RBT STUDY GUIDE: ASSESSMENT SECTION

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Introduction to Assessment

Assessment procedures form a critical foundation for effective behavior analytic intervention. As an RBT, you'll assist in implementing various assessments under the direction of a BCBA supervisor. Understanding different assessment types, procedural integrity, and accurate data collection is essential for this content area.

This section covers:

- Conducting preference assessments
- Assisting with functional behavior assessments
- Assisting with functional analysis procedures
- Implementing skill assessments

Assessment in RBT Practice:

- Comprises approximately 15% of the RBT exam
- Provides essential information for treatment planning
- Establishes baselines for measuring progress
- Identifies intervention priorities and strategies

Key Principles of Behavioral Assessment:

1. Systematic - follows standardized procedures
2. Objective - based on observable events

3. Comprehensive - examines multiple variables
4. Function-based - identifies maintaining variables
5. Skill-focused - determines current abilities and needs

B-1: Conduct Preference Assessments

Purpose and Types of Preference Assessments

Definition and Purpose: Preference assessments systematically identify items, activities, or stimuli that may function as reinforcers for an individual. These procedures help:

- Identify potential reinforcers for behavior change programs
- Establish a hierarchy of preferences (high to low)
- Track changes in preferences over time
- Minimize reliance on arbitrary reinforcer selection

Common Types of Preference Assessments:

Single-Stimulus (SS):

- Presents items one at a time
- Measures approach/consumption/engagement
- Advantages: Simple, quick, useful for individuals with limited discrimination skills
- Disadvantages: Does not establish hierarchy, may overestimate preferences

Paired-Stimulus (PS) / Forced-Choice:

- Presents items in pairs
- Individual selects one item from each pair
- All possible pairs presented
- Creates preference hierarchy based on selection percentage
- Advantages: Establishes clear hierarchy, relatively quick
- Disadvantages: More complex than SS, requires discrimination skills

Multiple-Stimulus Without Replacement (MSWO):

- Array of items presented simultaneously
- Individual selects one item
- Selected item removed and remaining items rearranged
- Process continues until all items selected or no selection made
- Advantages: Establishes hierarchy quickly, fewer trials than paired-stimulus
- Disadvantages: Requires scanning skills, may be overwhelming with many items

Multiple-Stimulus With Replacement (MSW):

- Array of items presented simultaneously
- Individual selects one item

- All items (including selected one) rearranged for next trial
- Advantages: Controls for positional bias
- Disadvantages: Time-intensive, may not produce clear hierarchy

Free-Operant Observation:

- Various items available simultaneously for extended period
- Measure time engaged with each item
- Advantages: Naturalistic, minimal interference with access
- Disadvantages: Time-intensive, requires continuous observation

Implementation Procedures

General Preparation Steps:

1. Identify potential reinforcers through interviews, observations
2. Gather all materials before beginning
3. Minimize distractions in assessment area
4. Review specific protocol with supervisor
5. Prepare data collection sheets

Paired-Stimulus Assessment Implementation:

1. Place two items equidistant from individual and each other
2. Deliver instruction: "Pick one" or "Which one do you want?"
3. Allow 5 seconds for response
4. Provide brief access to selected item (30 seconds)
5. Record selection
6. Repeat with all possible pairs in randomized order
7. Calculate percentage of times each item selected (selections ÷ presentations × 100)

MSWO Assessment Implementation:

1. Arrange 5-7 items in a semicircle equidistant from individual
2. Deliver instruction: "Pick one"
3. Allow 5 seconds for response
4. Provide brief access to selected item (30 seconds)
5. Remove selected item, rearrange remaining items
6. Repeat until all items selected or no selection made
7. Complete 3-5 sessions and average rankings

Example Data Sheet Format:

Copy

```
Client: _______ Date: _______ Assessor: _______
Assessment Type: MSWO
Items: Tablet, Bubbles, Ball, Music, Puzzle, Crayons

Session 1:
```

```
  1st selection: Tablet
  2nd selection: Music
  3rd selection: Bubbles
  4th selection: Ball
  5th selection: Puzzle
  6th selection: Crayons (by process of elimination)

Session 2:
  1st selection: Tablet
  2nd selection: Bubbles
  3rd selection: Music
  4th selection: Puzzle
  5th selection: Ball
  6th selection: Crayons (by process of elimination)

Session 3:
  1st selection: Music
  2nd selection: Tablet
  3rd selection: Bubbles
  4th selection: Ball
  5th selection: Puzzle
  6th selection: No selection made

Average Rankings:
  Tablet: 1.33
  Music: 2.00
  Bubbles: 2.67
  Ball: 4.33
  Puzzle: 4.67
  Crayons: 6.00
```

