# The TargetSearch Package

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#### Abstract

This document describes how to use *TargetSearch* to preprocess GC-MS data.

#### Package

TargetSearch 1.52.0

Report issues on https://github.com/acinostroza/TargetSearch/issues

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## 1 Supplied files

This section describes the files that have to be prepared before running *TargetSearch*. These comprise a sample definition file, a reference library file and a retention marker definition file. Throughout this manual, we will use the example files provided by the package *TargetSearchData*.

### 1.1 NetCDF files

*TargetSearch* can currently read only NetCDF files. Many GC-MS software vendors are able to convert their propietary raw chromatograms to NetCDF. There are however two issues you have to keep in mind:

- Make sure that you export the CDF files as nominal mass, not centroid nor profile mode, as *TargetSearch* cannot handle this type of data. Nevertheless, if such an option is not available, there files can be converted to nominal mass automatically.
- It is recommended to baseline correct your chromatograms before exporting to NetCDF to increase processing speed. If not, *TargetSearch* implements two methods for baseline correction that you can use at the cost of performance.

Though only NetCDF is supported, it is still possible to use other formats, such as mzXML, mzData or mzML using the package mzR. This is not yet implemented but it will in the next release.

#### 1.2 Sample Information

After exporting the CDF files into a convenient location, prepare a tab-delimited text file describing your samples. It must be contain (at least) the two columns entitled: "CDF\_FILE" and "MEASUREMENT\_DAY", or, column names that match "cdf" and "day", respectively. If more than one column matches the pattern, then the first (leftmost) is taken. Addictionally, if a column named "SAMPLE\_NAME" is found, this column will be used as sample names instead of the CDF files (useful if your CDF files are not human readable friendly).

Other columns such as sample group, treatment, etc. may be additionally included to aid sample sub-setting and downstream analyses. An example is shown in table 1.

CDF_FILE	MEASUREMENT_DAY	TIME_POINT		
7235eg08.cdf	7235	1		
7235eg11.cdf	7235	1		
7235eg26.cdf	7235	1		
7235eg04.cdf	7235	3		
7235eg30.cdf	7235	3		
7235eg32.cdf	7235	3		

Table 1: Sample file example

To import the sample list into R, use the function ImportSamples() specifying the options CDFpath (directory containing the NetCDF files) and RIpath (directory where the transformed cdf files, containing the retention index corrected apex data, also called RI-files, will be saved). This function will warn you if CDF samples are not found in the chosen path.

```
library(TargetSearchData)
library(TargetSearchData)
cdf.path <- system.file("gc-ms-data", package = "TargetSearchData")
sample.file <- file.path(cdf.path, "samples.txt")
samples <- ImportSamples(sample.file, CDFpath = cdf.path, RIpath = ".")</pre>
```

Alternatively, you could create a tsSample object by using the sample class methods.

#### 1.3 Retention index markers

To align different chromatograms using RI markers, a tab-delimited definition file for these markers has to be provided. At a minimum it should contain three columns specifying the search window (lower and upper threshod) and the fixed standard value for each marker (table 2). Further, a characteristic ion mass (m/z) has to be provided either in an additional column or as an argument mass to function ImportFameSettings().

rim.file <- file.path(cdf.path, "rimLimits.txt")
rimLimits <- ImportFameSettings(rim.file, mass = 87)</pre>

This will import the limits in 'rimLimits.txt' file and set the marker mass to 87 for all markers.

LowerLimit	UpperLimit	RIstandard		
230	280	262320		
290	340	323120		
350	400	381020		

Table 2: Retention time definition file example

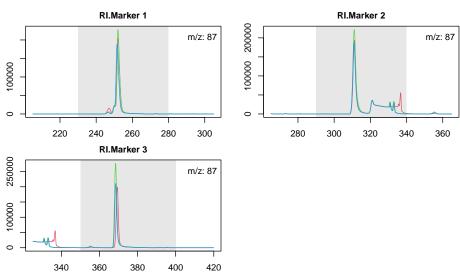
If you do not use RI markers, you can skip this part by setting the parameter rimLimits to NULL in RIcorrect() function. Please note that in this case, no retention time correction will be performed.

