

Four Ways to Troubleshoot Inconclusive Functional Analyses

So you've run an FA. Awesome! There are times, however, when FA results look quite different than the ones in *JABA*. Whether you've observed low (or even zero) rates of responding, or response patterns that aren't readily interpreted by conventional standards, here are a few procedural tweaks you can try. These suggestions came from Sessions 1 and 7 of *The Behavioral Observations Podcast*, which features interviews with Dr. Greg Hanley from Western New England University. Give them a listen for more information, or check out [Dr. Hanley's website](#) directly. I hope you find these suggestions helpful!

1. Re-interview caregivers to get more precise information regarding the evocative stimuli. For example, if the original interview suggested escape as a reinforcer, are you providing different instructional demands that caregivers typically do? Are there specific words, phrases, or even prosodic features that you can more closely duplicate? If Attention is thought to be the reinforcer, exactly how is that attention provided (again, specific phrases, tonality, etc... applies here as well). The details are key here, so try to replicate the evocative conditions as best as possible. Completing the [Open Ended Functional Assessment Interview](#) prior to the analysis will help with this.
2. Check for therapist reactivity. If no target behaviors occur when you run sessions, have the client's caregivers implement the analysis (under your supervision, of course).
3. Synthesize the hypothesized reinforcement contingencies. When re-interviewing caregivers, try to determine, for example, what an individual is escaping **to**. That is, when provided a demand, do target behaviors lead to escape, and **then** attention from caregivers? Tangibles? Opportunities for stereotypic behavior? If so, consider incorporating the more accurate, complex set of reinforcing consequences to your follow up functional analysis.
4. When possible, observe the behavior in its context to help answer items 1 through 3. This is the last of these suggestions because clients do not always oblige clinicians with opportunities to observe their challenging behaviors in their naturally occurring contexts. Also, caregivers may have learned to avoid evocative events, which makes the opportunity to observe less likely. However, observation may be a helpful tool if your functional analysis has stalled.

Do you have other strategies that work for you? Feel free to send comments and suggestions to matt@behavioralobservations.com