

Subgraph-Feature Search for Learning Classifiers  
and Regressors under Fixed Budget Constraint

Graduate school of Information Science and  
Technology, Hokkaido University

Ryo Shirakawa

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## Abstract

Recently, in various fields such as computational chemistry and bioinformatics, attention has been paid to classification and regression of data whose inputs are graphs of arbitrary size and shape, sometimes called graph classification/regression. In these problems, whether a certain subgraph is included or not is a fundamental feature for graphs that have no direct descriptors available. The simplest solution, enumerating subgraph patterns and use them as features, is so expensive since the number of possible subgraph patterns are intractably large due to the combinatorial explosion. Currently, discriminative pattern mining has been studied and given a good solution to this problem. The previous search method for such discriminative subgraph patterns tries to find the best one by the depth first search with some pruning rules. Such a exact search, however, is costly for heavily repeated use, which is necessary to obtain the number of features enough for high performance classifiers or regressors. To overcome this computational cost issue, we propose two approximate algorithms based on (i) best first search, (ii) Monte Carlo Tree Search(MCTS). We demonstrate effectiveness of our proposed methods by comparing performance in real problems using QSAR datasets.

## 1 Introduction

Graphs are fundamental data structures for representing combinatorial objects such as chemical compounds, networks and others. However, precisely because of their combinatorial nature, it is usually difficult to understand the underlying trends in large datasets of graphs. The rapid increase in data in recent years also includes data represented as graphs, and thus supervised learning in which the inputs are graphs of arbitrary size and shape has gained considerable attention in the fields of computer vision [1–4], chemoinformatics [5–13], bioinformatics [14–16] and computational chemistry [17, 18] and natural language processing [19].

Some of these problems have graph descriptors prepared in advance, such

as molecular dataset [20,21], but others have no direct descriptors available. For these problems, the most fundamental features are subgraph indicators, i.e., if a subgraph is embedded in the given graph or not, because many reactions and events are attributed to those substructures. However, the number of all possible subgraph patterns is intractably large due to the combinatorial explosion, so that it is difficult to enumerate all subgraphs in a realistic time for a given dataset. Therefore, it is necessary to restrict the subgraph candidate on the basis of some criterion. Frequent subgraph mining [22,23] is one method in this approach. However, since it chooses subgraphs according to the frequencies, it is possible to overlook the importance of subgraphs. On the other hand, discriminative pattern mining techniques [8, 24, 25] choose subgraphs according to a model-based discriminative criteria, and these are not likely to overlook important patterns for learning. Because of these merits, the present paper also adopts this approach.

### 1.1 Related Work

Related works [8,25] search the discriminative subgraph pattern using depth first policy with branch and bound method. While these methods perform efficient searches by designing tricky pruning, search policy of depth first is naive and they still suffer from computational costs for some domain or large datasets.

### 1.2 Our Approach

To overcome the above difficulty, we propose the more efficient two algorithms using Best First Search and Monte Carlo tree search (MCTS). The efficiency of these building-block algorithms are already known in some domains, so that in this paper we apply them to our graph classification/regression problem.

## 2 Preliminaries

### 2.1 Notations

Let  $[n]$  be a set of integers  $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  and let  $\mathbb{I}(P)$  be the indicator of a predicate  $P$ , i.e.,  $\mathbb{I}(P) = 1$  if  $P$  is true, else 0. A labeled graph is represented by a 4-tuple  $G = (V, E, \mathcal{L}, l)$ , where  $V$  is a set of vertices,  $E \subset V \times V$  is a set of undirected edges,  $\mathcal{L}$  is a set of labels, and  $l : V \cup E \rightarrow \mathcal{L}$  is a mapping that assigns a label to each vertex or edge. We denote a subgraph isomorphism, i.e., if  $g$  is a subgraph of  $G$ , as  $G \supseteq g$  and its negation as  $G \not\supseteq g$ . Thus, a subgraph indicator  $\mathbb{I}(G \supseteq g) = 1$  if  $G \supseteq g$ , otherwise 0. We also denote the training set of pairs of input graph  $G \in \mathcal{G}$  and its output responses  $y \in \mathcal{Y}$  as