To make sure that you have correctly set the time ranges for the RI markers, the function checkRimLim() can be used. This function plots the m/z of all the markers in (a subset of) the samples. By default, the option single is TRUE, which means only a (randomly chosen) sample will be used for the figure (the reason is we usually do not need to see all the samples,

and it is computationally expensive to display too many samples at the same time). To display multiple samples, set the said option to FALSE. In this case, it is recommended to use *subsetting* to select specific sample to review (in particular in large datasets).

The example below demonstrates the multiple display option restricted to the first three samples. Some basic plot styling is also possible by passing arguments to matplot(), such as, col and lty. The generated plot is shown in figure 1. Note that the gray area indicates the search window of each marker.

checkRimLim(samples[1:3], rimLimits, single=FALSE, col=2:4, lty=1)



#### Samples: 7235eg04, 7235eg06, 7235eg07

Figure 1: Example of the RI markers m/z traces in samples

### 2 Pre-processing

#### 2.1 Convertion of CDF files to TargetSearch format

Starting from *TargetSearch* 1.42, a CDF4 custom format was introduced. This format has many advantages over the typical CDF3 that is exported by commercial software, mainly compression and fast data access, which can speed up the internal *TargetSearch* computations (specially in plotting functions). Another advantage is that you can store baseline corrected data in this file, which is not possible to do in CDF file. And finally, the conversion is required if the CDF files are not in nominal mass format. The main disadvantage is that this format is unique to *TargetSearch* and it is unlikely to be used elsewhere, and the extra storage space required for these files.

To transform the files, simply run the function ncdf4Convert(). In the example below, the files are converted to CDF4 format and saved to the working directory. If the parameter path is missing, then the files will be placed in the same directory as the original CDF files.

```
samples <- ncdf4Convert(samples, path=".")</pre>
```

If you need to perform baseline correction on the CDF files, please check the following section instead.

Note: Although this convertion is optional, it is highly recommended. It is still possible to use the classic workflow at the cost of computation speed.

#### 2.2 Baseline correction

*TargetSearch* expects baseline corrected NetCDF files, which is usually performed by your GC-MS vendor's software. If that is the case, you may continue reading the following subsection.

However, if your chromatograms are not baseline corrected, *TargetSearch* provides two baseline correction methods. The first one is implemented in **baselineCorrection()** and is based on the work of Chang et al. [1]. This method is referred as "classic" in the man-pages as it has been present since the beginning. The second method called "quantiles", introduced in *TargetSearch* 1.42.0, estimates the baseline by computing a given quantile in a sliding window (the quantile is 50% bby default). This method is implemented in **baselineCorrectionQuant()**.

A wrapper function called **baseline()** is also provided, which has the advantage that it can take a CDF file name as input (the other functions take matrices). *Note: These functions are meant to be run internally and only exposed for advanced users.* 

To apply baseline correction to the chromatograms, we simply call the function ncdf4Convert(), similarly as the section above, but with extra parameters that are required so the baseline correction procedure takes place. An example of such as call is shown below.

samples <- ncdf4Convert(samples, path=".", baseline=TRUE, bsline\_method="quantiles", ...)</pre>

Here, the parameter baseline is set to TRUE (by default is FALSE) and we choose the method "quantiles". The ... contain the parameters passed to baselineCorrectionQuant(). Similarly, if the chosen method is "classic", then the extra parameters will be passed to base lineCorrectionQuant(). Please refer to the manpages for details on these methods.

