

Usage of R packages in accordance to their license type

Thousands of R packages are available on websites like CRAN, Github, Bioconductor, ... Those open source codes can be downloaded and deployed on your private R installation allowing you to provide data exploration, analyses or to develop R Shiny interfaces.

But behind those “open source” code, hides a system of user rights through types of licenses. Indeed, if you look more deeply on the information provided on these webpages you will find that, for each package, a type of license is associated (as shown on below screenshots)



The screenshot shows the CRAN page for the `ggplot2` package. The license is listed as `GPL-2 | file LICENSE`, which is highlighted with a red box. The page also displays the package version (3.3.2), dependencies, and other metadata.

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ggplot2: Create Elegant Data Visualisations Using the Grammar of Graphics

A system for 'declaratively' creating graphics, based on "The Grammar of Graphics". You provide the data, tell 'ggplot2' how to map variables to aesthetics, what graphical primitives to use, and it takes care of the details.

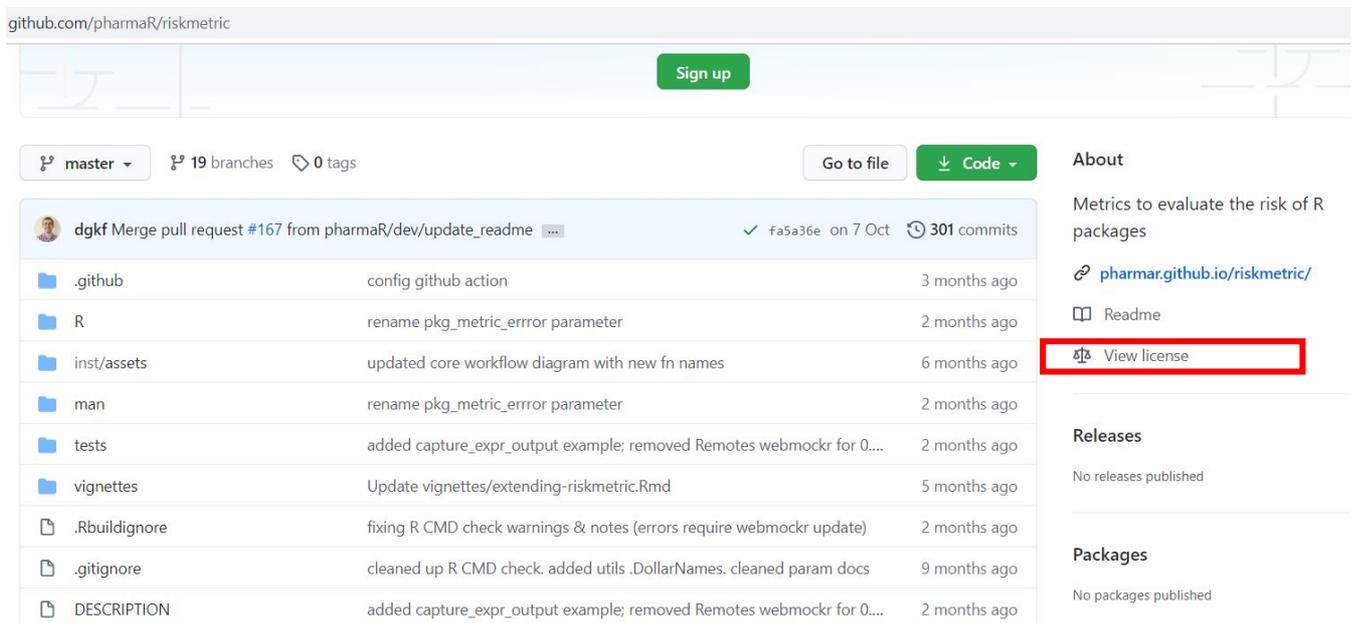
Version: 3.3.2
Depends: R (≥ 3.2)
Imports: digest, glue, grDevices, grid, gtable (≥ 0.1.1), isoband, MASS, mgcv, rlang (≥ 0.3.0), scales (≥ 0.5.0), stats, tibble, withr (≥ 2.0.0)
Suggests: covr, dplyr, ggplot2movies, hexbin, Hmisc, knitr, lattice, mapproj, maps, maptools, multcomp, munsell, nlme, profvis, quantreg, RColorBrewer, rgeos, markdown, rpart, sf (≥ 0.7-3), svglite (≥ 1.2.0.9001), testthat (≥ 2.1.0), vdiff (≥ 0.3.0)
Enhances: sp
Published: 2020-06-19
Author: Hadley Wickham [aut], Winston Chang [aut], Lionel Henry [aut], Thomas Lin Pedersen [aut, cre], Kokshe Takahashi [aut], Claus Wilke [aut], Kara Woo [aut], Hiroaki Yutani [aut], Dewey Dunnington [aut], RStudio [cph, fnd]
Maintainer: Thomas Lin Pedersen <thomas.pedersen@rstudio.com>
BugReports: https://github.com/tidymodels/ggplot2/issues
License: GPL-2 | file LICENSE
URL: https://ggplot2.tidyverse.org, https://github.com/tidyverse/ggplot2
NeedsCompilation: no
Citation: ggplot2 citation info
Materials: README NEWS
In views: Graphics, Phylogenetics, TeachingStatistics
CRAN checks: ggplot2 results

