



Predicting hits with ML and limited data: 3 new tricks

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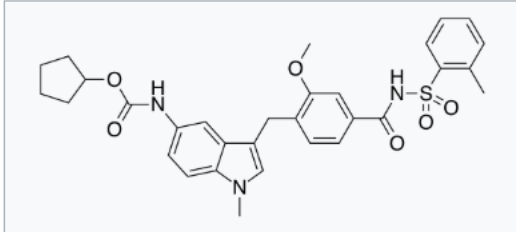
@janhjensen



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Target: some membrane protein (no X-ray structure)

Zafirlukast



IC₅₀ 2 μ M

~5 years

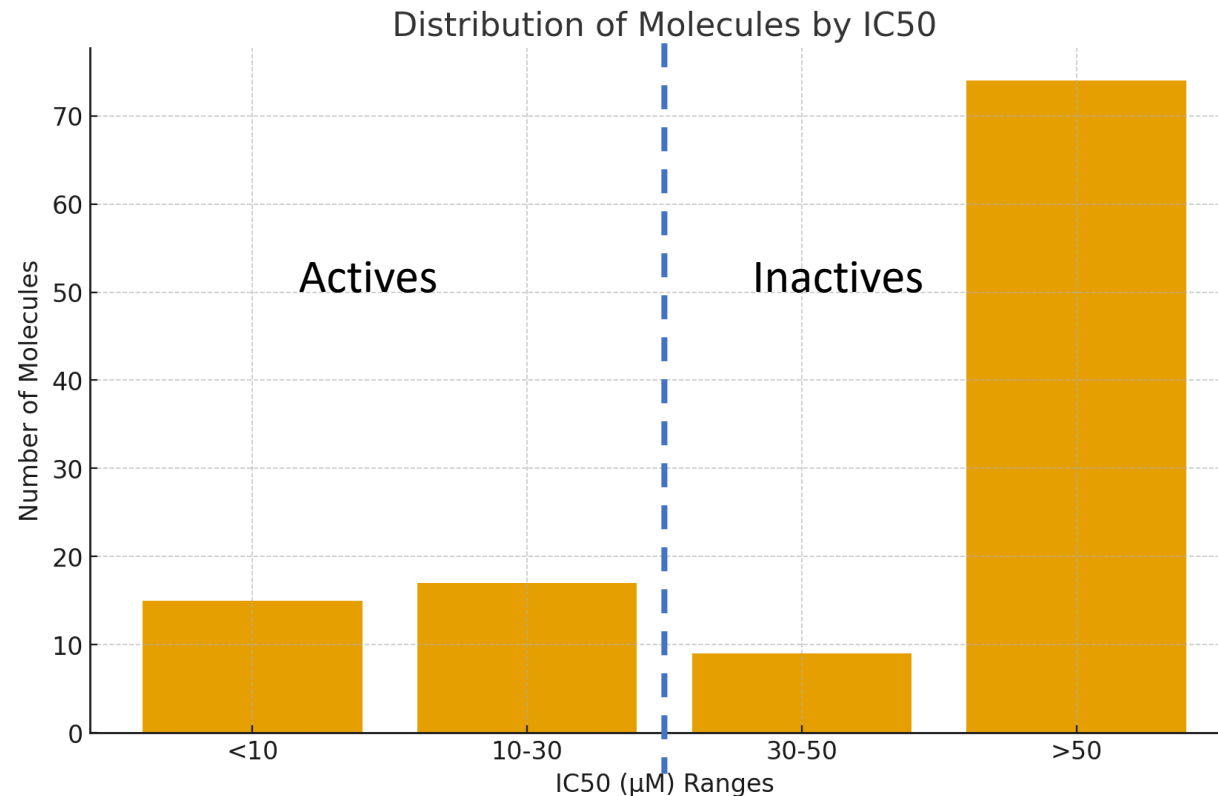
Some Pharma goodwill
BS and MSc students



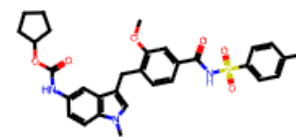
1st-year PhD student*

115 indoles

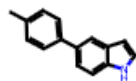
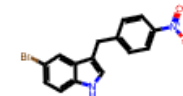
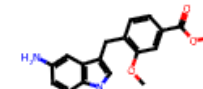
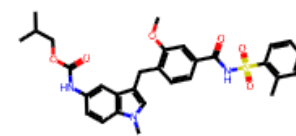
*Niels Guldager
Christian M. Pedersen
Anders Aa. Rehfeld



66% actives are zafirkulast derivatives



zafirlukast



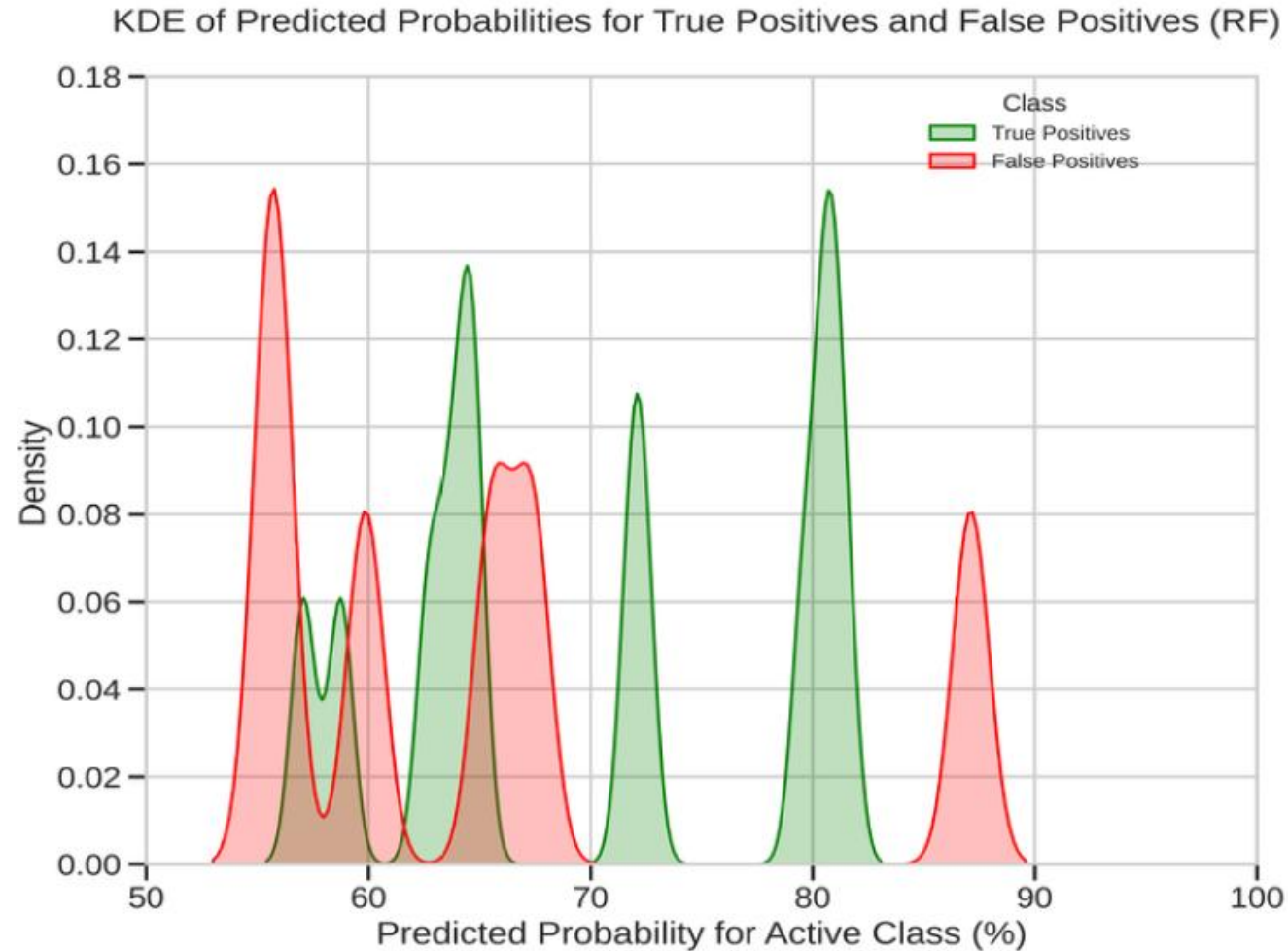
Very challenging data set: Business as usual doesn't work

