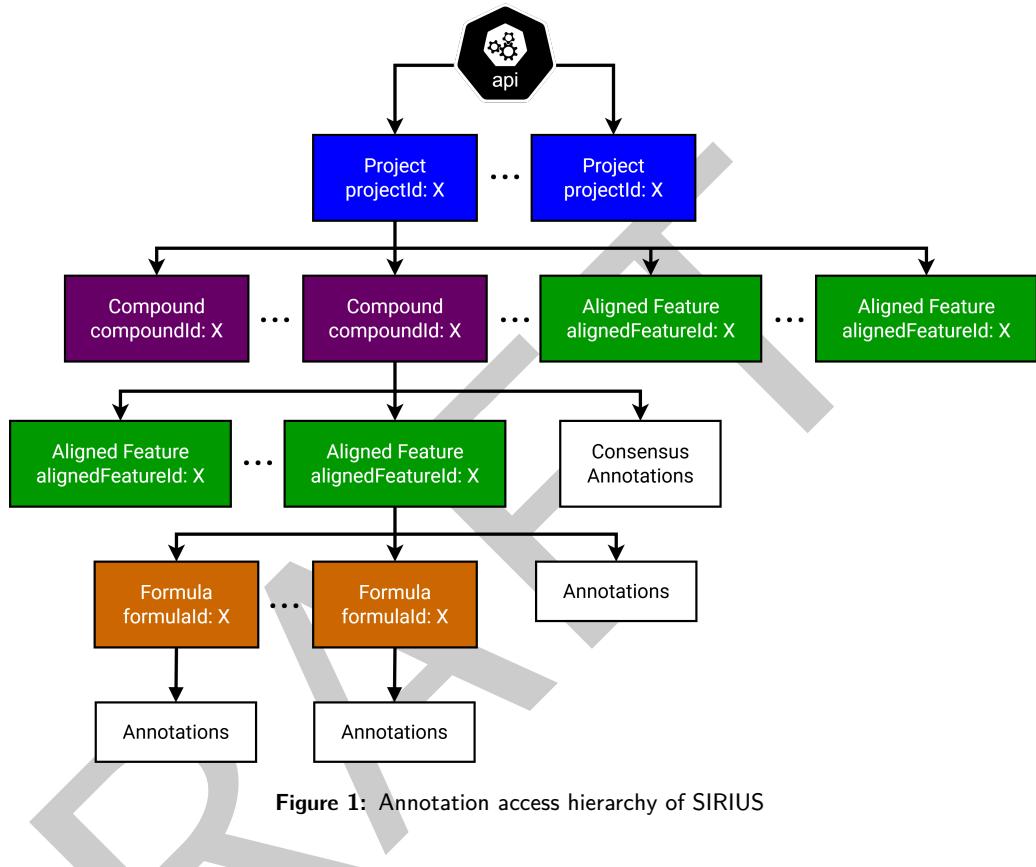
75 The API allows direct retrieval of specific data elements at arbitrary levels of granularity
76 (Figure 1). This spans from individual feature-level results to project-wide summaries, thereby
77 enabling more efficient and precisely targeted analytical workflows.

78 Decoupled architectural design

79 The API separates the data persistence layer from the data access layer, which permits
80 modifications to core SIRIUS functionality without invalidating existing project data structures.
81 This architectural decision ensures forward compatibility for future SIRIUS updates, addressing
82 the compatibility limitations encountered during the transition from SIRIUS version 5 to 6.

83 Platform-agnostic integration capabilities

84 The implementation according to the OpenAPI Specification guarantees that SIRIUS
 85 functionality remains accessible from any programming language ecosystem equipped with
 86 standard HTTP communication libraries.



87 API architecture

88 The core of the API consists of modules that enable programmatic control over the small
 89 molecule annotation workflow. These modules operate on the hierarchical structure of a SIRIUS
 90 project (Figure 1), which typically correlates to one LC-MS/MS experiment that can include
 91 multiple runs. SIRIUS operates on preprocessed data, accepting either preprocessed spectral
 92 inputs or raw mzML files that undergo automated preprocessing. This hierarchy begins at the
 93 molecular level, where compounds (purple in Figure 1) represent individual chemical entities.
 94 During mass spectrometric analysis, a single compound can generate multiple features, signals
 95 from molecules or ions detected across experimental runs, encompassing different ionization
 96 states that vary in retention time and mass-to-charge ratio. Alignment of these features over
 97 the different runs produces aligned features (green in Figure 1), the main access point for
 98 annotations in SIRIUS. This one-to-many relationship enables SIRIUS to provide consensus
 99 annotations by integrating evidence across features associated with the same compound. The
 100 API focuses on enabling programmatic access to molecular annotations rather than low-level
 101 signal processing, though experimental data like traces remain accessible when needed

102 Projects API

103 The projects API module administers SIRIUS project spaces (blue in Figure 1), which are
 104 isolated computational environments containing input spectral data and associated analysis
 105 results. This module allows to manage (create, open, close, delete) projects and import

106 mass spectrometry data from various formats. It further provides access to prediction vector
107 definitions utilized by CSI:FingerID and CANOPUS.

108 Compounds API

109 The compounds API module manages compound entities (purple in [Figure 1](#)) within projects.
110 Compound manipulation operations encompass addition, deletion, and information retrieval.

