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Continuous vs Discontinuous Measurement for RBTs (PDF)

Candidates often lose points when they confuse continuous measurement, which records every occurrence of a behavior, with discontinuous measurement, which samples part of the session. This set focuses on that distinction and on the recording methods that follow from it, such as frequency counts, event and duration recording, and interval-based sampling. Use it after you have reviewed the measurement definitions in the task list. Pay attention to what the stem says about observation time, since that detail usually tells you which category a method belongs to. Each question also gives a short reason for the answer, so you can see why a method fits the data it produces.

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Practice questions

Answer every question before you look at the key, then check yourself on the next pages.

1. An RBT must record every time a learner hits the desk. Which continuous measure directly answers how many times it occurred?

- **A** Latency
- **B** Interresponse time
- **C** Frequency
- **D** Duration

2. The team needs to know how long a learner engages in a tantrum during each episode. Which continuous measure fits this goal?

- **A** Whole-interval recording
- **B** Duration per occurrence
- **C** Response rate per minute
- **D** Percentage of intervals

3. During interval recording, a response begins just after each timer check. What should the RBT remember when summarizing the sample?

- **A** A percentage of scored intervals may be read directly as the share of time it occurred
- **B** Averaging enough sessions together should remove the error from interval sampling
- **C** The recorded amount can be inflated or shrunk by the sampling rule that was used
- **D** Momentary samples also capture responses that happen between the scheduled checks

4. Soon after extinction begins, Mateo's pushing the trays away becomes temporarily more frequent and intense. Which secondary effect is this?

- **A** A sign that the behavior's function has changed since the plan began
- **B** A burst, a short-lived rise as the reinforcer first stops coming
- **C** Maintenance, since the behavior keeps occurring under the new plan
- **D** Stimulus generalization, since the behavior now occurs in a new condition

5. During a 30-minute session, an RBT counts each time Milo independently requests help. Which measurement procedure is being used?

- **A** Frequency count
- **B** Interval scoring
- **C** Duration timing
- **D** Preference ranking

6. The RBT observed that Omar cried continuously for 95 seconds when the tablet was removed. How should this be recorded?

- **A** Summarize the client's attitude and intentions, such as defiant or motivated, in a short statement.
- **B** Record the observable behavior and its count, leaving out the context and procedures to keep it brief.
- **C** Reuse yesterday's note with the date updated, since the same programs were run in this session.
- **D** Record the observable behavior, the context, the measured result, and which procedures were used.

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7. Leo asks to change activities many times each session. The behavior is fine occasionally, so the plan reinforces it only when its rate stays at or below a criterion. Which procedure is this?

- **A** DRI
- **B** DRL
- **C** Response cost
- **D** DRO

8. Before collecting continuous data on a target with a clear onset and offset whose episodes vary in length, what distinction is most important for the RBT to understand?

- **A** Whether the plan sets an interval length, a start time, and a yes-or-no scoring rule
- **B** Whether the behavior was occurring at each interval's end, or at any point within it
- **C** Whether a lasting product, such as a form or worksheet, remains after the session
- **D** Whether the plan's goal is a count, a length, a cue delay, or response spacing

9. At the supervisor's direction, the team uses event recording during ordinary play under naturally occurring conditions. How should this component be classified?

- **A** Preference assessment
- **B** Indirect assessment
- **C** Descriptive assessment
- **D** Functional analysis

10. During a 15-minute session, Nora records every instance of a learner tapping a help card. Which measurement procedure is the closest match?

- **A** Frequency recording
- **B** Duration recording
- **C** Latency recording
- **D** Permanent product data

11. A technician records how many times Lee requests a break during a 2-hour clinic session. Which task is the closest match?

- **A** A.1 continuous measurement
- **B** A.3 permanent product recording
- **C** B.1 preference assessment
- **D** E.4 objective documentation

12. A review reveals that a frequency tally totals 12 but the graph shows 21. How should the RBT protect data accuracy?

- **A** Leave the entry as it is and raise the error at the next scheduled team meeting
- **B** Replace the value with an estimate based on the sessions just before and after
- **C** Remove the questionable session from the graph until the supervisor reviews it
- **D** Check the entry against the source record, then correct or report it per procedure

Answer key and explanations

1. Correct answer: C · Frequency

Frequency is a count of each occurrence of a discrete response during the observation. Use frequency when the question is "how many times?" and each response has a clear beginning and end.

Task: A.1

2. Correct answer: B · Duration per occurrence

Duration captures the elapsed time from the beginning to the end of a response or episode. Use duration for behavior whose length matters.

Task: A.1

3. Correct answer: C · The recorded amount can be inflated or shrunk by the sampling rule that was used

Discontinuous procedures sample behavior and may not equal its exact frequency or duration. Treat interval data as an estimate produced by the specified sampling rule.

Task: A.2

4. Correct answer: B · A burst, a short-lived rise as the reinforcer first stops coming

A temporary increase in frequency, duration, or intensity after extinction begins is an extinction burst. An extinction burst is a temporary escalation, not proof that the plan should be changed independently.

Task: D.6

5. Correct answer: A · Frequency count

Frequency records how many times a response occurs.

Task: A.1

6. Correct answer: D · Record the observable behavior, the context, the measured result, and which procedures were used.

Session documentation should be objective, accurate, and compliant with legal, regulatory, and workplace requirements. Observable descriptions and data replace labels, motives, omissions, or copied boilerplate. If another trained observer could not verify the wording, make it more objective.

Task: E.4

7. Correct answer: B · DRL

DRL is used when a behavior is acceptable at a lower frequency and reinforcement depends on meeting that rate criterion. Use DRL for “less often,” not “never.”

Task: D.3

8. Correct answer: D · Whether the plan’s goal is a count, a length, a cue delay, or response spacing

Continuous-measure selection follows the measurement goal and the response dimensions specified in the plan. Follow the operational definition and data plan; do not substitute a convenient measure.

Task: A.1

9. Correct answer: C · Descriptive assessment

Descriptive assessment observes behavior and environmental events as they naturally occur without systematic experimental manipulation. Direct naturalistic observation can suggest patterns, but it does not by itself prove a function.

Task: B.3

10. Correct answer: A · Frequency recording

Frequency recording counts each occurrence during the observation period.

Task: A.1

11. Correct answer: A · A.1 continuous measurement

Counting each request across the session is continuous measurement.

Task: A.1

12. Correct answer: D · Check the entry against the source record, then correct or report it per procedure

Data should be entered accurately from the source record, with discrepancies handled through the required procedure. Enter what was observed, preserve the source, and resolve discrepancies transparently.

Task: A.4

Study tips

- Ask whether the method records every occurrence or only samples of the session; that answers most items.
- Memorize which common methods are continuous: frequency, rate, duration, and latency.
- Remember that discontinuous methods estimate behavior and can miss brief events.
- Check the unit in each answer choice, since count, percent, and seconds point to different methods.

FAQ

Is frequency recording continuous or discontinuous?

Frequency recording is a continuous measure because each occurrence is counted during the observation period.

Why does measurement choice matter for an RBT?

The method determines what data are collected and how reliable they are for decisions. Choosing the wrong method can hide important changes in behavior.

Does this set cover every measurement method?

No. It concentrates on the continuous versus discontinuous distinction. Other measurement topics, such as interval methods, have their own practice set.

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