

How to perform an ABA functional analysis: Step-by-step cheat sheet

- 1. Define the target behavior**
Describe the behavior in clear, observable, and measurable terms so others can recognize and measure it.
- 2. Obtain consent and prepare staff**
Explain the process and purpose to caregivers and get informed consent.
Prepare staff who will observe or run sessions.
- 3. Establish safety protocols**
Identify risks and ensure supports are in place (e.g., protective equipment, extra staff).
Set rules for when to stop a session.
- 4. Clarify the experimental design**
Determine the sequence of conditions, the number of sessions you'll run, the length of each session, and what type of data you'll collect.
- 5. Prepare the environment and materials**
Set up a quiet, low-distraction space with minimal items.
Gather materials (preferred items, data sheets, task materials).
- 6. Run the control (play) condition first**
Provide attention and preferred items with no demands.
Use this as a baseline. Run for a set time (e.g., 10 minutes).
- 7. Run test conditions and collect data**
Run conditions (attention, escape, tangible, alone, play) in short sessions (5–10 minutes).
Alternate conditions and repeat each one several times.
Record behavior during each session.
- 8. Graph and analyze results**
Graph data to compare conditions.
Determine which condition(s) caused the learner to respond more consistently or frequently.
Use results to identify function and guide treatment.