Common Implementation Challenges

Competing Environmental Stimuli:

- **Challenge**: Individual distracted by items in environment
- **Solution**: Conduct assessment in minimally stimulating environment
- **Documentation**: Note environmental conditions that may affect results

Multiple/Simultaneous Selections:

- **Challenge**: Individual attempts to select multiple items
- **Solution**: Block access to secondary items, reinstate trial if necessary
- **Documentation**: Note multiple selection attempts in comments

No Selection Responding:

- **Challenge**: Individual does not select any items
- **Solution**: Consider alternative assessment format, check motivation

- **Documentation**: Record "no selection" for affected trials

Position Bias:

- **Challenge**: Individual consistently selects items in specific position
- **Solution**: Systematically vary item positions
- **Documentation**: Note position patterns for supervisor review

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B-2: Assist with Functional Behavior Assessment Procedures

ABC (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence) Data Collection

Purpose and Description: ABC data collection involves the systematic observation and recording of:

- **Antecedents**: Environmental events occurring immediately before the target behavior
- **Behaviors**: Detailed, objective description of the target behavior
- **Consequences**: Events occurring immediately after the target behavior

This narrative format helps identify patterns and potential functions of behavior.

Implementation Steps:

1. Prepare ABC data sheet with columns for time, antecedents, behaviors, and consequences
2. Observe client in relevant environments
3. When target behavior occurs, immediately record:
    - Specific environmental events immediately preceding behavior
    - Detailed description of the behavior itself
    - Events that followed the behavior (including natural consequences)
4. Note exact times when possible
5. Remain objective and avoid interpretations

Example ABC Data:

Copy

```
Client: _____ Date: _____ Observer: _____
Setting: Classroom during math instruction

Time    | Antecedent                          | Behavior
| Consequence
--------|-------------------------------------|----------------------
---------|-----------------------------------
```

```
9:15 AM | Teacher gives worksheet with      | Client crumples
paper,          | Teacher provides one-on-one
        | 20 double-digit multiplication    | throws on floor, says
| assistance, reduces task to
        | problems                          | "This is too hard"
| 5 problems
        |                                   |
|
9:47 AM | Peer obtains teacher              | Client raises voice
saying     | Teacher provides attention,
        | attention for completed work      | "Look at mine too"
| offers praise for work
        |                                   |
|
10:22 AM| Teacher announces 5 minutes       | Client puts head down
| Task requirement delayed,
        | left to complete assignment       | on desk, refuses to
respond    | allowed to finish during break
        |                                   | to prompts
|
```

Pattern Identification: After collecting multiple instances, review data to identify:

- Common antecedents preceding behavior
- Typical consequences following behavior
- Environmental patterns (times, settings, people)
- Potential function hypotheses based on patterns

Structured ABC Form Implementation

Advantages Over Narrative Format:

- More efficient for frequent behaviors
- Easier to identify patterns visually
- Allows for quantitative analysis
- Standardizes observation categories

Common Structured Categories:

Antecedent Categories:

- Presented with task/demand
- Denied access to item/activity
- Attention diverted to others
- Transition between activities
- Presence of specific people
- Environmental changes (noise, lighting)

Behavior Categories (based on operational definitions):

- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Property destruction
- Elopement
- Vocal disruption
- Non-compliance

Consequence Categories:

- Obtained attention
- Escaped/avoided task
- Obtained item/activity
- Sensory stimulation
- No apparent consequence
- Other (specify)

Structured Form Example:

Copy

```
Client: _______ Date: _______ Observer: _______
Time Period: 9:00-11:00 AM
Setting: Classroom

Time  | Antecedent Category | Behavior Category | Consequence
Category
------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------
----
9:15  | Presented task      | Property destruct.| Escaped task
9:47  | Attention to peers  | Vocal disruption  | Obtained
attention
10:22 | Presented task      | Non-compliance    | Escaped task
```

Scatterplot Assessment

Purpose and Description: Scatterplot assessments document patterns of behavior occurrence across time periods to identify temporal patterns or correlations with environmental events.

