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Functions of Behavior: Escape, Attention and Sensory Quiz

Understanding why a behavior occurs is the first step in planning an effective intervention. The common functions are escape, attention, access to tangible items, and automatic or sensory reinforcement, and the exam often presents short descriptions asking you to identify the function. This set uses observational details, such as what happened just before and just after the behavior, to test that reasoning. Treat each item as a clue-reading exercise: the antecedent and consequence in the stem usually point to one function. Each stem gives a few details about what came before and after the behavior, so reading them slowly is the main skill being tested.

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Practice questions

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

1. In the school cafeteria, an adult consistently talks to Mateo immediately after pushing the trays away. Data show the behavior increases when this occurs. Which function best matches this pattern?

- **A** Tangible: the conversation with the adult is the item being obtained
- **B** Attention: another person's response is what keeps the behavior going
- **C** Escape: the adult's talking interrupts whatever task is under way
- **D** Automatic: the adult's reply follows the behavior without fail

2. A plan places Aisha's screaming, which is maintained by access to the tablet, on extinction while reinforcing requests for the tablet. What should happen after problem behavior?

- **A** Withhold the item; give it after the replacement response
- **B** Withhold the item after both problem behavior and the replacement
- **C** Give the item quickly so the behavior does not escalate further
- **D** Remove the item and other preferred items for the rest of the day

3. The antecedent plan for Ethan's shouting repeatedly calls for delivering brief adult attention on a time-based schedule, regardless of behavior. Which procedure is this?

- **A** DRO: reinforcement follows an interval that passes without the behavior
- **B** Fixed interval: the first response after the interval is reinforced
- **C** Token economy: backup reinforcers are exchanged at set times
- **D** NCR: the functional reinforcer is given by the clock on a set schedule

4. The plan identifies Caleb's banging the work tray as attention maintained. During the behavior, what implements attention extinction?

- **A** Deliver attention on a timer, whether or not the behavior occurs
- **B** Hold back comments, eye contact, and reactions to the behavior
- **C** Have a different adult respond so the RBT can stay neutral
- **D** Remove one earned token each time the behavior occurs in session

5. A learner screams most often after difficult worksheets are presented and stops when work is removed. Which function is most likely?

- **A** Escape from tasks
- **B** Access to tangibles
- **C** Social attention
- **D** Automatic reinforcement

6. One staff member gives brief teacher attention after Maya's calling out, although the extinction plan says not to. What is the main concern?

- **A** The behavior should decrease sooner because its need is being met
- **B** The main risk is to that staff member's rapport with the learner
- **C** The behavior is likely to take on a new function as a result
- **D** Occasional reinforcement can make the behavior more persistent

7. The plan identifies Mateo's pushing the trays away as escape maintained. Which action implements escape extinction during tray stacking?

A Offer a preferred item to calm the learner, then continue the task
B Reprimand the behavior, then allow a short break from the task
C Follow through on the demand so the behavior does not end it
D Remove the task for now and present it again at the next session

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8. A learner bangs the table and peers laugh each time. Which function should be considered first from that pattern?

A Automatic
B Escape
C Tangible
D Attention

9. When asked to wipe the table, Zara engages in slapping the counter. Staff remove the task, and the behavior becomes more likely during later demands. Which function best fits?

A Tangible: the free time after removal is the item being earned
B Automatic: the behavior itself brings relief from the hard work
C Attention: staff must interact with the learner to remove the task
D Escape: ending the task is the consequence that maintains it

10. A preferred item is visible in the school library. After Noah engages in humming loudly, staff provide the item, and the behavior increases in similar situations. Which function best fits?

A Automatic reinforcement
B Attention
C Escape
D Access to a tangible item

11. A qualified supervisor directs a protocol in which alone and attention conditions are compared. What is this systematic test called?

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

12. A plan reinforces asking for a break while withholding escape after screaming. Which procedure best fits?

- **A** Momentary sampling procedure
- **B** Response cost procedure
- **C** Free-operant assessment
- **D** Differential reinforcement

13. Mateo's rocking continues when alone and directly produces a sensory effect. No social consequence is required. Which function best fits?