ECFP4-based RF* classifier

[Henry Teahan](#)

[Maria H. Rasmussen](#)



Leave-one-out



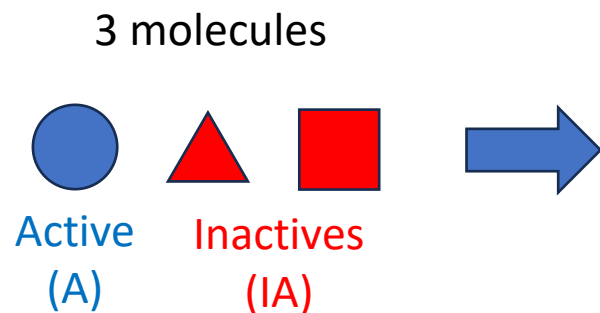
*bagged trees

Trick # 1: PDL



















Pairwise Difference Learning for Classification

Mohamed Karim Belaid^{1,2}(✉) , Maximilian Rabus² ,
and Eyke Hüllermeier³ 

Training



9 pairs

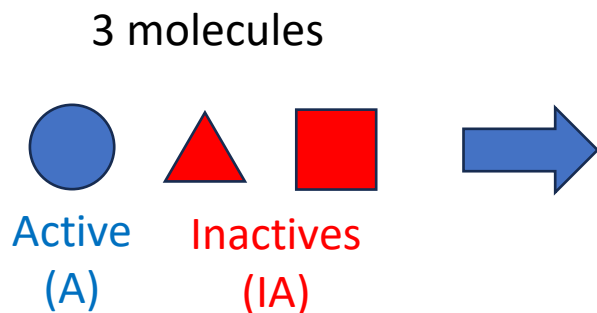
		1 (same category)
		0 (different category)
		0
		0
		1
		1 (same category)
		0
		1
		1

Trick # 1: PDL

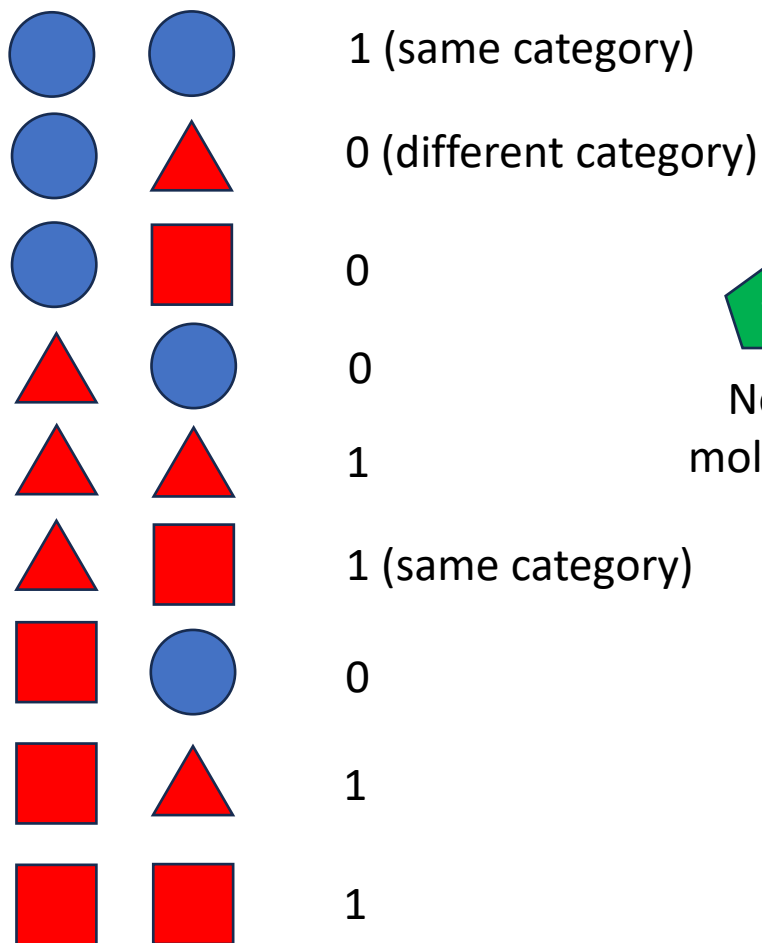
Pairwise Difference Learning for Classification