#### 2.3 Peak detection

Initially, *TargetSearch* identifies the local apex intensities in all chromatograms, finds the retention time (RT) of the RI markers and converts RT to RI using linear interpolation [2]. This is done by the function RIcorrect(). Parameters to this function are sample and retention time limits objects, the intensity threshold (IntThreshold = 100), the peak picking method (pp.method) and a Window parameter that will be used by said method. The function will return a matrix with the retention times of all RI markers and create a file with all extracted peaks of the respective NetCDF file, which will we call *RI file*. This file can be a tab-delimited file (RI file) (old format) or a custom binary file (default format). The difference between them is that the binary file allows much faster parsing compared to the other format.

Note: Formely, we would use this function for baseline correction, but as of TargetSearch 1.42.0, this has to be done as explained in the section above.

RImatrix <- RIcorrect(samples, rimLimits, IntThreshold = 100, pp.method = "ppc", Window = 15)

There are three peak picking methods available: *smoothing* implements the algorithm used by Tagfinder [3], *gaussian* uses basically the same algorithm, but the difference is the smoother is gaussian based, and the *ppc* algorithm, which is an adaptation of the function <u>ppc.peaks</u> from the package <u>ppc</u>. *Comment:* This package seems to be deprecated. It is not in CRAN

anymore. This method simply searches for local maxima within a given time window. The Window parameter sets the window size of the chosen peak picking method in terms of number of scan points. Note: The number of points actually used is  $2 \times Window + 1$ .

#### 2.4 RI correction

After running **RIcorrect()**, your chromatograms have been already retention time corrected. However, it is necessary to check that the RI markers detection was actually correct. To do so, *TargetSearch* examines the generated RI matrix **RImatrix** with the function **FAMEoutliers()**. It creates a PDF report of the RI markers including information about possible outliers that the user can remove or not. Alternatively, RI markers can be checked manually using the function **plotFAME** (Figure 2).

Here, threshold sets the number of standard deviations a value has to be away from the mean before it will be considered an outlier. In this example, however, no outliers were detected.

```
plotFAME(samples, RImatrix, 1)
```

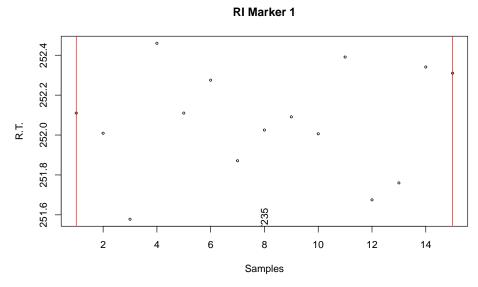


Figure 2: Retention Index Marker 1

Note that *TargetSearch* assumes that the RI markers are injected together with the biological samples. A different approach is to inject them separately. If this is the case, please look at the vignette *RI correct extra* and its accompanying file 'RetentionIndexCorrection.R' for a workaround.

In case of outliers, there is no single method to fix them as this really depends on the particular measurement conditions. However, there are few posibilities. i) If the time deviation from the mean is small, for example, less than one second, as a rule of thumb the outliers can usually be ignored. ii) if the outliers are due to chromatogram shift, then it is also fine to ignore them, because that is the point of the markers. iii) On the contrary, if the shift is because of a problem with the marker itself (eg, overloaded peak, low intense peak) and **not** because of a chromatogram shift, then do not ignore the outliers. In this case, you can manually set the retention time of the outlier to the mean/median, or choose another peak (which is stable across samples) as a new marker, or even just remove the RI marker from the list.

## 3 Library Search

#### 3.1 Reference Library File

The *reference library* file contains the information of the metabolites or mass spectral tags (MSTs) that will be searched for in the chromatograms. A public spectra database could be found here http://gmd.mpimp-golm.mpg.de/ at *The Golm Metabolome Database* [4, 5, 6].

Required information is the metabolite name ("Name"), expected retention time index ("RI"), selective masses ("SEL\_MASS"), most abundant masses ("TOP\_MASS"), spectrum ("SPEC-TRUM") and RI deviations ("Win\_1", "Win\_2", "Win\_3"). See example in table 3. The columns "Name" and "RI" are mandatory and you have at least to include one of the columns "SEL\_MASS", "TOP\_MASS" or "SPECTRUM" in the file (see below). The RI deviation columns are optional.

