

RBT EXAM PREP

RBT Terminology Glossary

A comprehensive ABA glossary covering key terms from the RBT Task List — with plain-language definitions, real-world examples, and exam tips for every concept you need to know.

● 47 Key Terms

● 6 RBT Task List Domains

● Definitions + Examples + Tips

A

Measurement
10 TERMS

B

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6 TERMS

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12 TERMS

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5 TERMS

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6 TERMS

Term — the concept name **Example** — how it looks in a real session **Exam Tip** — the detail test-writers love to ask about



How to use this guide: Review one domain at a time. Cover the definition and quiz yourself using just the term name, then check the example and exam tip to catch easy-to-miss distinctions.

A

Measurement

How behavior is observed, recorded, and quantified

Continuous Measurement

Recording every single instance of a behavior during the entire observation period.

Example: Counting every hand-raise during a 30-minute session.

Tip: Use for discrete, easy-to-count behaviors observed the whole time.

Frequency / Event Recording

Counting the number of times a behavior occurs.

Example: Tallying each instance of hitting during a session.

Tip: Best for behaviors with a clear, distinct beginning and end.

Latency Recording

Measuring the time between an instruction (SD) and the start of the response.

Example: Time between "sit down" and the child actually sitting.

Tip: Latency = time *before* the response starts, not how long it lasts.

Partial Interval Recording

Behavior is scored if it occurs at *any point* during a set time interval.

Example: Marking "yes" if talking-out happens even once in a 1-minute block.

Tip: Tends to overestimate how often the behavior truly occurs.

Momentary Time Sampling

Behavior is scored only if it is occurring at the exact moment an interval ends.

Example: Glancing up every 5 minutes to check if a client is seated.

Tip: The observer only needs to look at the single moment the interval ends.

Discontinuous Measurement

Recording behavior during only part of the observation period, as an estimate.

Example: Sampling behavior every 10 minutes instead of constantly.

Tip: Less precise than continuous — used when constant tracking isn't possible.

Duration Recording

Measuring how long a behavior lasts, from start to finish.

Example: Timing a tantrum from onset to the moment it stops.

Tip: Use when the length of the behavior matters more than the count.

Interresponse Time (IRT)

The amount of time between the end of one response and the start of the next.

Example: Time between one bite of food and the next bite.

Tip: Don't confuse with latency — IRT is response-to-response, not instruction-to-response.

Whole Interval Recording

Behavior is scored only if it occurs during the *entire* interval.

Example: Marking "on-task" only if focus lasted the full interval.

Tip: Tends to underestimate behavior — often used for on-task behavior.

Interobserver Agreement (IOA)

The degree to which two independent observers agree on what they recorded.

Example: Two RBTs both recording 8 out of 10 intervals the same way.

Tip: IOA checks that data collection is reliable and accurate, not the client's progress.

Assessment

B

Understanding why a behavior happens and what a client prefers

Preference Assessment

A systematic way to identify items or activities a client finds reinforcing.

Example: Presenting an array of toys to see which one the client chooses first.

Tip: Preferences shift day to day — reassess regularly, not just once.

Functional Analysis (FA)

A systematic manipulation of antecedents and consequences to directly test the function of a behavior.

Example: Testing attention, escape, tangible, and automatic conditions one at a time.

Tip: FA is experimental; functional assessment is the broader, non-experimental category.

Consequence (C)

What happens immediately after a behavior that affects whether it happens again.

Example: A child receives a toy right after asking for it appropriately.

Tip: Consequences can either reinforce or punish the behavior they follow.

Functional Assessment

A broad process (interviews, observation, data review) used to determine why a behavior occurs.

Example: Interviewing a parent and reviewing ABC data before writing a plan.

Tip: Indirect and descriptive methods both fall under this umbrella term.

Antecedent (A)

What happens immediately before a behavior occurs; the first part of the ABC model.

Example: A teacher gives an instruction right before a child cries.

Tip: Antecedents help identify what triggers or evokes the behavior.

ABC Data

A recording method that captures the Antecedent, Behavior, and Consequence around an event.

Example: Writing down what happened right before and after a tantrum.

Tip: ABC data is descriptive — it suggests a function but doesn't confirm one alone.

Skill Acquisition

C

Teaching new skills and building independence

Discrete Trial Training (DTT)

A structured teaching method using a clear SD, response, and consequence, repeated in trials.

Tip: Look for the 3-term contingency: SD → Response → Consequence.

Natural Environment Teaching (NET)

Teaching skills within naturally occurring situations, following the client's motivation.

Tip: NET follows the child's interest in the moment, unlike a structured table setting.

C

Skill Acquisition (continued)

Teaching new skills and building independence

Prompting

Any help given to increase the likelihood of a correct response.

Example: A verbal reminder, a gesture, or physical guidance.

Tip: The end goal is always to fade prompts toward independence.

Prompt Fading

Gradually reducing the level of assistance as the learner gains independence.

Example: Moving from hand-over-hand to a light touch to no help at all.

Tip: Fading prevents prompt dependence — relying on help that's no longer needed.

Prompt Hierarchy

An ordered sequence of prompt levels, from most to least intrusive (or the reverse).

Example: Physical → model → gesture → verbal → independent.

Tip: Least-to-most gives the learner a chance to respond independently first.

Errorless Learning

Teaching in a way that prevents mistakes by prompting before an error can occur.