$$\mathcal{D} = \{(G_1, y_1), (G_2, y_2), \dots, (G_N, y_N)\}. \quad (1)$$

We assume that  $\mathcal{G}$  is a set of all finite-size, connected, discretely-labeled, undirected graphs. We denote any set of graphs of size  $N$  by  $\mathcal{G}_N = \{G_i \mid i \in [N]\}$ , and the set of all possible connected subgraphs as  $\mathcal{S}_N = \bigcup_{G \in \mathcal{G}_N} \{g \mid G \supseteq g\}$ .

**Definition 1** (subgraph isomorphism) For two graphs,  $G' = (V', E', \mathcal{L}', l')$  and  $G = (V, E, \mathcal{L}, l)$ ,  $G'$  is subgraph isomorphic to  $G$  iff there exist an injective mapping  $\phi : V' \rightarrow V$ , s.t., (1)  $\forall v \in V', l'(v) = l(\phi(v))$ , (2)  $\forall (v_1, v_2) \in E', (\phi(v_1), \phi(v_2)) \in E$  and (3)  $l'(v_1, v_2) = l(\phi(v_1), \phi(v_2))$ .

### 2.2 Search Space for Subgraphs

In supervised learning from graphs, we represent each input graph  $G_i \in \mathcal{G}_N$  by the characteristic vector  $(\mathbb{I}(G_i \supseteq g) \mid g \in \mathcal{S})$  with a set  $\mathcal{S}$  of relevant subgraph features. However, since  $\mathcal{S}$  is not explicitly available when the learning phase starts, we need to simultaneously do searching and constructing of  $\mathcal{S}$  during the learning process. In order to define an efficient search space for  $\mathcal{S}_N$ , i.e., any subgraphs occurring in  $\mathcal{G}_N$ , the techniques for *frequent subgraph*



where TSS is the total sum of squared error and  $\mathcal{D}_1(g) = \{(G_i, y_i) \in \mathcal{D} \mid G \supseteq g\}$  and  $\mathcal{D}_0(g) = \{(G_i, y_i) \in \mathcal{D} \mid G \not\supseteq g\}$ .

### 3 Problem Setting and Challenges

Our problem is to search for a subgraph  $g$  that minimizes (3). However, the search space of subgraphs (Section 2.2) is intractably large due to the combinatorial explosion. The naive search policy require very high computational costs and it is difficult to find the suitable solution. Our challenge is to design an efficient policy for searching subgraphs in a large search space based on the discriminative criteria.

### 4 Depth First Search with Branch and Bound

The state of the art methods [8, 25] searching for a discriminative subgraph pattern is typically based on the depth first search, as shown in Figure 2 (a), with a branch and bound technique. [25] searches the best subgraph pattern using  $DScore$ . This method calculates the lower bound of  $DScore$  obtained by child nodes of search space, and if this lower bound does not reach the provisional solution the child is pruned.

**Theorem 1** *Given  $\mathcal{D}_1(g)$  and  $\mathcal{D}_0(g)$ , for any subgraph  $g' \supseteq g$ ,*

$$DScore(g') \geq \min_{(\diamond, k)} \left[ \text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_1(g) \setminus S_{\diamond, k}) + \text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_0(g) \cup S_{\diamond, k}) \right] \quad (4)$$

where  $(\diamond, k) \in \{\leq, >\} \times \{2, \dots, |\mathcal{D}_1(g) - 1|\}$ , and  $S_{\diamond, k} \subset \mathcal{D}_1(g)$ , such that  $S_{\leq, k}$  is a set of  $k$  pair  $(G_i, r_i)$  selected from  $\mathcal{D}_1(g)$  in descending order of residual error  $r_i$ , and  $S_{>, k}$  is that in increasing order. Note that  $\setminus, \cup$  are set difference and set union respectively.