Name	RI	Win_1	SEL_MASS	SPECTRUM
Pyruvic acid	222767	4000	89;115;158;174;189	85:7 86:14 87:7 88:5 8
Glycine (2TMS)	228554	4000	86;102;147;176;204	86:26 87:19 88:8 89:4
Valine	271500	2000	100;144;156;218;246	85:8 86:14 87:6 88:5 8
Glycerol (3TMS)	292183	2000	103;117;205;293	85:14 86:2 87:16 88:13
Leucine	306800	1500	102;158;232;260	158:999 159:148 160:45
Isoleucine	319900	1500	102;103;158;163;218	90:11 91:2 92:1 93:1 9
Glycine	325000	2000	86;100;174;248;276	85:6 86:245 87:24 88:12

Table 3: Reference Library exam
---------------------------------

In this file, masses and intensities must be positive integers. RIs and RI deviations can be any positive real number. The selective and most abundant masses list must be delimited by semicolon (;). The spectrum is described by a list of mass and intensity pair. Every mass-intensity pair is separated by colon (:) and different pairs are separated by spaces.

The function ImportLibrary() imports the reference file.

Here we set the RI window deviations to 2000, 1000 and 200 RI units. Since "Win\_1" column is already in the file, the first value (2000) is ignored. Also, the 15th most abundant masses are taken but excluding the masses 147, 148 and 149 (common confounding masses)

### 3.2 Library Search Algorithm

The library search is performed in three steps. First, for every metabolite, selective masses are searched in a given time window around the expected RI. This is done by the function medianRILib(). This function calculates the median RI of the selective masses and return new library object with the updated RI. The time deviation is given either in the library file (column "Win\_1") or when the library is imported (see ImportLibrary()).

lib <- medianRILib(samples, lib)</pre>

It is also posible to examinate visually the RI deviation of the metabolites by setting the parameter <u>makeReport=TRUE</u>, which creates a pdf report like the one shown in figure 3. This may help to set or update the expected RI deviation.

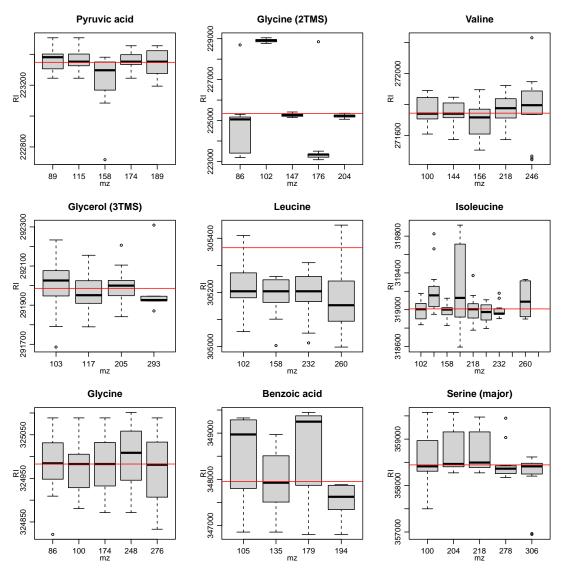


Figure 3: RI deviation of first 9 metabolites in the library

In the second step, the function sampleRI() searches the selective masses again, but using the updated RI and the RI deviation defined in the library object ("Win\_2"). After that, the intensities of the selected masses are normalised to the median of the day, and then used to extract other masses with correlated apex profiles. The masses for which the Pearson correlation coefficient is above r\_thres are taken as metabolite markers and their RIs are averaged on a per sample basis. This average RI represents the exact position where the metabolite elutes in the respective sample, which is returned in a matrix form.

