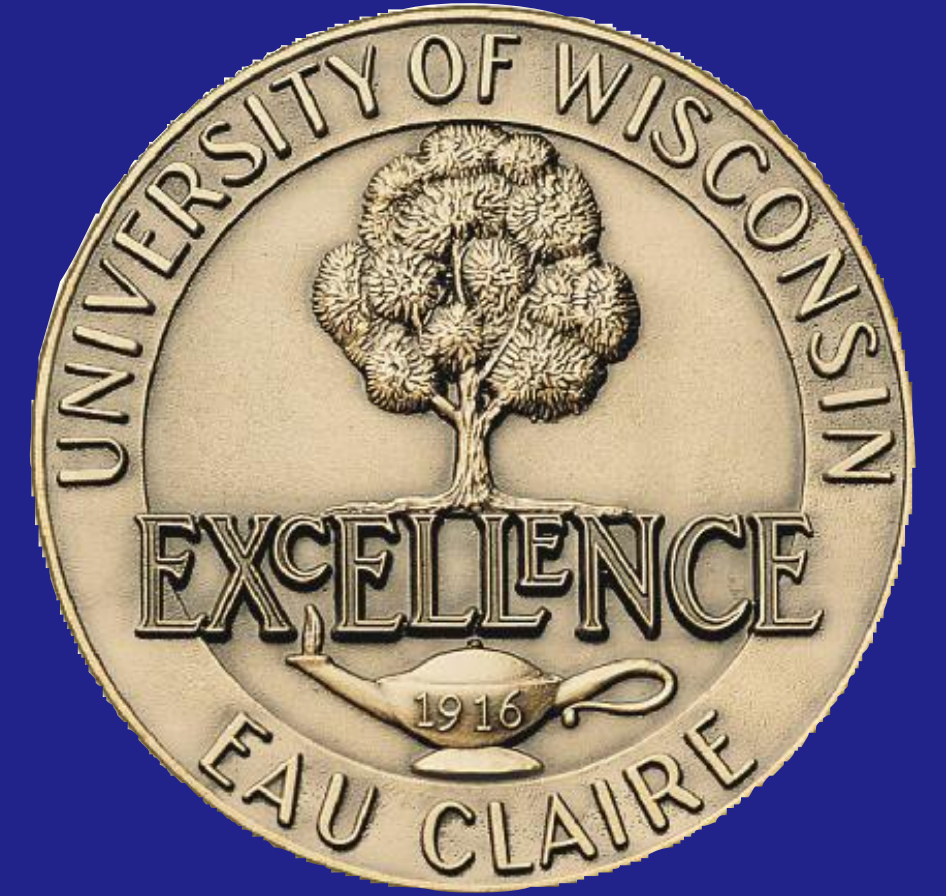


Evaluating Effectiveness of Prompting Ratio Procedures in Basic Canine Obedience Training



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Introduction

- Basic canine obedience training develops an important owner-pet relationship that provides indispensable benefits for animals and their owners.
- One important training goal is for the animal to perform behaviors following only a verbal command, but many inexperienced trainers overuse hand gestures or *prompts* (Spector, 1999).
 - The overuse of prompts can result in a condition called *prompt dependency*:
 - Behaviors will not occur unless the hand prompt is given.
- Behavioral Applications Regarding Canines (BARC) has adopted a 5:1 prompt-to-probe ratio procedure to guide novice trainers but, there is no published research examining the efficacy of this training procedure. That is, even though the structure of the procedure assists trainers in program implementation, there is no empirical support for this procedure.
- Treatment integrity and efficacy are paramount in any training situation. As such, we are interested in whether a 5:1, 3:1, or 1:1 prompt-to-probe ratio procedure may be most efficient for behavior acquisition in animal training.

Method

Dogs

- 6 Dogs of mixed breeds participated in our study, 1 female and 5 males with approximated ages ranging from 3 months to 1 year.
- Only naïve dogs were used in this study.

Setting & Materials

- All sessions were conducted at the Eau Claire County Humane Association.
- Hotdogs and verbal praise were used as reinforcers.
- Specific forms (see inset) were used to aid procedural integrity and data collection.

