Functional Assessment Observation Form

THE CONTENT OF THE FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT OBSERVATION FORM

This Functional Assessment Observation Form has eight major sections (see next page). A blank copy of the form is included on page 9. Each labeled section is described below. This form combines an event-recording system with hypothesis generation. Once learned, it can provide a streamlined data collection system that implementers value and use consistently.[1]

SECTION A: IDENTIFICATION/DATES

In Section A, you show who is being observed and the dates on which the data are being collected. Note that a single page can be used across multiple days.

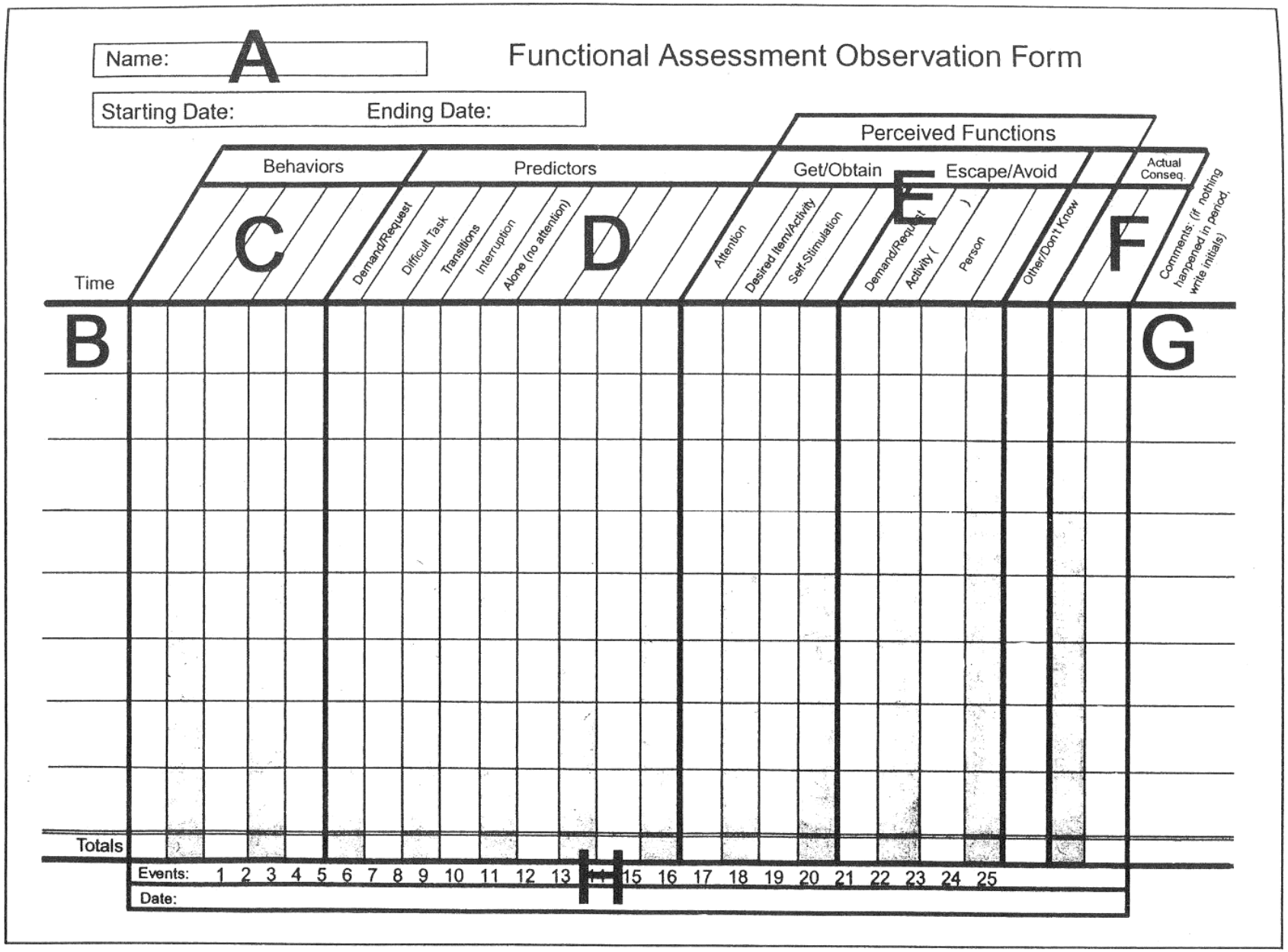
Section B: Time Intervals

Section B is separated into blocks that can be used to designate specific intervals (1 hour, a half-hour, 15 minutes). List here the periods and settings/activities in which observation is taking place. These can be arranged in a variety of ways, depending on a person's daily schedule. For a school student you might list class period times and content (for example, 8:30-9:00, Homeroom; 9:05-9:50, Language Arts; 9:55 - 10:40, Computer; 11:45-12:30, Lunch; 1:25-3:00, Job Training). For an adult in a less structured home setting, you might simply list time periods (3:00-4:00; 4:00-5:00; 5:00-6:00). Depending on a person's typical pattern of behavior or typical schedule, you may want to use unequal interval periods within the blocks, such as 15-minute intervals during busy morning routines and two-hour intervals during the evening when problem behaviors are much less frequent. If targeted behaviors are very frequent during a particular time period or activity, multiple blocks can be used to record data for that period. A row for summarizing total frequencies of behaviors or incidents is labeled at the bottom of the form.

Section C: Behaviors

In Section C, list the individual behaviors you have identified for monitoring during the observations. These targeted behaviors should be the ones identified during your interviews with relevant people. You may also decide to list *positive* behaviors such as appropriate communication responses or attempts that seem important to document or are of interest. The form allows flexibility in monitoring behaviors. For example, if a particular behavior (eye-poking or aggression) occurs in both low-intensity and high-intensity forms, you can list each form as a separate behavior to identify differences or similarities in their patterns of occurrence. When several behaviors occur regularly in combinations, you may monitor them all within a single behavior notation (dropping to the floor, screaming, kicking feet and flailing arms to pound the floor may all be recorded under tantrum). However, be cautious about grouping behaviors together for coding. One of the more useful pieces of information obtained through the FAO is the individual behaviors that tend to occur together and those that do not. Initial perceptions that certain behaviors always go together may not always be supported by direct observation data.