The third step will look up for all the masses (selective and most abundant masses) in all the samples. This is done by the function peakFind(). It returns a tsMSdata object with the intensities and RI of every mass (rows) and every sample (columns) that were search for.

peakData <- peakFind(samples, lib, cor\_RI)</pre>

The intensity and RI slots can be accessed by using the Intensity and retIndex methods. Each slot is a list, where every component of the list is a matrix, which is related to a metabolite in the library. There should be as many components as metabolites in the library. In every matrix, columns are samples and rows are masses.

```
met.RI
               <- retIndex(peakData)
met.Intensity <- Intensity(peakData)</pre>
# show the intensity values of the first metabolite.
met.Intensity[[1]]
##
        7235eg04 7235eg06 7235eg07 7235eg08 7235eg09 7235eg11 7235eg12 7235eg15
                                                                                   9873
## 89
            3185
                      7974
                                3211
                                          3544
                                                    9475
                                                              2172
                                                                         9373
## 115
            1811
                      4279
                                1652
                                          1924
                                                              1081
                                                                         5112
                                                    5138
                                                                                   5460
## 158
             377
                      1162
                                 400
                                           458
                                                    1139
                                                                288
                                                                         1122
                                                                                   1214
                                                                        16852
## 174
            5840
                     14031
                                5690
                                          6414
                                                   16970
                                                              3928
                                                                                  17885
## 189
                       200
                                           101
                                                      250
                                                                          237
              NA
                                  NA
                                                                 NA
                                                                                    248
## 99
            1131
                      3034
                                1191
                                          1260
                                                    3658
                                                                753
                                                                         3621
                                                                                   3793
## 100
            1021
                      2672
                                1037
                                          1046
                                                    3074
                                                                630
                                                                         3136
                                                                                   3269
## 175
             762
                      1828
                                 731
                                           795
                                                    2307
                                                                467
                                                                         2265
                                                                                   2443
## 117
             359
                       957
                                 342
                                           380
                                                    1208
                                                                225
                                                                         1214
                                                                                   1259
## 90
                                           301
              NA
                       729
                                  NA
                                                      855
                                                                170
                                                                          865
                                                                                    977
## 176
             239
                       547
                                 234
                                           232
                                                     729
                                                                149
                                                                          729
                                                                                    758
## 116
             271
                      1305
                                  NA
                                            NA
                                                    1012
                                                                155
                                                                         1185
                                                                                   1262
## 114
             153
                       338
                                 133
                                           150
                                                      455
                                                                 NA
                                                                          413
                                                                                    439
## 101
             130
                        NA
                                 158
                                           182
                                                      469
                                                                 NA
                                                                          507
                                                                                    528
## 91
             178
                                           168
                                                      503
                                                                 NA
                                                                          490
                                                                                    592
                       411
                                 172
##
       7235eg20 7235eg21 7235eg22 7235eg25 7235eg26 7235eg30 7235eg32
           11701
                               10407
                                                              2330
## 89
                      3245
                                          2738
                                                    1577
                                                                          460
## 115
            6384
                      1819
                                5662
                                          1488
                                                      822
                                                              1311
                                                                          253
## 158
            1451
                       410
                                1229
                                            NA
                                                      NA
                                                                325
                                                                           NA
           20963
                      5826
                               18655
                                                    2971
                                                              4425
                                                                          909
## 174
                                          5135
## 189
             292
                                 293
                                            NA
                                                                 NA
                                                                          NA
                        NA
                                                      NA
## 99
            4471
                      1193
                                3945
                                          1027
                                                      580
                                                                          183
                                                                867
## 100
            3876
                      1058
                                3408
                                             NA
                                                      446
                                                                696
                                                                          170
                                           661
                                                                          122
## 175
            2831
                       725
                                2501
                                                      354
                                                                528
## 117
            1451
                        NA
                                1350
                                           303
                                                      138
                                                                265
                                                                           NA
```

	90 176 116	1111 926 1451	252 237 NA	961 780 1193	241 NA 335	NA 100 121	215 192 194	NA NA NA
##	116 114 101	520 666	NA 135 153	483	NA 130	NA NA	194 115 118	NA NA
## ##		624	213	525	NA	121	134	NA

### 4 Metabolite Profile

The function **Profile** makes a profile of the MS data by averaging all the normalised mass intensities whose Pearson coefficient is greater that r\_thresh.