**Proof 1** Given  $\mathcal{D}_1(g)$  and  $\mathcal{D}_0(g)$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \text{bound} &= \min_{g'} [\text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_1(g')) + \text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_0(g'))] \\ &= \min_{S \subset \mathcal{D}_1(g)} [\text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_1(g) \setminus S) + \text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_0(g) \cup S)] \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

$$= \min_{(\diamond, k)} [\text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_1(g) \setminus S_{\diamond, k}) + \text{TSS}(\mathcal{D}_0(g) \cup S_{\diamond, k})] \quad (6)$$

where  $(\diamond, k) \in \{\leq, >\} \times \{2, \dots, |\mathcal{D}_1(g) - 1|\}$ . From the anti-monotone property (2), we have  $\mathcal{D}_1(g') \subseteq \mathcal{D}_1(g)$  for  $g' \sqsupseteq g$  for the training set  $\mathcal{D}$  from which the equation (5) directly follows. Thus, we show (6) in detail. For simplicity, let  $A = \{a_1, \dots, a_n \mid a_i \in \mathbb{R}\}$  denote  $\mathcal{D}_1(g)$ , and  $B = \{b_1, \dots, b_m \mid b_i \in \mathbb{R}\}$  denote  $\mathcal{D}_0(g)$ . Then, the goal of (5) is to minimize the total sum of squares  $\text{TSS}(A \setminus S) + \text{TSS}(B \cup S)$  by tweaking  $S = \{s_1, \dots, s_k\} \subset A$ . The key fact is that  $\text{TSS}(A \setminus S) + \text{TSS}(B \cup S)$  can be regarded as a quadratic equation of  $\sum_{i=1}^k s_i$  when the size of  $S$  is fixed to  $k$ . More precisely,

$$\begin{aligned} \text{TSS}(A) &= \sum_{i \in [n]} \left( a_i - \frac{\sum_{i \in [n]} a_i}{|A|} \right)^2 = \sum_{i \in [n]} a_i^2 - \frac{(\sum_{i \in [n]} a_i)^2}{|A|} \\ \text{TSS}(A) + \text{TSS}(B) &= \sum_{i \in [n]} a_i^2 + \sum_{i \in [m]} b_i^2 - \frac{(\sum_{i \in [n]} a_i)^2}{|A|} - \frac{(\sum_{i \in [m]} b_i)^2}{|B|} \\ \text{TSS}(A \setminus S) + \text{TSS}(B \cup S) &= \sum_{i \in [n]} a_i^2 + \sum_{i \in [m]} b_i^2 - \frac{(\sum_{i \in [n]} a_i - \sum_{i \in [k]} s_i)^2}{|A \setminus S|} - \frac{(\sum_{i \in [m]} b_i - \sum_{i \in [k]} s_i)^2}{|B \cup S|} \\ &= \sum_{i \in [n]} a_i^2 + \sum_{i \in [m]} b_i^2 - \frac{(\sum_{i \in [n]} a_i - \sum_{i \in [k]} s_i)^2}{n - k} - \frac{(\sum_{i \in [m]} b_i - \sum_{i \in [k]} s_i)^2}{m + k} \end{aligned}$$

Therefore,  $\text{TSS}(A \setminus S) + \text{TSS}(B \cup S)$  is minimized when  $\sum_{i=1}^k s_i$  is maximized or minimized. In other words, (5) becomes minimum when the mean of  $S \subset \mathcal{D}_1(g)$  is maximized or minimized.  $\square$