Mohamed Karim Belaid^{1,2}(✉) , Maximilian Rabus² ,
and Eyke Hüllermeier³ 

Training

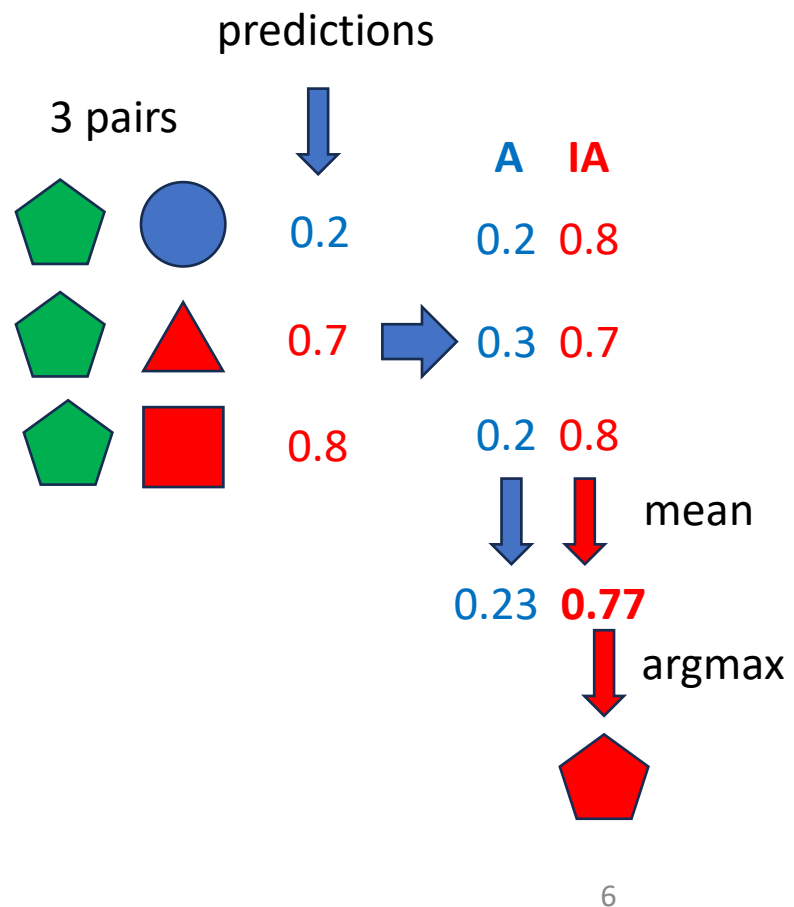


9 pairs

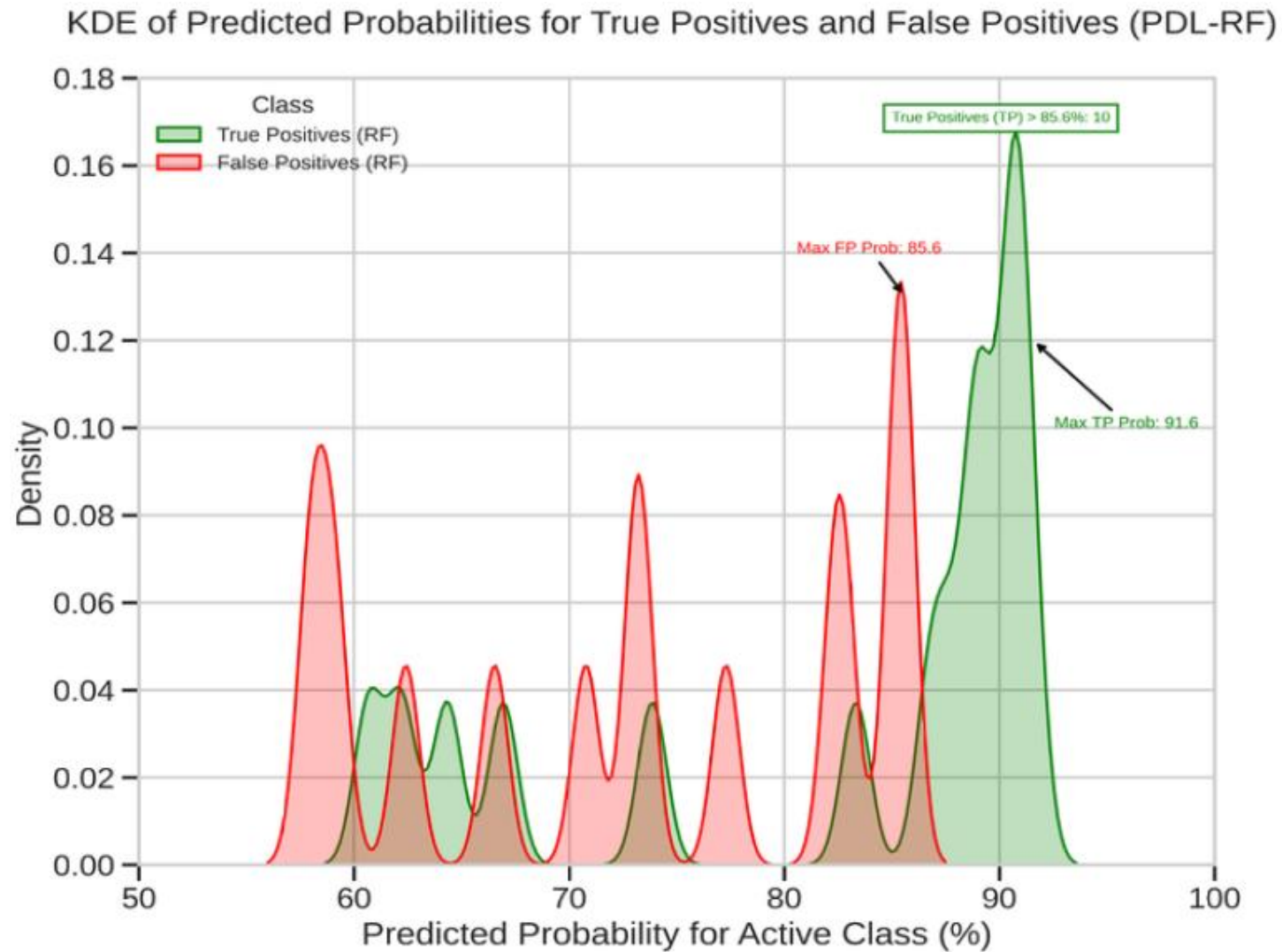



New
molecule

Deployment



PDL works much better

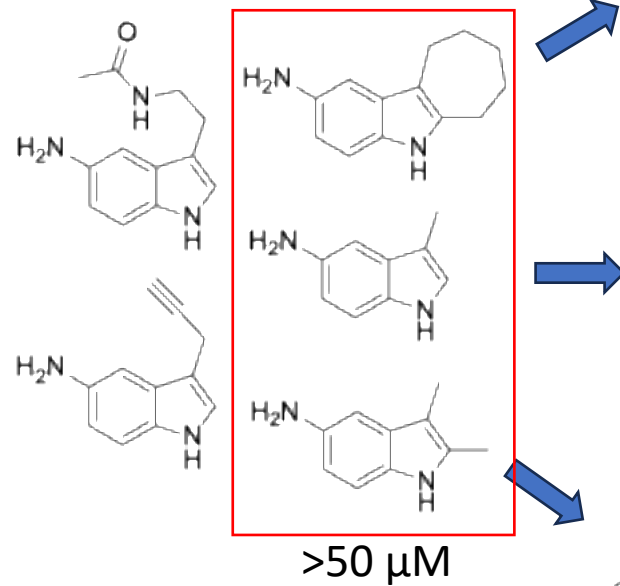