A *msProfile* object is returned. The averaged intensities and RI matrices that can be obtained by **Intensity** and **retIndex** methods. The profile information is represented by a *data.frame* in the **info** slot (accessible by **profileInfo** method). The columns are:

**Name** The metabolite/analyte name.

Lib\_RI The expected RI (library RI).

Mass\_count The number of correlating masses.

Non\_consecutive\_Mass\_count Same as above, but not counting the consecutive masses.

Sample\_Count\_per\_Mass The number of samples in which a correlating mass was found. The numbers are separated by semi-colon (;) and each number corresponds to one correlating masses (same order). If all the numbers are the same, only that unique number is shown.

Masses The correlating masses.

RI The average RI.

**Score\_all\_masses** The similarity score calculated using the average intensity of all the masses that were searched for, regardless of whether they are correlating masses.

Score\_cor\_masses Same as above, but only correlating masses are considered.

As metabolites with similar selective masses and RIs can be present in metabolite libraries, it is necessary to reduce redundancy. This is performed by the function **ProfileCleanUp** which selects peaks for which the RI gap is smaller than timeSplit and computes the Pearson correlation between them. When two metabolites within such a time-group are tightly correlated (given by r\_thres) only the one with more correlated masses is retained.

The function returns a *msProfile* object. The **info** slot is similar as described above, but extra columns with a "Cor\_" preffix (e.g., "Cor\_Name") are included. They provide information about metabolite redundancy.

### 5 Peaks and Spectra Visualisation

Finally, it may be of interest to check the chromatographic peak of selected metabolites and compare the median spectra of the metabolites, i.e., the median intensities of the selected masses across all the samples, with the reference spectra of the library. There are two functions to do so: plotPeak and plotSpectra.

For example, we can compare the median spectrum of "Valine" against its spectrum reference. Here we look for the library index of "Valine" and plot the spectra comparison in a "head-tail" plot (figure 4).

```
grep("Valine", libName(lib))
```

## [1] 3

plotSpectra(lib, peakData, libID = 3, type = "ht")

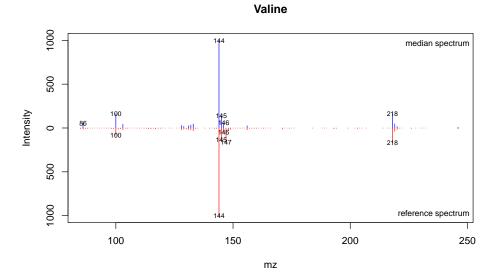


Figure 4: Spectra comparison of "Valine"

To look at the chromatographic peak of "Valine" in a given sample, we use the functions peakCDFextraction to extract the raw chromatogram and plotPeak to plot the peak (figure 5).

```
# we select the first sample
sample.id <- 1
cdf.file <- file.path(cdf.path, cdffiles[sample.id])
rawpeaks <- peakCDFextraction(cdf.file)
# which.met=3 (id of Valine)
plotPeak(samples, lib, MetabProfile, rawpeaks, which.smp=sample.id,
    which.met=3, corMass=FALSE)</pre>
```

Refer to the documentation of the functions **plotPeak** and **plotSpectra** for further options not covered here.

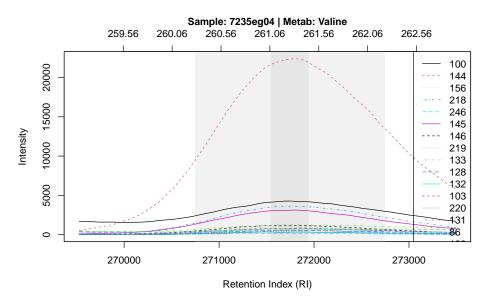


Figure 5: Chromatographic peak of Valine

## 6 TargetSearch GUI

Warning: The graphical user interface (GUI) has been removed from TargetSearch. Please use the regular functions.