[1] Text and forms adapted from *Functional Assessment and Program Development for Problem Behavior* (second edition), by Robert E. O'Neill, Robert H. Horner, Richard W. Albin, Jeffrey R. Sprague, Keith Storey, and J. Stephen Newton (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1997, pp. 37-44), by permission of the publisher.



Note: The authors have used this form for many cases, and teachers have received it well. We have discovered that the process of filling out the form has given teachers new skills in observing behaviors and designing behavior interventions, often alleviating the need for a more time-intensive plan development.

Section D: Predictors

In Section D, list important events or stimuli identified in your interviews as potential predictors for the occurrence of problem behaviors. Such events typically are present or occur just before or at the same time as the problem behaviors. The FAO form already lists several potential predictors that have often been found in the research literature and in the authors' clinical experiences to be related to the occurrence of problem behaviors. These are Demands/Requests, Difficult Tasks, Transitions (place to place or activity to activity), Interruptions, and being left Alone (no attention). Additional empty slots are provided for you to list potential predictors specific to the person being observed. These might include the names of different support persons present; particular activities or tasks; conditions such as noise, schedule changes, or confusion; and the presence of particular classmates, housemates, or co-workers. You might also label a column "Don't Know" or "Unclear" to be used when the person recording data cannot identify particular setting events or antecedent stimuli that may be related to the occurrence of problem behaviors.

Section E: Perceived Functions

In Section E, we ask observers to make their "best guess" regarding what they perceive as the apparent function of behaviors that occur during an incident. In other words, note why you think the person did what he or she did. This section has two major areas: obtaining desired things and escaping/avoiding undesired things. The specific "things" that would be designated on the form would depend on information gathered during the interview process. However, as in the Predictors section, the form lists several outcomes that individuals have been interested in obtaining or escaping through problem behavior. These outcomes include obtaining attention, specific items or activities (you might list specific items or activities), and self-stimulation; and escaping or avoiding demands/requests, specific activities, or people. A column for "Don't Know" is included for situations in which observers are unsure of possible functions of the behavior observed.