Implementation Steps:

1. Create a grid with time periods (rows) and days (columns)
2. Observe and record behavior occurrence during each time period
3. Note intensity or frequency using predetermined rating system
4. Identify patterns across time periods and days
5. Connect patterns to environmental events (activities, staffing, etc.)

Example Scatterplot Format:

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```
Client: _______ Date Range: 4/1-4/5 Observer: _______
Behavior: Aggressive behavior (hitting, kicking, biting)
Rating: 0=None, 1=Low (1-2 occurrences), 2=Moderate (3-5), 3=High (6+)
```

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-9:00	1	0	1	0	0
9:00-10:00	2	3	2	3	2
10:00-11:00	0	1	0	1	0
11:00-12:00	0	0	0	0	0
12:00-1:00	0	0	1	0	0
1:00-2:00	3	3	2	3	3

Pattern Analysis:

- Behavior consistently higher during 9:00-10:00 and 1:00-2:00
- These time periods correspond to math instruction and independent work periods
- Suggests possible task avoidance function

B-3: Assist with Functional Analysis Procedures

Functional Analysis Basics

Definition and Purpose: Functional analysis (FA) is a systematic process of experimentally manipulating environmental variables to identify functional relationships between behaviors and specific environmental conditions. FAs provide the most rigorous evidence for behavior function.

Key Distinctions:

- **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)**: General term for various assessment procedures
- **Functional Analysis (FA)**: Specific experimental analysis with controlled conditions
- **Experimental Functional Analysis**: Full analysis with all standard conditions
- **Brief Functional Analysis**: Abbreviated version with fewer trials

RBT Role in Functional Analysis:

1. Implementing precisely defined protocols as designed by BCBA
2. Following specific condition guidelines with procedural integrity
3. Recording data accurately during sessions
4. Maintaining safety procedures throughout assessment
5. Not designing or modifying protocols independently

Standard Functional Analysis Conditions

Attention Condition:

- **Purpose**: Tests if behavior is maintained by social positive reinforcement (attention)
- **Setup**: Low attention environment, attention delivered contingent on target behavior
- **Implementation**:
    1. Tell client, "I have some work to do" or similar statement
    2. Engage in other activity, minimize attention
    3. Contingent on target behavior, provide brief attention (10-30 seconds)
    4. Return to minimal attention after delivery
    5. Record occurrences of target behavior

Escape Condition:

- **Purpose**: Tests if behavior is maintained by social negative reinforcement (escape from demands)
- **Setup**: Continuous presentation of demands with brief breaks contingent on problem behavior
- **Implementation**:
    1. Present demands consistently using three-step prompting
    2. Contingent on target behavior, remove demands for brief period (30 seconds)
    3. After break, reintroduce demands
    4. Record occurrences of target behavior

Tangible Condition:

- **Purpose**: Tests if behavior is maintained by access to items/activities
- **Setup**: Preferred items visible but not accessible, delivered contingent on target behavior
- **Implementation**:
    1. Keep preferred items visible but out of reach
    2. Contingent on target behavior, provide brief access (30 seconds)
    3. Remove item after access period
    4. Record occurrences of target behavior

Alone/Ignore Condition:

- **Purpose**: Tests if behavior is maintained by automatic reinforcement
- **Setup**: Minimal environmental stimulation, no social consequences
- **Implementation**:
    1. Place client in setting with minimal stimulation
    2. No interaction or consequences delivered for behavior
    3. Record occurrences of target behavior
    4. Prioritize safety monitoring

Control/Play Condition:

- **Purpose**: Serves as comparison condition with minimized motivation for problem behavior
- **Setup**: Free access to preferred items, attention, and no demands

- **Implementation**:
    1. Provide noncontingent access to preferred items
    2. Deliver attention every 30 seconds
    3. No demands presented
    4. Ignore problem behavior
    5. Record occurrences of target behavior

Procedural Integrity in Functional Analysis

Critical Elements for RBT Implementation:

1. **Condition Adherence**: Implementing each condition exactly as designed
2. **Consequence Consistency**: Delivering consequences only as specified
3. **Timing Accuracy**: Maintaining specified durations for conditions and consequences
4. **Data Precision**: Recording behavior occurrences with temporal accuracy
5. **Environmental Control**: Minimizing unplanned environmental variables

Common Implementation Errors:

- Delivering attention during alone/ignore conditions
- Inconsistent application of three-step prompting in escape condition
- Variable timing of consequence delivery
- Failing to return to condition after delivering consequence
- Inadvertent reinforcement of behaviors other than targets

Safety Considerations:

- Always prioritize client and staff safety over procedural purity
- Know crisis intervention procedures before beginning
- Establish clear termination criteria for dangerous behavior