order

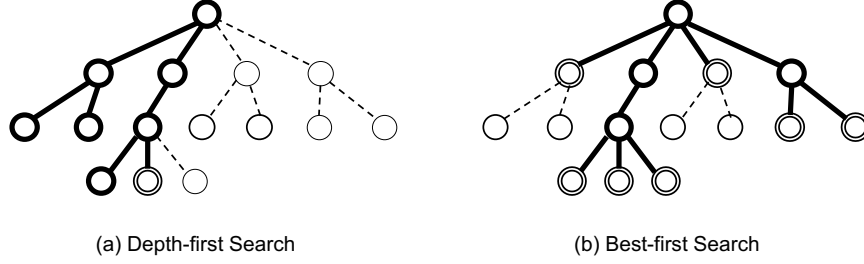


Figure 2: Depth-first vs. Best-first. The bold circles show already searched nodes and double circles show the candidate nodes for next expansion

## 5 Proposed Method

The previous method [25] employs a simple depth-first search policy without referring to the discriminative criterion value ( $DScore$ ) and its bound of each node. In some cases, this criterion and its bound are useful for designing search policies. In this section, using this criterion, we present two efficient methods to search a discriminative subgraph pattern based on (i) Best First Search and (ii) Monte Carlo Tree Search.

### 5.1 Best First Search

Best-first searching [26] is a search policy that expands from the best node based on some evaluation value, shown as Figure 2 (b). The A\* algorithm [27] and Dijkstra algorithm [28] are representative.

The previous method designed the pruning rule by calculating the bound value in (4). In the proposed method, this bound value is set as the search priority of each node, and is applied to the best-first search. The pseudocode is shown in Algorithm. 1. The search starts from the root node, and selects the node with the highest bound from the expansion candidate set. The child nodes of the selected node are expanded, and the score is calculated and added to the expansion candidate set. The above operation is repeated until pruning is possible for all expansion candidate set.

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**Alg. 1:** Subgraph Search by Best First Search

---

**Input:** Training data  $\mathcal{D} = \{(G_1, r_1), (G_2, r_2), \dots, (G_N, r_N)\}$

**Output:** Best score subgraph  $g^*$

**Function** *Best First Search*( $\mathcal{D}$ )

```
  candidate  $\leftarrow \{\text{root}\}$  repeat
     $g \leftarrow \arg \max_{\text{candidate } c} \text{bound}(c)$  ;
    candidate  $\leftarrow \text{candidate}/g$  ;
    forall child  $c$  of  $g$  do
      if Score( $c$ ) is better than  $\text{score}^*$  then
         $\text{score}^* \leftarrow \text{Score}(c)$  ;
         $g^* \leftarrow c$  ;
      end
      candidate  $\leftarrow \text{candidate} \cup c$  ;
    end
  until all candidate can be pruned;
  return  $g^*$  ;
```

---

## 5.2 Monte Carlo Tree Search

We consider to apply Monte Carlo tree search (MCTS) [29–31] to our problem. MCTS is widely known as the method used in computer Go. IT is also applied in various fields such as feature selection. One of them, Upper Confidence Bounds for Tree (UCT) algorithm [29] is empirically highly evaluated as a way to find good solutions within a limited budget. This method resolves the exploration-exploitation problem using Upper Confidence Bound (UCB), which allows to estimate the expected reward of each child. The simplest UCB policy is called UCB1 and does not require the prior specific knowledge. The policy selects to search child node  $i$  that maximizes