PDL fingerprint $\text{FP1} + \text{FP2} + (\text{FP1} - \text{FP2})$

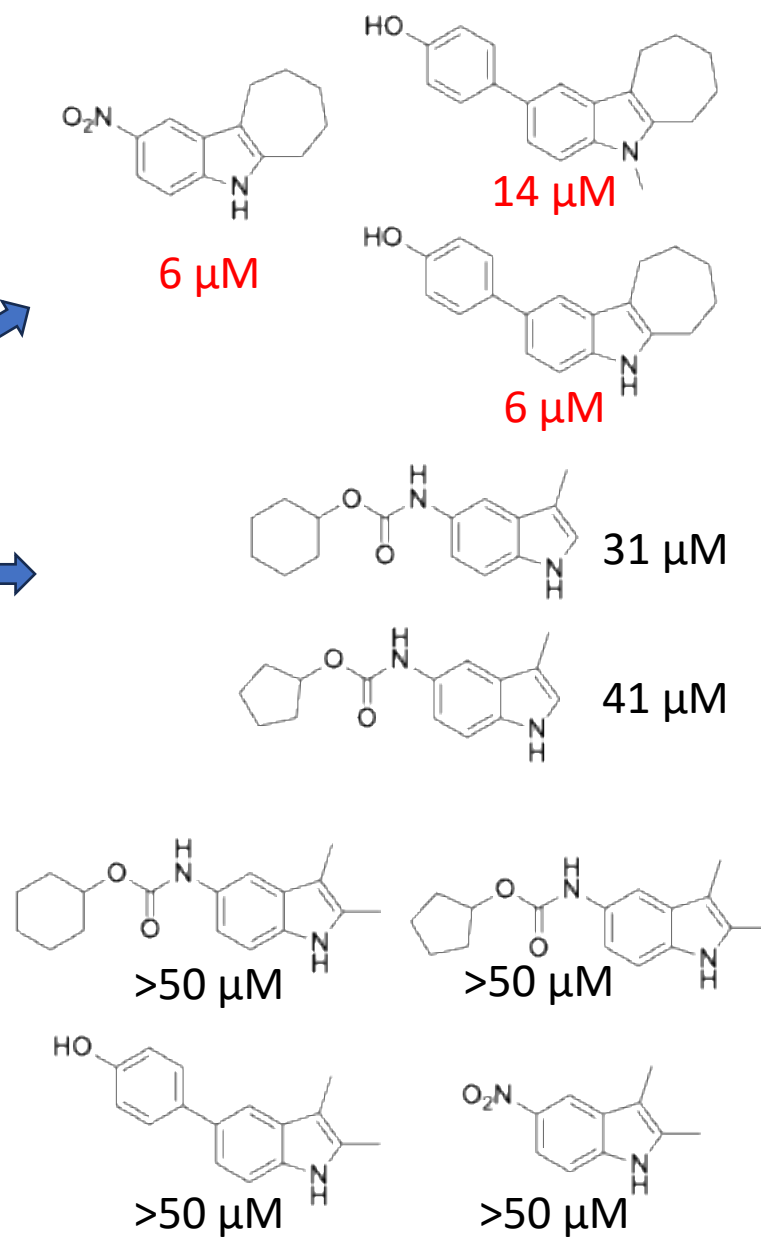


Screening Enamines Building Blocks set (1288 indoles)

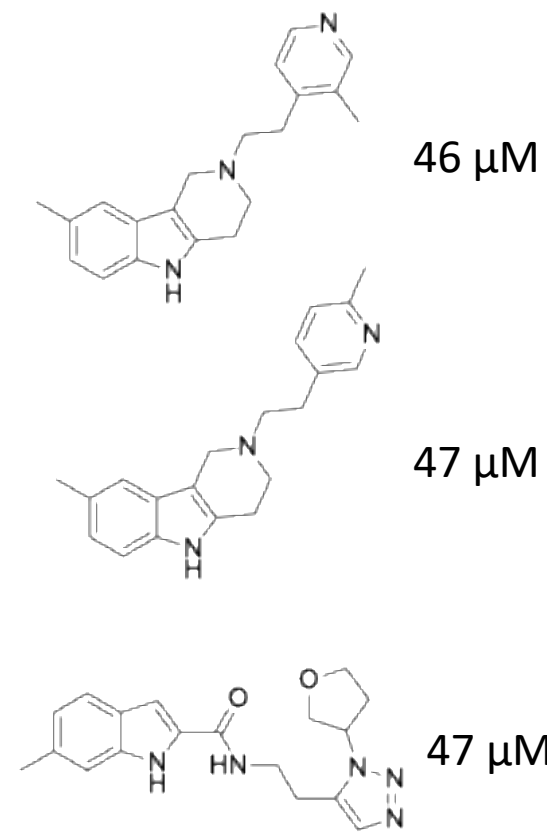
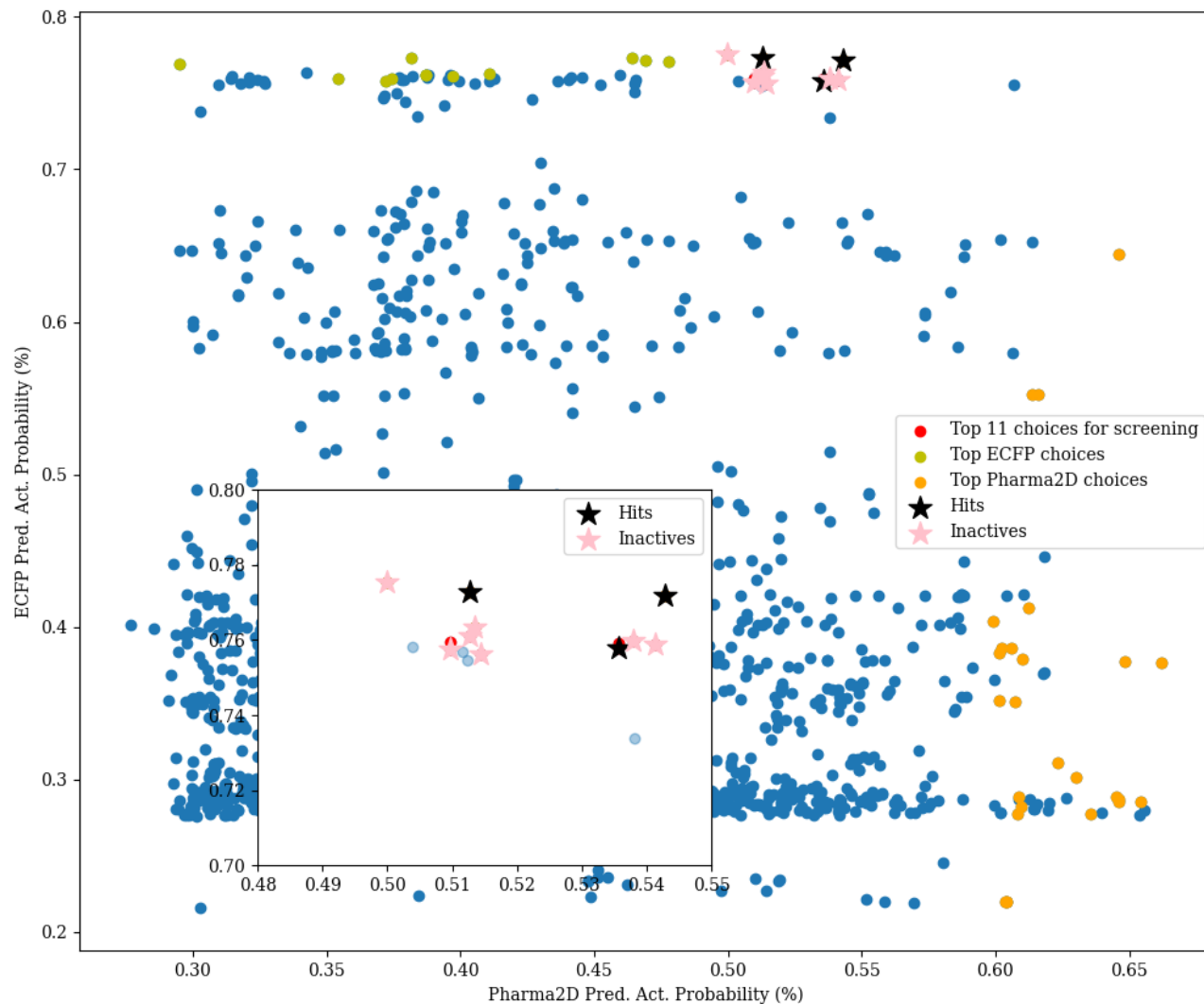
Predicted