- Maintain supervision visibility throughout sessions
- Document any safety-related deviations from protocol

B-4: Assist with Skill Assessments

Types of Skill Assessments

Standardized Assessments:

- Formal assessments with normative data
- Published protocols with specific administration guidelines
- Examples: VB-MAPP, ABLLS-R, AFLS, Vineland-3

Curriculum-Based Assessments:

- Directly linked to intervention curricula

- Assess skills in sequence of teaching progression
- Examples: Program-specific assessments, academic curriculum assessments

Task Analyses:

- Break complex skills into component steps
- Assess performance on each component
- Examples: Self-care routines, vocational tasks, complex academic skills

Naturalistic Observations:

- Assessment in natural contexts
- Focus on functional application of skills
- Examples: Playground observations, mealtime assessments, community skills

Implementation Procedures

General Implementation Guidelines:

1. Review assessment protocol thoroughly before beginning
2. Gather all required materials and data sheets
3. Arrange environment according to protocol specifications
4. Minimize distractions during assessment
5. Follow exact presentation procedures as specified
6. Record responses precisely according to scoring criteria
7. Maintain neutral affect during administration
8. Do not provide feedback about correctness unless specified
9. Adhere to starting/stopping rules in protocol

Prompting Considerations:

- Provide only prompts specified in protocol
- Record prompted vs. independent responses distinctly
- Avoid unintentional prompting (facial expressions, eye gaze)
- Follow specific error correction procedures if indicated

Data Collection Requirements:

- Record exact responses, not just correct/incorrect
- Note qualitative aspects of performance when relevant
- Document environmental factors affecting performance
- Maintain verbatim records of verbal responses when required
- Include latency, duration, or other dimensions if specified

Common Skill Assessment Types and Implementation

Discrete Trial Assessment:

- Structured presentation of individual items

- Clear discriminative stimuli and response requirements
- Implementation:
    1. Present stimulus exactly as specified
    2. Wait for response or until response interval elapses
    3. Record response according to scoring criteria
    4. Provide consequence as specified (often neutral)
    5. Maintain intertrial interval before next item

Probe Assessment:

- Testing performance without prior instruction
- Assessing maintenance of previously mastered skills
- Implementation:
    1. Present target skill opportunity without teaching
    2. Record response accuracy, independence, etc.
    3. Provide minimal feedback (unless otherwise specified)
    4. Test multiple exemplars of same skill when possible

Natural Environment Assessment:

- Assessment during typical activities
- Focus on functional application of skills
- Implementation:
    1. Arrange natural opportunities or contrive situations
    2. Observe response to natural cues
    3. Record occurrence/nonoccurrence of target skills
    4. Note contextual variables affecting performance
    5. Allow natural consequences when possible

Task Analysis Assessment:

- Evaluation of each step in complex sequence
- Focus on both accuracy and independence
- Implementation:
    1. Present initial discriminative stimulus
    2. Observe performance of each step
    3. Record performance level on each component (independent, verbal prompt, gesture prompt, physical prompt, etc.)
    4. Allow sufficient time between steps
    5. Complete entire sequence regardless of errors (unless protocol specifies otherwise)

Skill Assessment Challenges and Solutions

Motivational Challenges:

- **Challenge**: Client disengaged from assessment process
- **Solution**: Intersperse easy items, provide breaks, embed in preferred activities
- **Documentation**: Note motivational variables affecting performance

Instructional History Effects:

- **Challenge**: Previous teaching affecting assessment responses
- **Solution**: Use novel examples, vary presentation from teaching format
- **Documentation**: Record relevant instructional history information

Environmental Distractions:

- **Challenge**: External stimuli interfering with assessment
- **Solution**: Minimize distractions, reschedule if necessary
- **Documentation**: Note environmental conditions affecting results

Prompt Dependency:

- **Challenge**: Client waiting for prompts before responding
- **Solution**: Maintain neutral wait time, follow protocol regarding prompts
- **Documentation**: Record patterns of prompt-waiting behavior

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Practice Questions

1. When conducting a paired-stimulus preference assessment, items should be presented: a) In a single row in front of the client b) One at a time in random order c) In pairs, with all possible pairings presented d) In a semicircle arrangement
2. During the attention condition of a functional analysis, the RBT should provide attention: a) On a fixed-time schedule throughout the session b) Only contingent upon the occurrence of the target behavior c) Whenever the client is engaging in appropriate behavior d) At random intervals regardless of client behavior