$$UCB1 = \bar{X}_i + C \times \sqrt{\frac{\ln n}{2n_i}} \quad (7)$$

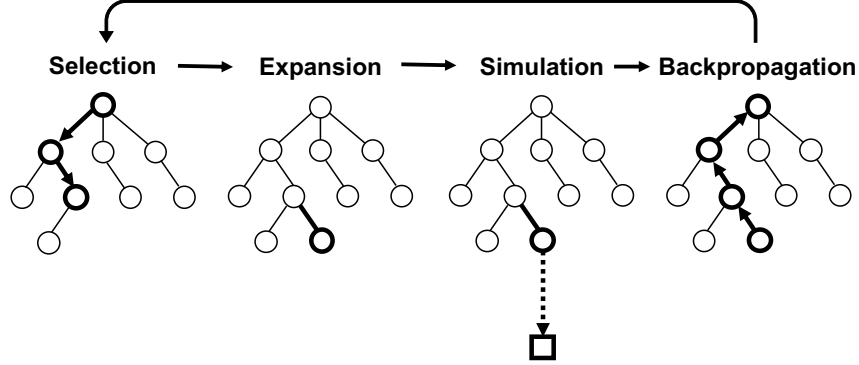


Figure 3: One circle of processes in UCT

where  $\bar{X}_i$  is the average reward from child node  $i$ ,  $n_i$  is the number of times child node  $i$  was selected,  $n$  is the number of times parent node of  $i$  was selected, and  $C$  is an exploration constant. The left term encourages the exploitation of high expected reward child, and the right term encourages the exploration of less visited child.

The UCT algorithm is an iterative method doing the four operations of selection, expansion, simulation, and backpropagation up to a predefined computational cost, shown as Figure 3.

1) Selection:

Start from the root node, and select the child repeatedly until the expandable node is reached based on the value of (7). A node is expandable if it represents a non-terminal state and has unvisited children.

2) Expansion:

One random child node that is unvisited is expanded. In this operation, we consider the same pruning condition as (4). If the random select node can be pruned, another node is reselected and added.

3) Simulation:

A Monte Carlo simulation is run from the new expanded node, and repeatedly select a child from the available children uniformly and randomly. This simulation stops if the simulation node has no children or is based on a stochastic condition known as a stopping feature used in [30]. The stochastic condition is  $1 - q^d$  depending on the simulation node level  $d$ , where  $q < 1$  is a parameter and  $q = 1 - 10^{-1}$  in the present paper.

4) Backpropagation:

Calculate the reward of the node  $g$  obtained by simulation. To align the range to  $[0, 1]$ , reward is defined,

$$reward(g) = -DScore/TSS(\mathcal{D}) \quad (8)$$

these value will be large if discrimination is successful, otherwise small. Then backpropagate this reward to the nodes selected in selection and expansion phase.

### Low Cost Simulation

In this problem setting, the search space is not given in advance. Therefore, we need to construct a search space that matches the given dataset and subgraph search at the same time. When Monte Carlo simulation is performed in this problem, it is necessary to enumerate all the child nodes for each simulation node, which requires a large cost. We design a low-cost simulation method since the simulation cost has a big influence on the search efficiency.

First, a graph including simulation node is randomly selected from the dataset. Expand the subgraph represented by the simulation node on the selected graph. If an expanded subgraph is available (minimum order defined by [22]), this simulation is taken, otherwise it is repeated.

The entire procedure of the proposed algorithm is illustrated with pseudocode in Alg. 2, 3.

---

**Alg. 2:** Subgraph Search by UCT

---

**Input:** Training data  $\mathcal{D} = \{(G_1, r_1), (G_2, r_2), \dots, (G_N, r_N)\}$

**Output:** Best score subgraph  $g^*$

**Function**  $UCT(\mathcal{D})$

```

    repeat
         $g \leftarrow \text{Selection}(\text{root})$  ;
         $g \leftarrow \text{Expansion}(g)$  ;
        if  $\text{Score}(g)$  is better than  $\text{score}^*$  then
             $\text{score}^* \leftarrow \text{Score}(g)$  ;
             $g^* \leftarrow g$ ;
        end
         $s \leftarrow \text{Simulation}(g)$  ;
         $\text{Backpropagation}(s, g)$  ;
    until predefined cost is exhausted;
    return  $g^*$  ;

```

---

---

**Alg. 3:** Four Basic Operations in UCT

---

**Function** *Selection*( $g$ )

```
while  $g$  is expandable do
   $g \leftarrow \arg \max_{\text{children } c \text{ of } g} \bar{X}_c + C \times \sqrt{\frac{\ln n_g}{2n_c}} ;$ 
end
return  $g$  ;
```