Tested



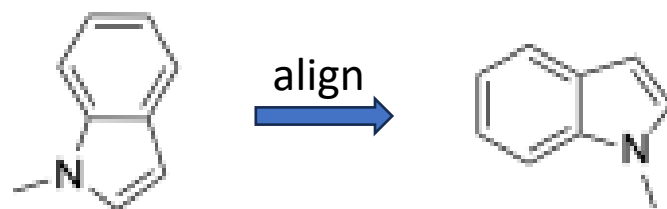
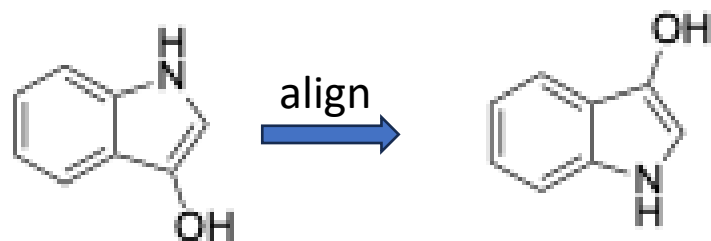
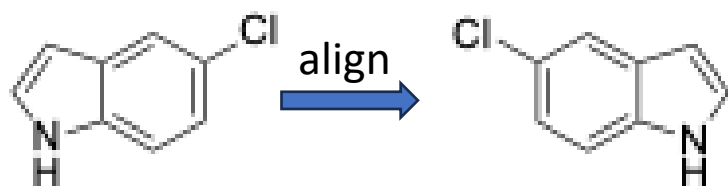
11 new predictions from Enamine Hit Locator Set (7649 indoles) (10 were tested -> 0 hits)



Trick # 2

The “2D atomic pharmacophore model”

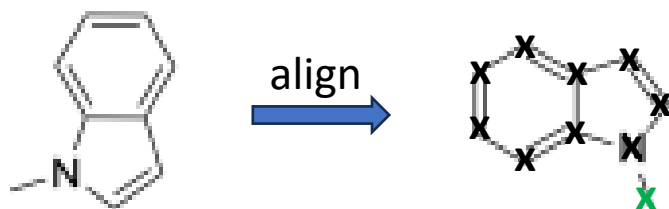
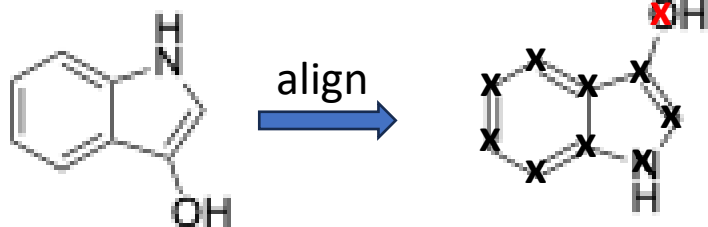
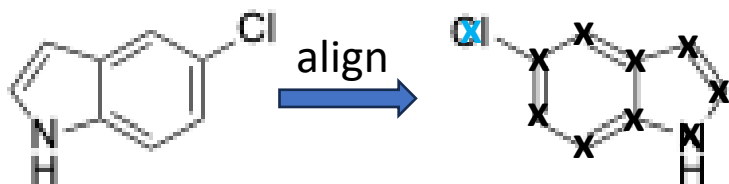
Training set



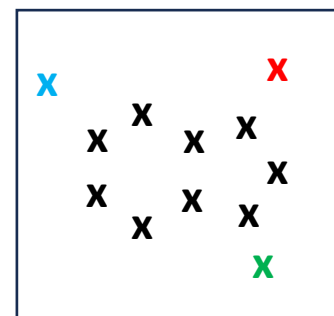
Trick # 2

The “2D atomic pharmacophore model”

Training set



Combine
& cluster
2D coords



(x, ... , x, x, x, x)

Descriptor vector

x's are...

Presence (binary)

HBD (binary)

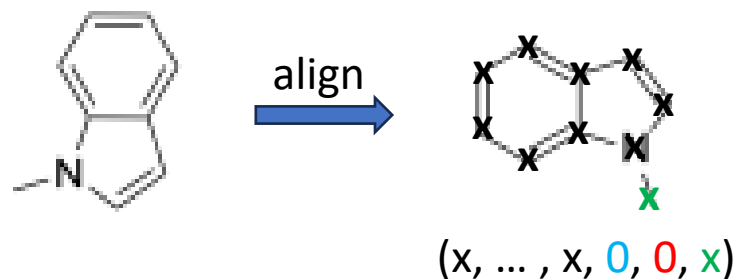
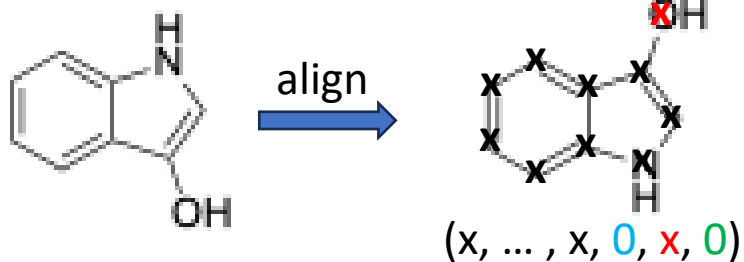
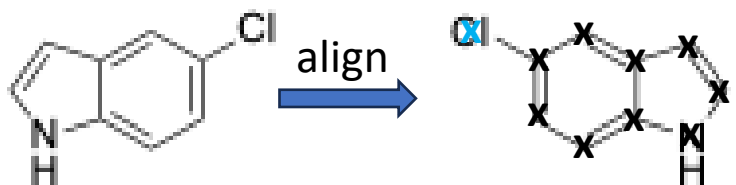
HBA (binary)

Atomic logP values (float)

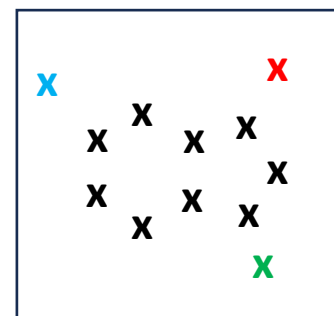
Trick # 2

The “2D atomic pharmacophore model”

Training set



Combine
& cluster
2D coords



(x, ... , x, x, x, x)
Descriptor vector

x's are...