111 Features API

112 The features API module facilitates manipulation of aligned features (green in [Figure 1](#)) as well
113 as retrieval of their associated annotation results. Analogous to the compounds API, available
114 operations include addition, deletion, and information retrieval. Accessible annotations include
115 essentially all computational results generated by methods implemented within SIRIUS.

116 Searchable databases API

117 The searchable databases API module manages custom spectral and structural database
118 resources. This module supports creation and deletion of custom databases, import of new
119 entries into existing databases, retrieval of database metadata, and enumeration of all custom
120 and built-in databases available within the SIRIUS environment. As spectra must be annotated
121 with a structure, any spectral library also functions as a structure database.

122 Jobs API

123 The jobs API module controls annotation job workflows. Users can define custom job
124 configurations specifying which analytical methods to apply to designated datasets. These
125 jobs can then be executed, monitored, terminated, or deleted as needed. Job configurations
126 can be saved for reuse, and their command-line equivalents retrieved for reproducibility.

127 Client libraries

128 Built on the RESTful API, *PySirius*, *RSirius*, and a Java client library provide idiomatic
129 interfaces for Python, R, and Java users, respectively. The libraries are automatically generated
130 from the OpenAPI specification using the [OpenAPI Generator](#), occasionally requiring custom
131 templates and automated patches for full compatibility. The SIRIUS development team actively
132 maintains all client libraries to ensure continued compatibility and feature parity with the API.

133 All client libraries include SiriusSDK helper classes that manage the SIRIUS REST service
134 lifecycle. These classes enable starting the service from within code with automated process
135 detection, shutdown and restart capabilities, and attachment to existing instances. Methods
136 return a central API client for streamlined access to all API modules and endpoints. Researchers
137 can now analyze tandem mass spectrometry data with SIRIUS using standard Python, R and
138 Java code. This includes loading data, running jobs, and retrieving results without leaving
139 their analytical environment. The clients enable sharing of complete workflows in contained
140 environments rather than describing multi-tool methodologies.

141 Updates and maintainability

142 A CI/CD pipeline automatically generates and tests the R and Python client libraries against
143 the latest SIRIUS API for each new release. The new client versions are subsequently published
144 to conda-forge. This automated workflow ensures the client libraries remain maintainable,
145 up-to-date, and resilient as new clients are added. The SIRIUS Java SDK is part of the SIRIUS
146 main application and is therefore built and distributed alongside it.

147 Expandability and contribution

148 The OpenAPI specification enables generation of client libraries for any [supported programming](#)
149 [language](#) of the OpenAPI Generator. We welcome community contributions of additional client
150 libraries and relegate interested readers to our [contribution guidelines](#).

151 Installation via conda-forge

152 Installation of either *PySirius* or *RSirius* via conda-forge automatically installs SIRIUS as a
153 dependency.

```
154 conda install -c conda-forge py-sirius-ms      # Python client library (PySirius)  
155 conda install -c conda-forge r-sirius-ms      # R client library (RSirius)  
156 conda install -c conda-forge sirius-ms        # SIRIUS (included in the above)
```

157 Examples and documentation

158 Minimalistic examples illustrating the fundamental usage of *RSirius* and *PySirius* are provided
159 within the client library source code repository. Exemplary implementations demonstrating
160 the usage of individual functions corresponding to each [API module](#) are available in the test
161 suites for *RSirius* and *PySirius*. Comprehensive documentation for *RSirius* and *PySirius* is also
162 provided in the repository.

163 Research impact statement

164 SIRIUS and its contained methods have been named “methods to watch” in *Nature Methods*
165 on multiple occasions ([Singh, 2020, 2023](#)). The core methods, such as CSI:FingerID and
166 CANOPUS, are established standards in the field, evidenced by hundreds of citations for
167 their foundational papers. Furthermore, the web services for these tools recently surpassed a
168 combined [one billion queries](#), demonstrating large scale adoption.

169 The Java client has enabled integration of SIRIUS into major metabolomics platforms. [MZmine](#)
170 has incorporated SIRIUS functionality directly into its workflow since version 4.8, while
171 Agilent’s [Mass Hunter Explorer](#) v2.0 integrates SIRIUS capabilities through a proprietary
172 client implementation. The RforMassSpectrometry initiative is currently adapting *RSirius* as
173 the foundation for *RuSirius*. *PySirius* and *RSirius* show more than fifty thousand combined
174 downloads on [Anaconda.org](#).

175 Availability

176 Both the [client library source code](#) and the [SIRIUS source code](#) are openly available on GitHub.
177 The client libraries are distributed via conda-forge as [py-sirius-ms](#) (*PySirius*) and [r-sirius-ms](#)
178 (*RSirius*). SIRIUS itself is available via conda-forge as [sirius-ms](#) or as direct [releases](#) on GitHub.
179 The Java client is hosted on a GitLab [package registry](#), and the SIRIUS API implementation is
180 part of the [SIRIUS repository](#).

181 AI usage disclosure

182 AI assistance was utilized for text editing of this manuscript and the [contribution guidelines](#) of
183 the client repository. All changes proposed by AI systems were manually reviewed.

184 Competing interests

185 MF, ML, MAH, KD and SB are co-founders of Bright Giant GmbH.

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