Baseline

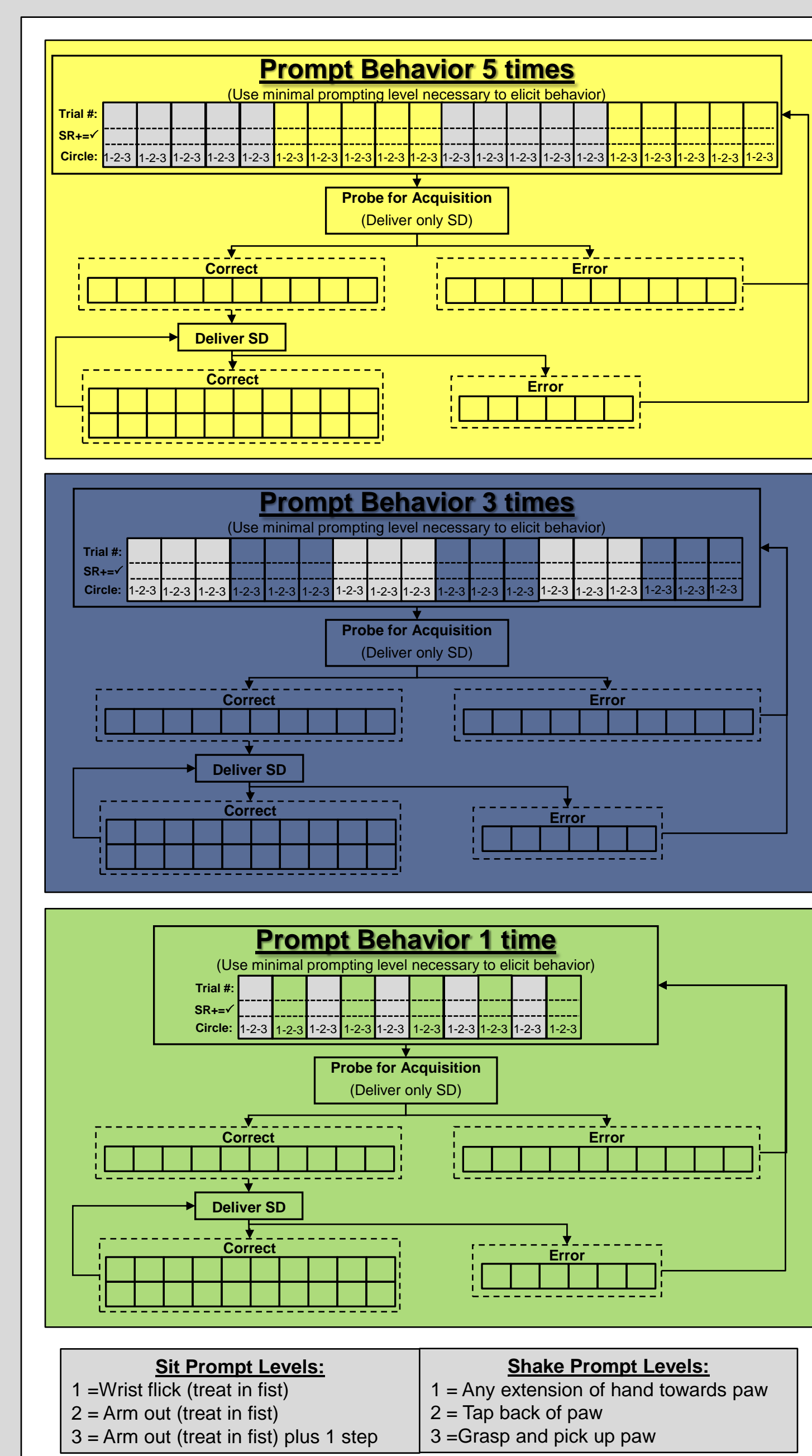
- Each dog's learning history (sit and shake) was assessed prior to the start of the study.

Training

- Each session consisted of approximately 20 trials.
- One of three levels of prompt:probe ratio (see inset) was randomly assigned for each behavior.
- Target behaviors occurring within 5 seconds of the verbal command were reinforced.
- Acquisition of the target response was defined as 10 consecutive correct responses.

Procedural Integrity

- Procedural integrity was measured as percentage of trials implemented correctly and was taken for 100% of the trials.