Presence (binary)

HBD (binary)

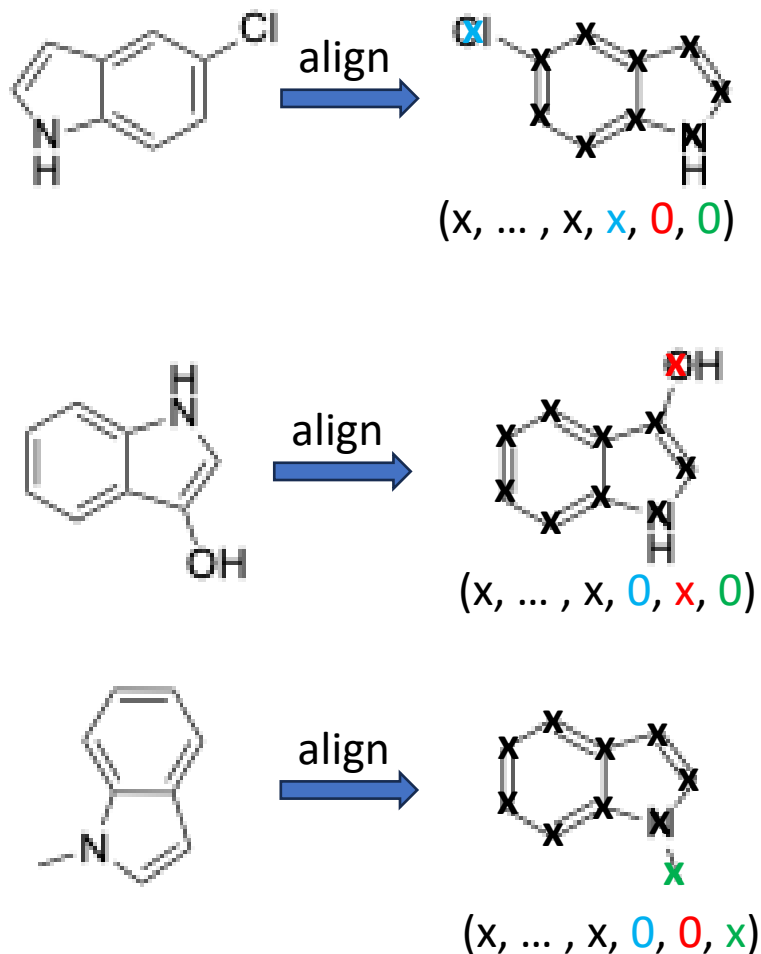
HBA (binary)

Atomic logP values (float)

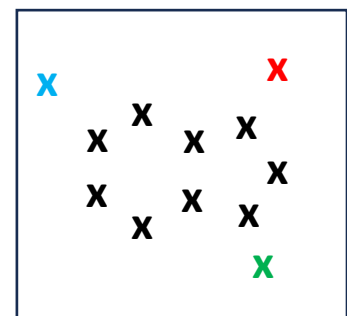
Trick # 2

The “2D atomic pharmacophore model”