Focusing on the particular outcome of a behavior and judging its function may be somewhat new ideas for many observers. People are often more accustomed to attributing the occurrence of problem behaviors to a person's "personality traits" or disability labels (for example, "she likes to hurt people because she is mean," "he does that because he is angry," "he does that because he has autism"). Because of this tendency, some observers may need repeated explanations and extra help to understand the important purpose of this section. We believe it is more respectful of a person's dignity to assume that functional reasons exist for problems behaviors rather than to think that such behaviors occur because of some personal trait or characteristic that is unchangeable.

Section F: Actual Consequences

In Section F, you record data on the actual consequences that follow problem behaviors–for example, the person was told "no," was ignored, was redirected. This information gives you some idea of the consistency with which certain consequences are being provided. It also provides further clues to the potential functions of problem behaviors. For instance, if time away to a quiet place is used with problem behaviors that appear to be escape motivated, then putting the student in such an area may actually be reinforcing the behaviors.

Section G: Comments

Observers can write brief comments here regarding behaviors that occurred during the corresponding block of time. We also recommend that observers use this space to write their initials for a block of time in which no targeted behaviors were observed. This practice verifies that observation was occurring and that no problem behaviors were observed. As

we noted earlier, knowing when and under what circumstances problem behaviors do not occur can be very informative.

Section H: Event and Date Record

The rows of numbers in Section H are designed to help the observer keep track of the number of problem behavior events that have occurred and the days across which these events were observed. The numbers are used to show each event with one or more problem behaviors.

Box 2.2

Step for Setting Up a Functional Assessment Observation Form for Collecting Data

1. Write basic identifying information and dates of observations.
2. List the time intervals and settings/activities down the left side of the form.
3. List the behaviors to be monitored.
4. List potentially relevant setting events and/or more immediate antecedent events in the Predictors section.
5. List any additional possible functions of behaviors, if necessary, in the Perceived Functions section.
6. List the actual consequences that are typically delivered when behaviors occur.

The first time a behavior or incident occurs, the data recorder should mark the appropriate boxes on the form with the number 1 to identify the first recorded event of the behavior. The number 1 in the Events row of Section H would then be crossed off. The next occurrence of problem behaviors and the relevant boxes in each section of the form would be recorded by using the next number in the row (2 indicates the second occurrence, 3 indicates the third, and so on). Each time a number is used, it is crossed off. When recording is finished on a particular day, a slash can be drawn after the last number and the day's date recorded in the Date row below to indicate the date on which those incidents occurred. During the next day's data collection, the first incident would be recorded using the next unused number in the row (such as 5 or 6) and would then continue with the following numbers (7, 8, 9, 10). Using numbers in this way for each incident or occurrence of targeted behaviors enables you to link specific predictors, functions, and consequences with behaviors. If the same data sheet is used across multiple days, notations in the Date row help you see which incidents occurred on which days. Such information can be helpful as you look for patterns across time or try to validate what people tell you about the way a person's behaviors may vary on particular days (for example, "Her behavior is always worst on Mondays"). The steps for setting up the FAO to collect data are summarized in Box 2.2. The next page shows a form on which behaviors, predictors, perceived functions, and actual consequences are filled in and ready for use.

A quick analysis and interpretation of the data presented in the completed FAO reveal several pieces of important information. Joe was observed for 2 days (3/16 and 3/17) during which a total of 17 events of problem behavior were coded (see Events row at bottom). Three problem behaviors were observed: slapping others, spitting on the desk, and screaming. Predictors added to the form for monitoring were the three classroom assistants who work with Joe: Marsha, Bill, and John. Actual consequences to Joe were blocking and redirection or having the behavior ignored. The Time column shows the school periods and times during which data were collected.