**Function** *Expansion*( $g$ )

```
repeat
   $g' \leftarrow \text{random}(\{\text{children } c \text{ of } g\}) ;$ 
until  $g'$  is not pruned;
return  $g'$  ;
```

**Function** *Simulation*( $g$ )

```
 $s \leftarrow g$  ;
while  $s$  has some child and not enough stochastic condition do
  repeat
     $G \leftarrow \text{random}(\mathcal{D}) ;$ 
     $s' \leftarrow \text{random expansion from } s \text{ on } G ;$ 
  until  $s'$  is enough to minimum order;
   $s \leftarrow s'$  ;
end
return  $s$  ;
```

**Function** *Backpropagation*( $s, g$ )

```
 $X = \text{Score}(s) ;$ 
while  $g \neq \text{NULL}$  do
   $n_g \leftarrow n_g + 1 ;$ 
   $\bar{X}_g \leftarrow \frac{\bar{X}_g \times (n_g - 1) + X}{n_g} ;$ 
   $g \leftarrow \text{parent of } g ;$ 
end
```

---

## 6 Experiments

### 6.1 Datasets

We also evaluate the performance based on the most typical benchmark on real datasets: the quantitative structure-activity relationship (QSAR). We select Four binary-classification datasets (CPDB, Mutag, AIDS(CAvsCM), CAS) in Table 1: CPDB and Mutag for mutagenicity tests and AIDS(CAvsCM) for antiviral tests. All chemical structures are encoded as molecular graphs using RDKit<sup>1</sup>, and some structures in the raw data are removed by chemical sanitization<sup>2</sup>. We simply apply a node labeling by the RDKit default atom invariants (edges not labeled), i.e., atom type, # of non-H neighbors, # of Hs, charge, isotope, and inRing properties. These default atom invariants use connectivity information similar to that used for the well-known ECFP family of fingerprints [32]. See [17] for more elaborate encodings.

Table 1: Dataset summary

Dataset	CPDB	Mutag	AIDS(CAvsCM)	CAS
# data	684	188	1503	4337
# ( $y = +1, -1$ )	(341, 343)	(125, 63)	(422, 1081)	(2401, 1936)
# nodes	25.2	26.3	59.0	30.3
# edges	25.6	28.1	61.6	31.3

# of nodes and edges are average.

### 6.2 UNDER CONSTRUCTION

## 7 Conclusion

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.rdkit.org/>

<sup>2</sup>Due to this pre-processing, the number of datasets differs from that in the simple molecular graphs in the literature, where the nodes are labeled by atom type, and the edges are labeled by bond type.



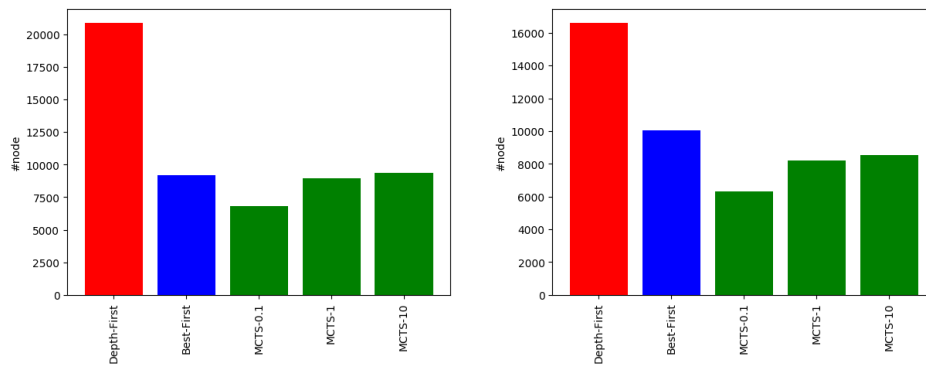


Figure 4: 一つめの図

acknowledge

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