3. When collecting ABC data, the RBT should focus on documenting: a) The client's internal emotional states b) The hypothesized function of the behavior c) Observable environmental events before and after the behavior d) Historical patterns of behavior over time
4. A scatterplot assessment is most useful for identifying: a) The function of problem behavior b) Preferred reinforcers for a client c) Temporal patterns of behavior occurrence d) Skill deficits across developmental domains
5. When assisting with a skill assessment, the RBT's role includes: a) Designing the assessment protocol b) Modifying the assessment based on client performance c) Implementing the assessment protocol as designed by the BCBA d) Determining skill acquisition goals based on results
6. During a task analysis assessment, if a client is unable to complete a step, the RBT should typically: a) Skip that step and move on to the next one b) Provide full physical prompting and continue c) End the assessment and report failure d) Follow the specific assessment protocol for errors
7. In the escape condition of a functional analysis, which consequence should occur contingent on the target problem behavior? a) Providing attention b) Providing access to tangible items c) Removing demands temporarily d) Ignoring the behavior

8. When conducting an MSWO preference assessment, after a selection is made, the RBT should: a) Return the selected item to the array in a different position b) Remove the selected item from the array c) Replace the selected item with a new item d) Allow continuous access to the selected item
9. Which of the following would be an objective way to document behavior in an ABC assessment? a) "Client was very aggressive and upset" b) "Client hit peer on arm twice with open hand" c) "Client displayed negative attention-seeking behavior" d) "Client was uncooperative with teacher demands"
10. When implementing a standardized assessment, the RBT should: a) Modify items to match the client's ability level b) Skip items that appear too difficult for the client c) Follow the standardized protocol exactly as written d) Provide additional prompting as needed for success

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Answer Key

1. **c) In pairs, with all possible pairings presented** *Explanation: In a paired-stimulus preference assessment, items are presented in pairs, with each item paired with every other item to determine relative preference. This allows for calculation of a preference hierarchy based on selection percentage.*
2. **b) Only contingent upon the occurrence of the target behavior** *Explanation: The purpose of the attention condition in a functional analysis is to test if behavior is maintained by attention. Attention is withheld except when the target problem behavior occurs, at which point attention is delivered contingently.*
3. **c) Observable environmental events before and after the behavior** *Explanation: ABC data collection focuses on objectively recording the Antecedents (events preceding the behavior), the Behavior itself, and the Consequences (events following the behavior) to identify patterns and potential functions.*
4. **c) Temporal patterns of behavior occurrence** *Explanation: A scatterplot assessment is designed to identify patterns of behavior occurrence across time periods and days to determine if behavior is correlated with specific times, activities, or routines.*
5. **c) Implementing the assessment protocol as designed by the BCBA** *Explanation: The RBT's role in skill assessment is to implement the assessment protocol exactly as designed by the supervising BCBA, including following specified administration procedures and data collection methods.*
6. **d) Follow the specific assessment protocol for errors** *Explanation: Different assessment protocols have specific procedures for handling errors. The RBT should follow these protocols exactly as specified rather than making independent decisions about how to proceed.*
7. **c) Removing demands temporarily** *Explanation: In the escape condition, the purpose is to test if behavior is maintained by negative reinforcement (escape from demands). When the target behavior occurs, demands are temporarily removed to determine if this reinforces the behavior.*
8. **b) Remove the selected item from the array** *Explanation: In a Multiple-Stimulus Without Replacement (MSWO) assessment, after a selection is made, that item is*

removed from the array for subsequent trials within that session. This is what distinguishes MSWO from MSW (with replacement).

9. **b) "Client hit peer on arm twice with open hand"** *Explanation: This description is objective because it describes the observable behavior in specific, measurable terms without interpretation or judgment.*
10. **c) Follow the standardized protocol exactly as written** *Explanation: When implementing standardized assessments, it is critical to follow the protocol exactly as written to maintain the validity and reliability of the assessment. Modifications compromise standardization and invalidate the results.*

Note: This document is for educational purposes only. For official RBT Certification requirements, always refer to the BACB website and current Task List.