Name: Joe

Functional Assessment Observation Form

Starting Date: 3-16 Ending Date: 3-17

Time	Behaviors: Slap others	Behaviors: Spit on desk	Behaviors: Scream	Predictors: Demand/Request	Predictors: Difficult Task	Predictors: Transitions	Predictors: Interruption	Predictors: Alone (no attention)	Predictors: Marsha	Predictors: Bill	Predictors: John	Perceived Functions: Get/Obtain: Attention	Get/Obtain: Desired Item/Activity	Get/Obtain: Self-Stimulation	Escape/Avoid: Demand/Request	Escape/Avoid: Activity ( )	Escape/Avoid: Person	Escape/Avoid: Other/Don't Know	Actual Conseq.: Ignore	Actual Conseq.: Block/Redirect	Comments: (if nothing happened in period, write initials)
8:50-9:35 Reading	1 11		2 10		1 11	1 11				2 10	1 11		2 10			1 11				2 10	1 11	2-read on own 10-read on own
9:40-10:25 Lang Arts	3 4 5 12 13				12	3 4 5 12 13			3 4 5 12 13							3 4 5 12 13						3 4 5 12 13	
10:30-11:15 Choir																						M.J.
11:20-12:05 Math	6 7		14		6 7	6 7			14		6 7		14			6 7				14	6 7	14 - seat work
12:05-12:50 Lunch																						B.W.
12:55-1:40 Social Studies	8 15				8 15	8 15					8 15					8 15					8 15	
1:45-2:30 Science	17		9		16 17	17	16		9		16 17		9			17	16			9 16	17	
2:35-3:20 P.E.																						J.S.
Totals	13		4		9																	

Events:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10 11 12 13 14 15 16	17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
Date:	3/16	3/17	

The observation data shows clear patterns in the occurrence of problem behaviors. Look at the very first event involving problem behaviors. It is coded with a 1. This first event included both slapping others and screaming (a 1 in both columns). It occurred when a demand/request was made during the reading period (1's are in the row for 8:50 to 9:35). Marsha was working with Joe (see a 1 under Marsha for the period) and she implemented a block/redirect procedure. The perceived function was escape from the demand/request.

In looking for overall patterns, we see that slapping others (which occurred 12 times in the two days) and screaming (9 occurrences) frequently occurred together–but not always (see events 3, 4, and 5). This finding suggests that these two behaviors are members of the same response class and are used for the same function. The perceived function for both behaviors is escape from demands/requests. Note that screaming did occur once by itself during Science on 3/17 (see the event coded with 16). The predictor was a difficult task and the perceived function was escape from the task. This particular screaming incident was ignored. Blocking and redirection were used in the other slapping and screaming events. Spitting on the desk, which was observed four times, was seen as serving an attention-getting function. The predictor noted was that Joe was working alone (no attention). The Comments column provides even further information for events 2, 10 and 14. Despite the perceived function, the spitting was ignored by school staff, at least during the observation period presented here.

USING THE FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT OBSERVATION FORM

Recording

The basic use of the FAO form is straightforward. Recording is event driven, occurring whenever a problem behavior or a behavioral episode or incident involving problem behaviors occurs. When problem behaviors occur during a time interval, place the appropriate number from Section H (1 for the first occurrence or episode, 2 for the second, 3 for the third, and so on) in the appropriate box or boxes in the Behaviors section. Then move horizontally across the rest of the form and place the same number in the appropriate boxes in the other sections, thereby recording the Predictors (setting events and antecedent stimuli) that were present when the behaviors occurred, the Perceived Functions of the behaviors, and the Actual Consequences that followed the occurrence of the behaviors. Finally, cross off the number used in Section H so you can easily see which number will be used next. If a comment is needed or desired, write it in the corresponding Comments box. Also, to facilitate follow-up on observations, observers could write their initials in the Comments box at the end of a time period, particularly if there is no other way to identify who was observing during a period. The example (on the previous page) illustrates how several occurrences of problem behaviors might be recorded.

When problem behaviors occur relatively infrequently, information may be recorded for each occurrence of the behaviors. In such a case, an actual frequency count of the behavior can be obtained from the form. However, sometimes problem behaviors will occur in high-frequency bursts (such as several head hits or face slaps in rapid succession), or in episodes that include multiple occurrences of one or more problem behaviors (such as a 5-minute tantrum that involves dropping to the floor, kicking feet, screaming, several hits, and attempted bites). In such cases observers should code the entire burst or episode with a single entry on the form–that is, one number representing the entire episode or burst. Using this method, the frequency of bursts or episodes can be determined but not the actual frequency of each problem behavior.