Results

Mean Trials to Acquisition

- 5:1 = 67 trials
- 3:1 = 68 trials
- 1:1 = 88 trials

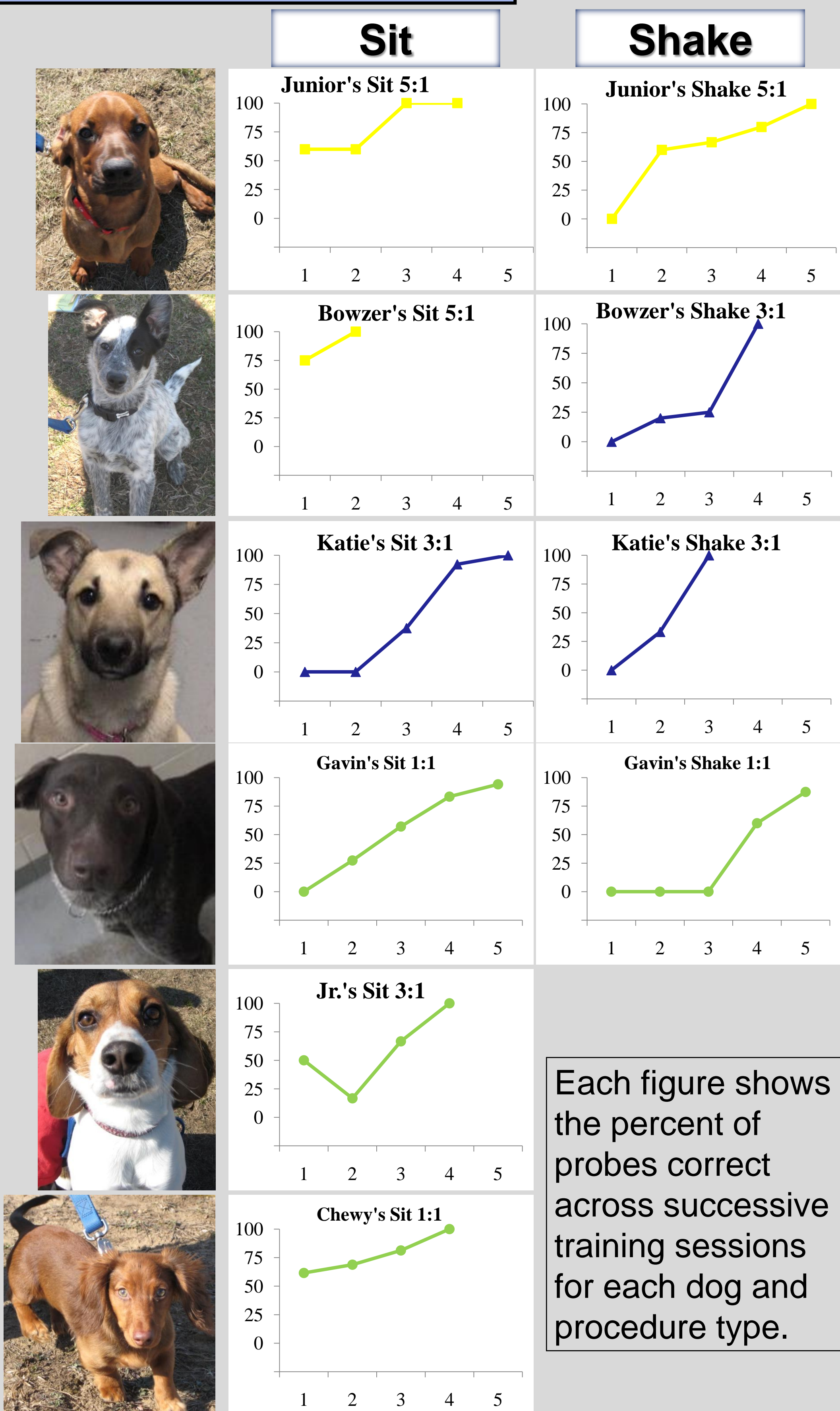
Procedural Integrity

- Measured for 100% of all trials.
 - 5:1 = 100%
 - 3:1 = 98.9%
 - 1:1 = 99.2%

- Measured as percentage of trials implemented correctly.

Inter-observer Agreement

- Calculated for 34% of sessions with 95% agreement.



Discussion

Implications

- Our results indicate that the 5:1 and 3:1 procedure's may be equally efficient in training basic obedience behaviors. In addition, both procedure's, 5:1 and 3:1 appear to be more efficient than the 1:1 procedure.
- These data would suggest that using a ratio of prompting greater than 1 may lead to behavior acquisition in fewer trials.

Potential Confounding Variables

- Limited subject history, age, and breed information.
- Training setting presented uncontrollable distractions and between session events (e.g., other dogs and potential adopters).

Future Research

- Investigate additional prompt:probe ratio values.
- Investigate effects of prompt level and fading.

Thank you to ECCHA Director Lauren Evans, ECCHA team, UWEC ORSP, and Psychology Department Chair, Dr. Lori Bica.