Training set



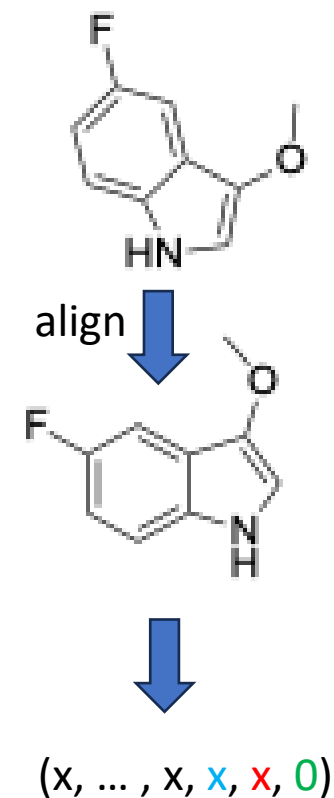
Combine
& cluster
2D coords

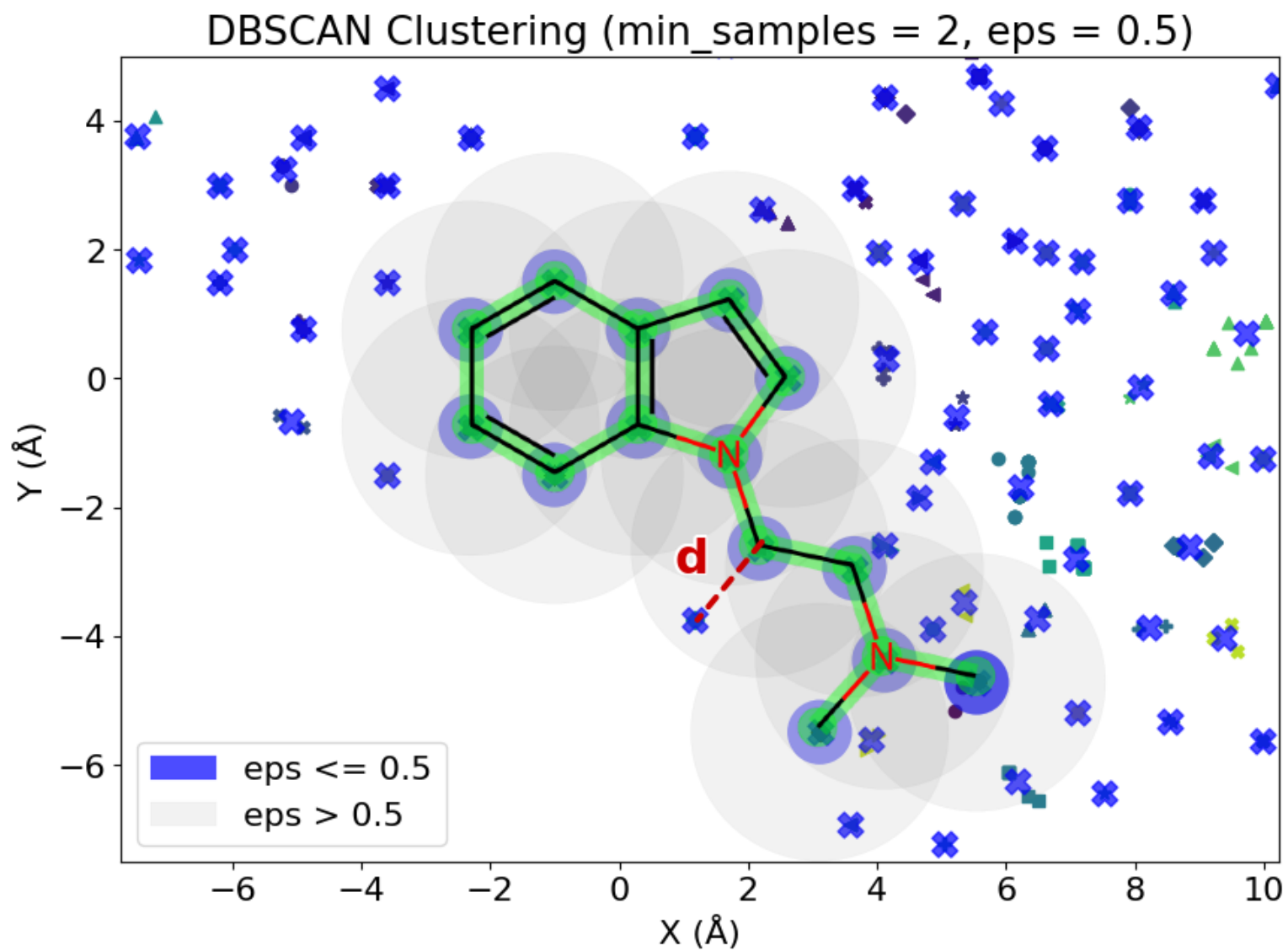


(x, ..., x, x, x, x)
Descriptor vector

x's are...
Presence (binary)
HBD (binary)
HBA (binary)
Atomic logP values (float)

New molecule





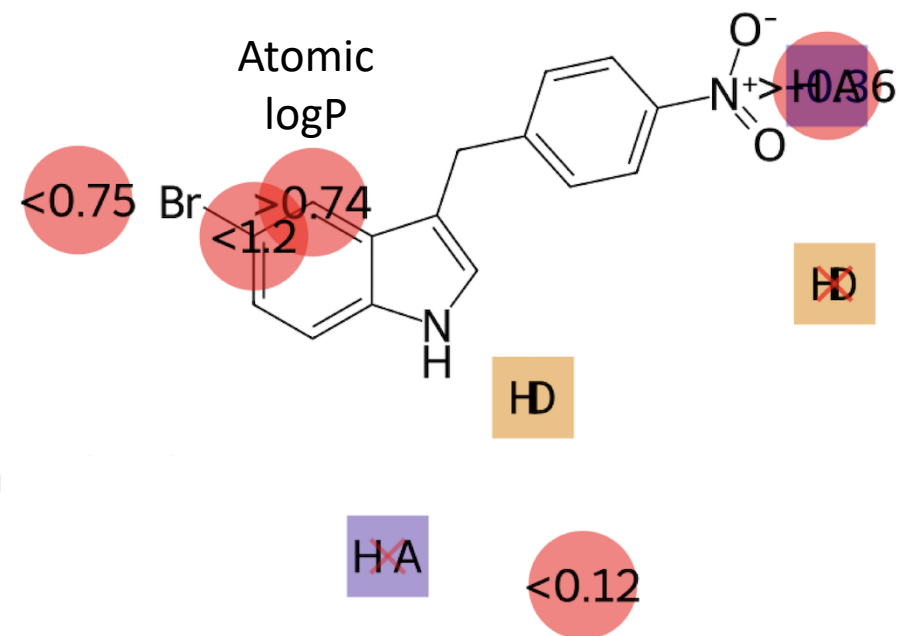
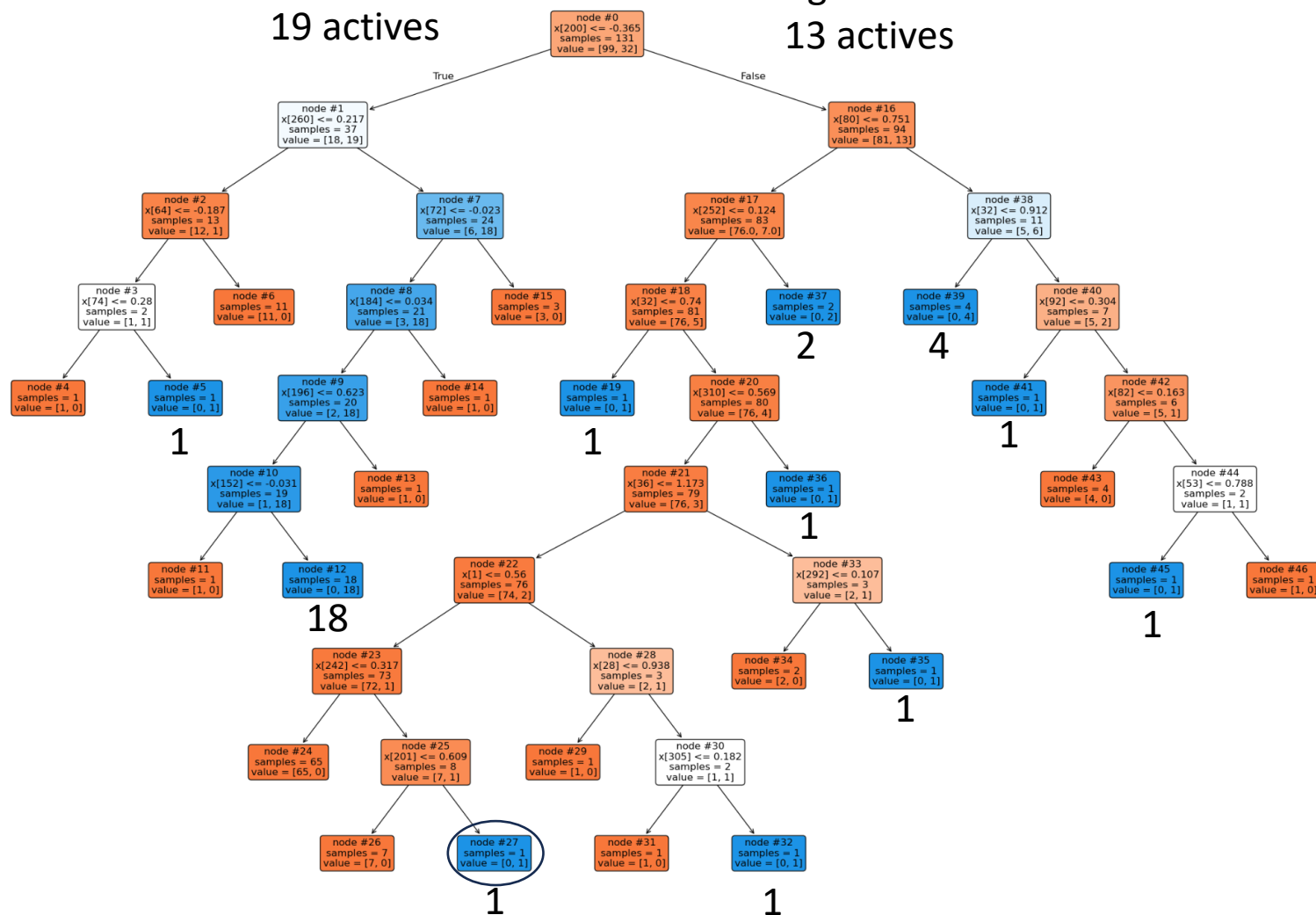
eps $>$ 0.5 \rightarrow property scaled with distance