Finally, for behaviors that occur with high frequency, the form should be used for brief time sample periods in which only a few, or even just one, occurrence or incident is recorded. This approach greatly reduces demands related to data collection but may also result in information being missed. The hope in such a case would be that high frequency behaviors occur so often that a clear picture will emerge even if all occurrences are not recorded.

No matter the recording approach used, support personnel and observers should ensure that the health, safety, and support needs of a person engaging in problem behaviors are met before they shift their attention to recording information on the observation form. Data collection should not interfere with the delivery of needed support or intervention. However, the person responsible for collecting data should record information when possible following the occurrence of problem behaviors to ensure accuracy and guard against the loss of information. The copy of the FAO form that is being used for data collection should be located in a convenient, central place where those responsible for observation have ready access for recording, such as on a clipboard or in a file on the teacher's desk.

As noted earlier, knowing where and when problem behaviors are not occurring can be very useful. If no problem behaviors occur during a time period, we recommend that the observer write his or her initials in the appropriate Comments column box to indicate that observation was occurring during this period. This eliminates the question of whether the absence of data during a period means that no problem behavior occurred or nobody was observing at that time. Having observers include their initials also allows you to know who was observing during a given time period in case you want to follow up on what was happening during the period. Box 2.3 summarizes the basic steps in the recording process.

Box 2.3

Basic Steps for Recording Data on the Functional Assessment Observation Form

1. If problem behaviors occur during a recording interval:
   a. Recorder puts first unused number (from bottom list, Section H) in appropriate box or boxes in Behaviors section.
   b. Recorder uses the same number to mark appropriate boxes in the Predictors, Perceived Functions, and Actual Consequences sections.
   c. Recorder crosses out just-used number in the list at the bottom of the form.
   d. Recorder writes any desired comments in the Comments column.
   e. At the end of the time period the recorder puts his or her initials in the Comments box.
2. If problem behaviors do not occur during a recording interval:
   a. Recorder puts his or her initials in the Comments box for that interval and writes any desired comments.

Initial Training

People who will be using the FAO form need to be trained before using the form independently. Training should involve describing the different sections of the form and how they are used, and providing practice on recording on the form before actual observation begins. Training also should include specific information on the logistics of the observation and recording processes to be used. This includes writing on the form the actual time intervals to be employed, identifying the persons responsible for recording data, specifying where the form will be located and stored, and determining the planned schedule for observations. Once actual observation has begun, someone in a supervisory or monitoring capacity should discuss with the observers any issues or problems that arise. It is not unusual to need to revise the observation form or procedures after a day or two of actual recording. For example, behaviors or predictors may occur that were overlooked in the initial interviews and form setup and will need to be added to the form. Behaviors or predictors (difficult tasks, transitions) may need to be more clearly defined for consistent recording. Procedures (such as where the form is kept) may need to be modified.

FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT OBSERVATION FORM[1]

Name: _____

Starting Date: _____ **Ending Date**: _____

TIME(S)	**Behaviors**					**Predictors**									**Perceived Functions: Get/Obtain**				**Perceived Functions: Escape/Avoid**				**Perceived Functions**	**Actual Consequences**		**COMMENTS: (If nothing happened in period.) Write initials.**
						Demand/Request	**Difficult Task**	**Transitions**	**Interruption**	**Alone (no attention)**					**Attention**	**Desired Item/Activity**	**Self-Stimulation**		**Demand/Request**	**Activity ( )**	**Person**		**Other/Don't Know**			
Total(s)																										
Event(s)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	
Date(s)																										

[1]Adapted by permission of Dr. Jeff Sprague, from:
O'Neill, R.E., Horner, R.H., Albin, R., Storey, K. & Sprague, J.R. (1990). Functional analysis of problem behavior: A practical assessment and intervention strategies. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publisher.