Downloads:

Reference manual: ggplot2.pdf
Vignettes: Extending ggplot2
Using ggplot2 in packages
Aesthetic specifications

Package source: ggplot2_3.3.2.tar.gz
Windows binaries: r-devel: ggplot2_3.3.2.zip, r-release: ggplot2_3.3.2.zip, r-oldrel: ggplot2_3.3.2.zip
macOS binaries: r-release: ggplot2_3.3.2.tgz, r-oldrel: ggplot2_3.3.2.tgz
Old sources: ggplot2 archive

Reverse dependencies:



The screenshot shows the GitHub repository for `pharmaR/riskmetric`. The repository is currently on the `master` branch, has 19 branches, and 0 tags. The license is listed as `GPL-2`. The repository contains several files and folders, including `.github`, `R`, `inst/assets`, `man`, `tests`, `vignettes`, `.Rbuildignore`, `.gitignore`, and `DESCRIPTION`. The license is highlighted with a red box.

github.com/pharmaR/riskmetric

Sign up

master 19 branches 0 tags

Go to file Code

About

Metrics to evaluate the risk of R packages

pharmar.github.io/riskmetric/

Readme

View license

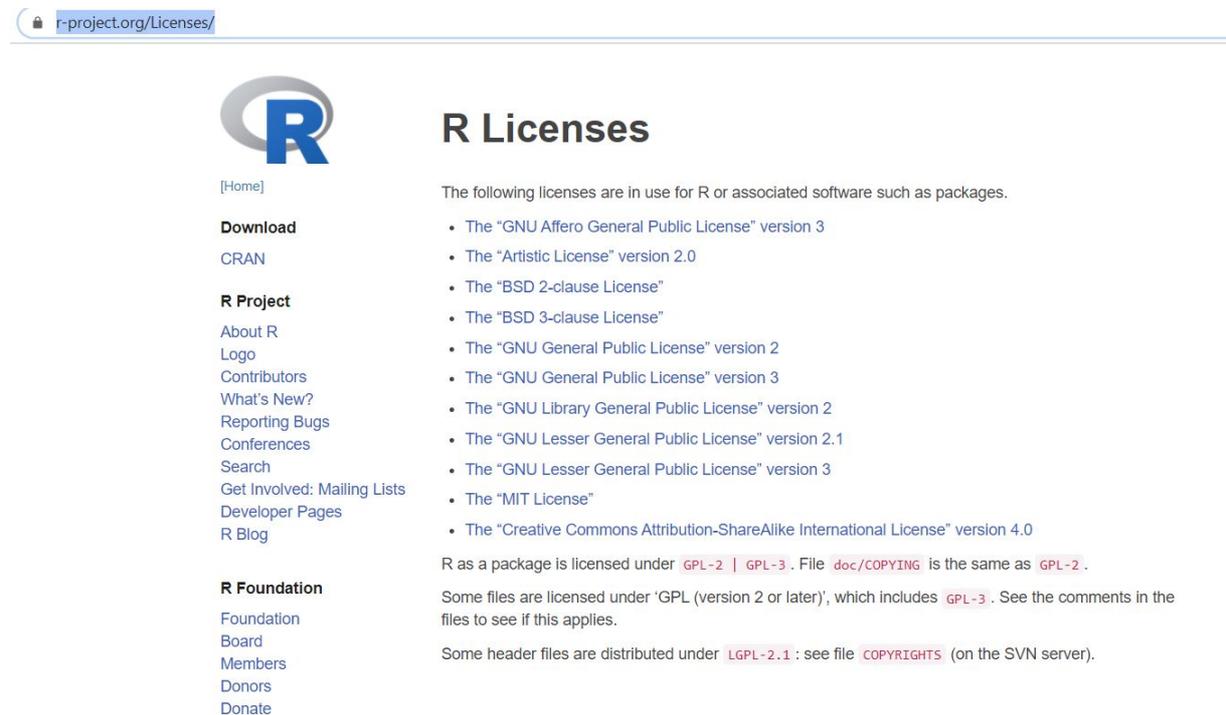
Releases

No releases published

Packages

No packages published

There are lots of different types of license but the ten most used for R packages are listed on <https://www.r-project.org/Licenses/>

The image is a screenshot of the R Project website's 'Licenses' page. At the top left, there is a navigation menu with links for [Home], Download, CRAN, R Project, About R, Logo, Contributors, What's New?, Reporting Bugs, Conferences, Search, Get Involved: Mailing Lists, Developer Pages, and R Blog. Below this is the 'R Foundation' section with links for Foundation, Board, Members, Donors, and Donate. The main content area is titled 'R Licenses' and contains a list of ten licenses used for R packages: GNU Affero GPL v3, Artistic License v2.0, BSD 2-clause, BSD 3-clause, GNU GPL v2, GNU GPL v3, GNU Library GPL v2, GNU Lesser GPL v2.1, GNU Lesser GPL v3, and MIT License. It also includes information about the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike license and details about R's own licensing (GPL-2, GPL-3, and doc/COPYING).