Trick # 3

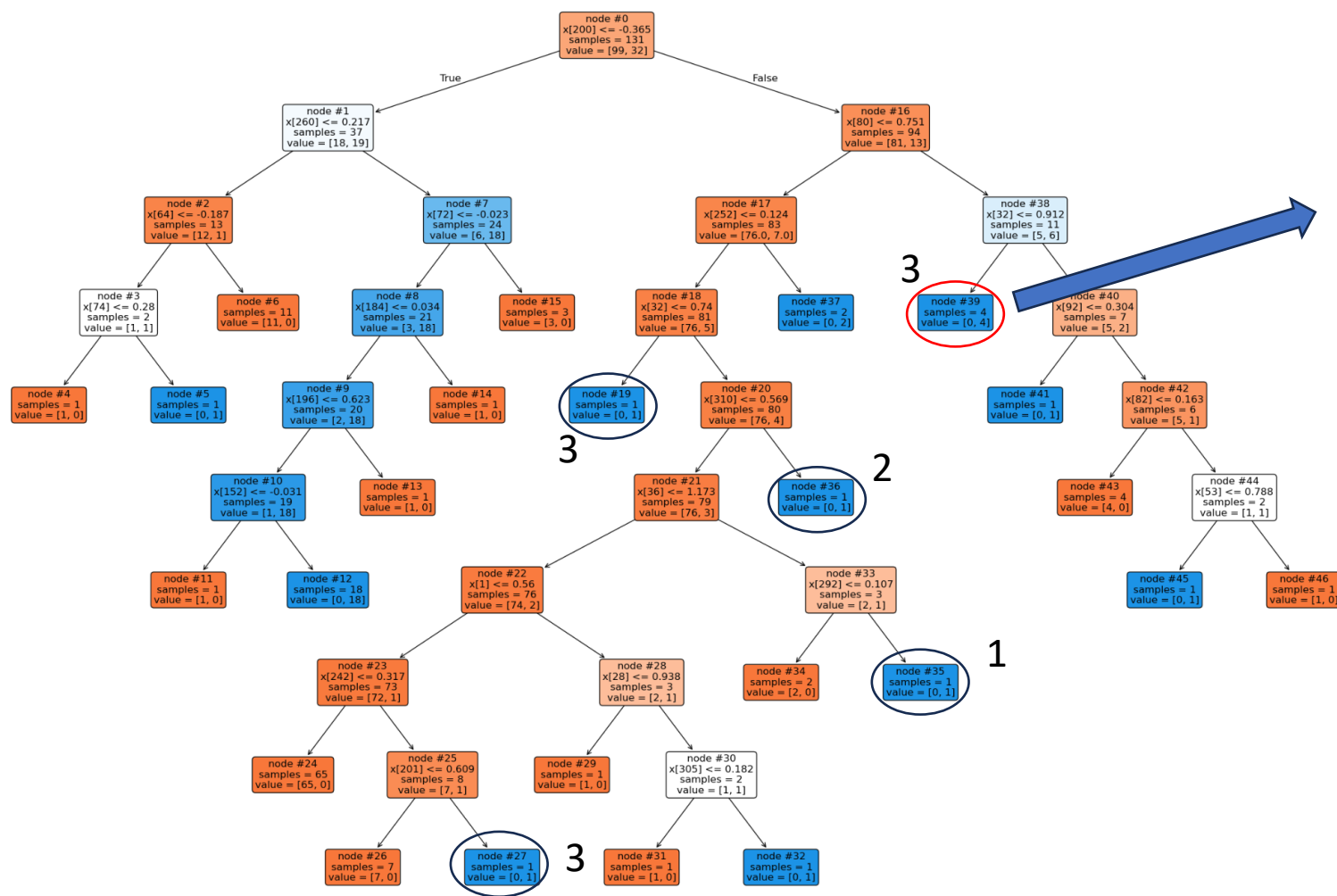
Better descriptor → simpler model
Decision tree offers interpretability

Left side:
19 actives

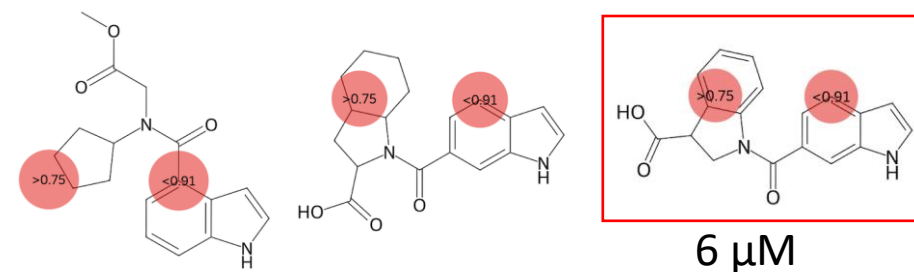
Right side:
13 actives



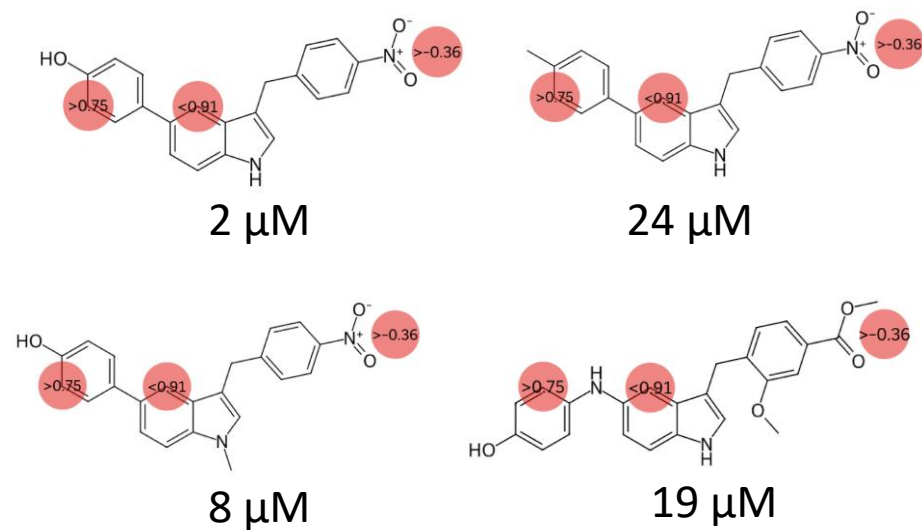
12 new predictions from Enamine Hit Locator Set
(11 were tested → 1 hit)



We picked these molecules ...



... because of these molecules



3 tricks

Pair difference learning for classification*

2D atomic pharmacophore model

Decision tree for insight/analysis

*also works for regression



Research Article |  Open Access |  

Finding Drug Candidate Hits With A Hundred Samples: Ultralow Data Screening With Active Learning

Jacob M. Nielsen, Maria H. Rasmussen, Casper Steinmann, Nicolai Ree, Michael Gajhede, Jan Stenvang,
Jan H. Jensen 

First published: 20 August 2025 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceur.202500134>