

Science in a Competitive Format

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Nowadays, most people see programming competitions as a ladder that leads to the work in a software industry. However, there is another area where algorithmic skills are highly valuable, which is science. And while people are generally aware of computer science, there are other important fields, such as physics, biology, economics and others, where many algorithmic problems emerge.

Thus, to spread the idea that the science could be fun and could pose a lot of different and interesting algorithmic questions, we decided to host the first Bioinformatics Contest (<http://contest.bioinf.me>). Bioinformatics is an area of science at the cross of biology, medicine and computer science. It is a very important field, which results could help humankind.

Mirroring the real life we developed a problem set consisting of two types of problems: with exact and approximate answers. The first type are typical ACM-style problems where a participant is required to develop an algorithm for a well-defined problem. Problems of the second type are similar to TopCoder Marathon problems where people are awarded partial points depending on the quality of the answer.

The contest was held online on Stepik platform and attracted about 3000 participants world-wide. Five winners are known olympiad competitors, while the top 20 places were distributed evenly amongst programming competitors and active researchers.

Overall, we found such contests to be a good way to introduce research to talented programmers as a possible interesting career path.