These licenses govern the conditions of the use of R packages, and on your created code, if you aim to share it outside your company. Full terms of those licenses can be accessed on the CRAN website and you can find a summary of the main right of use and incompatibility between license on <https://www.gnu.org/licenses/license-list.fr.html>

Furthermore, some of those licenses:

- allow you to freely use R package, but do not allow you to modify the source code if needed unless you then make your new script public,
- allow you to freely use or modify an R package but included a contaminating condition that oblige you to use same level of license if you want to share (or sell) your script,
- allow you to totally freely use the R package, modify it and share it (for free or sell) to anyone (MIT). The only condition to follow in this case is to include this MIT copyright and permission notice in the copy (see <https://www.r-project.org/Licenses/MIT>).

The license is also an important point to take into account when you're developing your own package (to publish it on CRAN or another website) or when you outsource this development. In both cases you will have to define the expected license level from the beginning.

To help you for this license level "evaluation" you can look at the license information on a website like <https://www.gnu.org/licenses/license-recommendations.en.html>.

It is worth noting that, when you create an R package, you only distribute *your* code. You do not generally distribute (or modify) any package dependencies specified in the package DESCRIPTION file (including base R or and C libraries).

In case of doubt for a specific project do not hesitate to contact your legal department (or a specialized company).

It should also be noted that for certain licenses allowing free use, developers of derived codes or applications (as companies, etc.) cannot oppose the use or modification of their code or application in the case where a third party would have legally had a copy of it.

Now that you are more aware of the licenses for R packages, remember to check them before your use to avoid disappointments at the end of the project 😊.

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On behalf of the PSI AIMS SIG.

Disclaimer: The content of the article are the beliefs of the author and do not represent Servier.