Nevertheless, the old GUI is still available in my github repository. Please follow the instructions if you want to install it.

https://github.com/acinostroza/TargetSearchGUI

### 7 Untargeted search

Although *TargetSearch* was designed to be targeted oriented, it is possible to perform untargeted searches. The basic idea is to create a library that contains evenly distributed "metabolites" in time and every "metabolite" uses the whole range of possible masses as selective masses. An example:

```
metRI <- seq(200000, 300000, by = 5000)
metMZ <- 85:250
metNames <- paste("Metab",format(metRI,digits=6), sep = "_")</pre>
```

Here we define a set of metabolites located every 5000 RI units from each other in the RI range 200000-300000, with selective masses in the range of 85-300, and assign them a name. After that, we create an tsLib object.

```
metLib <- new("tsLib", Name = metNames, RI = metRI,
    selMass = rep(list(metMZ), length(metRI)), RIdev = c(3000, 1500, 500))
```

Now we can use this library object to perform a targetive search with this library on the *E. coli* samples as we did before.

```
metLib <- medianRILib(samples, metLib)
metCorRI <- sampleRI(samples, metLib)
metPeakData <- peakFind(samples, metLib, metCorRI)
metProfile <- Profile(samples, metLib, metPeakData)
metFinProf <- ProfileCleanUp(metProfile, timeSplit = 500)</pre>
```

The metFinProf object can be used to create a new library by taking only the metabolites that have, for example, more than 5 correlating masses and using the correlating masses as selective ones.

```
sum( profileInfo(metFinProf)$Mass_count > 5)
## [1] 11
tmp <- profileInfo(metFinProf)$Mass_count > 5
metRI <- profileInfo(metFinProf)$RI[tmp]
metNames <- as.character( profileInfo(metFinProf)$Name[tmp] )
metMZ <- sapply(profileInfo(metFinProf)$Masses[tmp],
    function(x) as.numeric(unlist(strsplit(x,";"))) )
metLib <- new("tsLib", Name = metNames, RI = metRI,
    selMass = metMZ, RIdev = c(1500, 750, 250))</pre>
```

After the new library object is created, the process can be repeated as shown above.

Finally, by using the function writeMSP, it is possible to export the spectrum of the unknown metabolites to MSP format used by NIST mass spectra search (http://www.nist.gov/ srd/mslist.htm), so the unknown spectra can be search against known metabolite spectra databases.

### References

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## 8 Session info

Output of **sessionInfo()** on the system on which this document was compiled.

- R version 4.2.0 RC (2022-04-19 r82224), x86\_64-pc-linux-gnu
- Locale: LC\_CTYPE=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_NUMERIC=C, LC\_TIME=en\_GB, LC\_COLLATE=C, LC\_MONETARY=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_MESSAGES=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_PAPER=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_NAME=C, LC\_ADDRESS=C, LC\_TELEPHONE=C, LC\_MEASUREMENT=en\_US.UTF-8, LC\_IDENTIFICATION=C
- Running under: Ubuntu 20.04.4 LTS
- Matrix products: default
- BLAS: /home/biocbuild/bbs-3.15-bioc/R/lib/libRblas.so
- LAPACK: /home/biocbuild/bbs-3.15-bioc/R/lib/libRlapack.so
- Base packages: base, datasets, grDevices, graphics, methods, stats, utils
- Other packages: TargetSearch 1.52.0, TargetSearchData 1.33.0
- Loaded via a namespace (and not attached): BiocManager 1.30.17, BiocStyle 2.24.0, assertthat 0.2.1, cli 3.3.0, compiler 4.2.0, digest 0.6.29, evaluate 0.15, fastmap 1.1.0, highr 0.9, htmltools 0.5.2, knitr 1.38, magrittr 2.0.3, ncdf4 1.19, rlang 1.0.2, rmarkdown 2.14, stringi 1.7.6, stringr 1.4.0, tools 4.2.0, xfun 0.30, yaml 2.3.5