- **A** Escape, since being alone means no one is placing demands
- **B** Automatic reinforcement produced by the behavior itself
- **C** Attention that staff will deliver once they return to the room
- **D** Tangible access, since the sensory effect is the item obtained

14. A plan says to deliver brief teacher attention every two minutes during writing, regardless of whether calling out occurs. Which procedure is the RBT implementing?

- **A** Response-cost punishment procedure
- **B** Extinction by withholding attention
- **C** Noncontingent reinforcement
- **D** Functional communication training

Answer key and explanations

1. Correct answer: B · Attention: another person's response is what keeps the behavior going

Social interaction follows the behavior and is associated with an increase, which is consistent with an attention function. Attention-maintained behavior produces a socially delivered response from another person.

Task: D.1

2. Correct answer: A · Withhold the item; give it after the replacement response

The maintaining tangible is withheld after problem behavior and remains available through the appropriate alternative response. Pair extinction with a practical, reinforced way to access the same outcome.

Task: D.4

3. Correct answer: D · NCR: the functional reinforcer is given by the clock on a set schedule

NCR delivers the functional reinforcer according to time rather than contingent on problem behavior, reducing motivation to obtain it through that behavior. NCR is scheduled access to a relevant reinforcer independent of problem behavior.

Task: D.2

4. Correct answer: B · Hold back comments, eye contact, and reactions to the behavior

Function-based extinction withholds the specific reinforcer that previously maintained behavior. Safety and the written protocol remain controlling. Extinction is function specific: withhold the maintaining reinforcer named in the plan.

Task: D.4

5. Correct answer: A · Escape from tasks

Screaming followed by work removal suggests escape as the hypothesized function.

Task: D.1

6. Correct answer: D · Occasional reinforcement can make the behavior more persistent

Inconsistent extinction can create intermittent reinforcement, making behavior more resistant while obscuring evaluation of the plan. Extinction requires coordinated, consistent implementation across trained team members.

Task: D.4

7. Correct answer: C · Follow through on the demand so the behavior does not end it

Escape extinction prevents problem behavior from producing task removal, while teaching continues with planned supports and safety procedures. For escape-maintained behavior, extinction means the response no longer removes the demand.

Task: D.4

8. Correct answer: D · Attention

Peer laughter is a form of attention following behavior.

Task: D.1

9. Correct answer: D · Escape: ending the task is the consequence that maintains it

The behavior produces delay or removal of a demand and then increases, which is consistent with an escape function. Escape-maintained behavior postpones, reduces, or ends an aversive task or condition.

Task: D.1

10. Correct answer: D · Access to a tangible item

The response produces access to an item or activity and subsequently increases, which is consistent with a tangible function. Tangible-maintained behavior produces access to a preferred item or activity.

Task: D.1

11. Correct answer: D · Functional analysis

A functional analysis systematically manipulates relevant antecedents or consequences across controlled conditions to test their effects on behavior. Experimental manipulation distinguishes a functional analysis from indirect and descriptive assessment.

Task: B.3

12. Correct answer: D · Differential reinforcement

Differential reinforcement strengthens an alternative response.

Task: D.3

13. Correct answer: B · Automatic reinforcement produced by the behavior itself

The behavior itself directly produces the reinforcing stimulation, which is consistent with automatic reinforcement. Automatic reinforcement is directly produced by the response itself.

Task: D.1

14. Correct answer: C · Noncontingent reinforcement

Noncontingent reinforcement provides the reinforcer on a schedule independent of the target behavior.

Task: D.2

Study tips

- Ask what happens immediately after the behavior; the consequence is the strongest clue to function.
- Associate escape with removal of a demand, attention with social response, and tangible with access to items.
- Recognize automatic or sensory reinforcement when the behavior produces its own consequence without a social response.
- Do not infer function from topography alone, because the same behavior can serve different functions.

FAQ

How is escape-maintained behavior identified?

It is identified when the behavior tends to occur in demand situations and results in removal or delay of the demand.

What is automatic reinforcement?

Automatic reinforcement means the behavior itself produces the reinforcing consequence, without help from another person.

Does an RBT determine the function alone?

No. Function is determined through assessment under the supervisor's direction. The RBT collects accurate data that support the assessment.

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