Example: Prompting immediately after the SD so the learner never guesses wrong.

Tip: Reduces frustration and builds a strong history of correct responding.

Shaping

Reinforcing successive approximations toward a target behavior.

Example: Reinforcing babbling, then words, then full sentences over time.

Tip: Shaping builds behaviors that don't yet exist in the learner's repertoire.

Chaining

Linking the steps of a task analysis together to teach a multi-step skill.

Example: Teaching handwashing step by step: turn on water, soap, scrub, rinse, dry.

Tip: Backward chaining teaches the *last* step first so the learner reaches the natural reinforcer.

Generalization

The extension of a learned skill to new settings, people, or materials.

Example: A child who learns to greet a teacher also greets a grandparent.

Tip: Practice across multiple environments and people to promote generalization.

Maintenance

The continued performance of a skill over time, after active teaching has stopped.

Example: A child still ties their shoes correctly months after mastering the skill.

Tip: Periodic review sessions help support long-term maintenance.

Positive Reinforcement

Adding a stimulus immediately after a behavior that increases the future likelihood of that behavior.

Example: Giving praise right after a child completes a task independently.

Tip: "Positive" means adding something — it doesn't describe how it feels.

Token Economy

A system where tokens are earned for desired behavior and later exchanged for a backup reinforcer.

Example: Earning stars on a chart that are traded for extra playtime.

Tip: Tokens are conditioned reinforcers — they only work because they're paired with backup reinforcers.

D

Behavior Reduction

Decreasing challenging behavior safely and ethically

Extinction

Withholding reinforcement for a previously reinforced behavior to decrease it.

Example: No longer giving attention to a behavior that used to get a reaction.

Tip: Expect an extinction burst before the behavior decreases.

Functional Communication Training (FCT)

Teaching an appropriate communication response that serves the same function as the problem behavior.

Example: Teaching a child to say “help” instead of throwing materials.

Tip: FCT works best when the new response is easier than the old behavior.

Positive Punishment

Adding a stimulus after a behavior that decreases the future likelihood of that behavior.

Tip: “Positive” means adding something — not that it feels pleasant.

Antecedent Intervention

A strategy that modifies the environment before a behavior occurs, to prevent it.

Example: Offering choices before a transition to reduce refusal.

Tip: These are proactive strategies — they happen before behavior, not after.

Extinction Burst

A temporary increase in the frequency or intensity of a behavior when extinction begins.

Example: Tantrums get briefly worse right after attention is withheld.

Tip: This is expected — giving in reinforces the escalation instead.

Differential Reinforcement

Reinforcing a desired behavior while withholding reinforcement for problem behavior.

Example: DRA reinforces an alternative behavior; DRO reinforces the absence of behavior.

Tip: Know the acronyms: DRA, DRO, DRI, and DRL each work differently.

Negative Punishment

Removing a stimulus after a behavior that decreases the future likelihood of that behavior.

Example: Taking away a preferred toy immediately after hitting.

Tip: “Negative” means removing something, just like negative reinforcement.

Motivating Operations (MO)

Events that temporarily change the value of a reinforcer and the likelihood of a behavior.

Example: A hungry client works harder for food as a reinforcer.

Tip: Includes satiation (less effective) and deprivation (more effective).

E

Documentation & Reporting

Recording accurate, objective information

Session Note

A written summary of what occurred during a session, including data and observations.

Tip: Keep notes objective, factual, and free of personal opinion.

Objective Language

Describing only what is observed, without interpretation or opinion.

Example: “Client hit the table 3 times” instead of “client was angry.”

Tip: Avoid labeling emotions or intent — describe the observable behavior.

E

Documentation & Reporting (continued)

Recording accurate, objective information

Incident Report

Formal documentation of an unusual event, such as an injury or severe behavior, completed right away.

Tip: Report facts only — what happened, when, and who was involved.

Raw Data

Data as it was originally collected, before being summarized or graphed.

Tip: Always keep raw data — it's the source of truth if a summary is ever questioned.

Permanent Product Recording

Measuring behavior by examining a tangible result it produces.

Example: Counting the number of completed worksheet problems.

Tip: Useful when you can't observe the behavior directly, only its outcome.

F

Professional Conduct & Scope of Practice

Working ethically and within your role

Scope of Practice

The specific set of tasks and responsibilities an RBT is trained and authorized to perform.

Tip: RBTs never design or modify a treatment plan — that's the BCBA's role.

Supervision

Ongoing oversight of an RBT's work by a qualified BCBA or BCaBA, required to maintain certification.

Tip: Know the minimums: at least 5% of monthly service hours, with two face-to-face contacts.

RBT Ethics Code

The BACB's official ethics standards that RBTs must follow in every practice setting.

Tip: When in doubt about an ethical situation, bring it to your supervisor first.

Confidentiality

The obligation to protect client information and share it only as permitted by law or with consent.

Tip: Never post identifying client details, including photos, on social media.

HIPAA

The federal law that protects the privacy and security of client health information.

Tip: HIPAA applies to how you store, share, and discuss all client data — even verbally.

Dual Relationship

A situation where an RBT has more than one type of relationship with a client (e.g., friend, family, business).

Tip: Avoid dual relationships — they can compromise objectivity and quality of care.



Final tip: Many exam questions test the difference between similar-sounding terms (e.g., latency vs. IRT, DRA vs. DRO). When you review, always pair a term with what it is *not*.