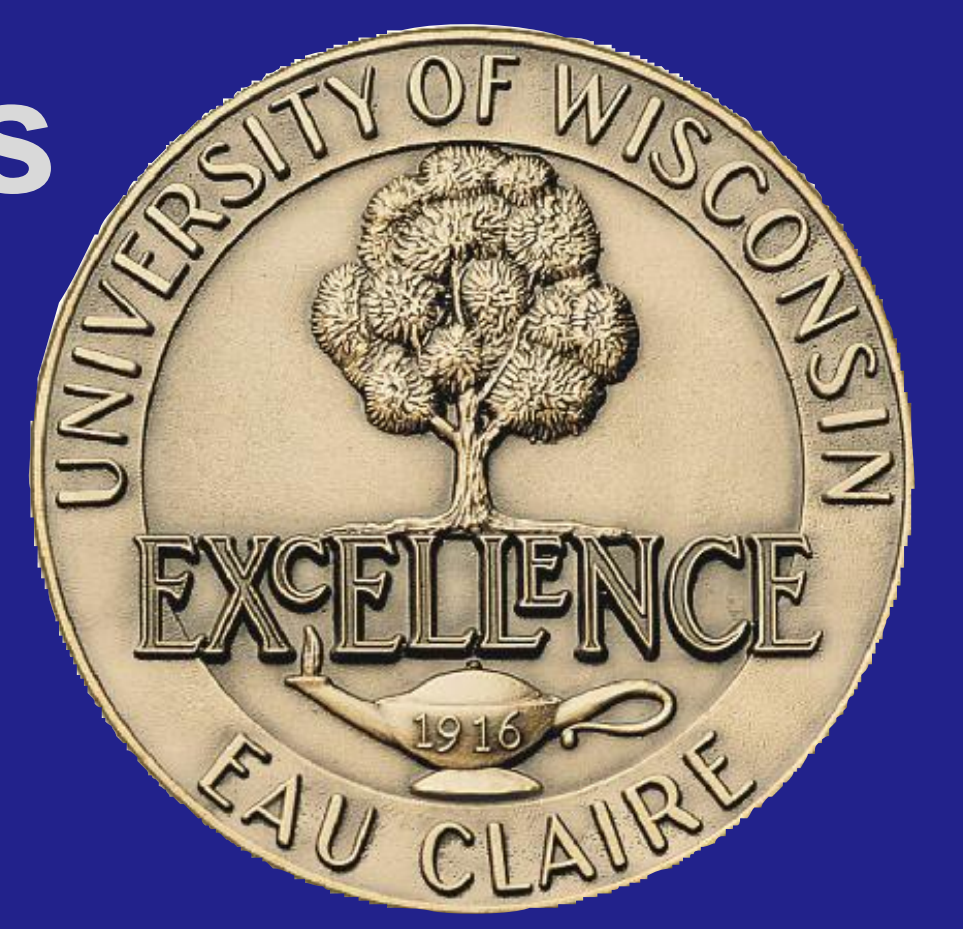




# The Effect of a Trained Attending Response on Rate of Acquisition in Canines



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## Introduction

Centuries of anecdotal reports from dog trainers have reported that providing a reward contingent on behavior will increase that behavior :

1751- "If he fails to follow the scent he is beaten, but if he does well he is caressed and rewarded."

1814- "Obedience is rewarded by caressing, while the contrary is punished with the whip."

1999- "If you call a puppy, and it comes, and you pet it, the pups' coming will become more and more reliable."

Established dog trainers have used anecdotal evidence to make the claim that the training of an attending response is crucial for effective teaching. Although there is empirical support from human studies on the importance of trained attending (Fox, 1977) there is no research in the animal training literature to confirm these findings.

The present study assessed the effect of a trained attending response on rate of acquisition in canines.

## Methods

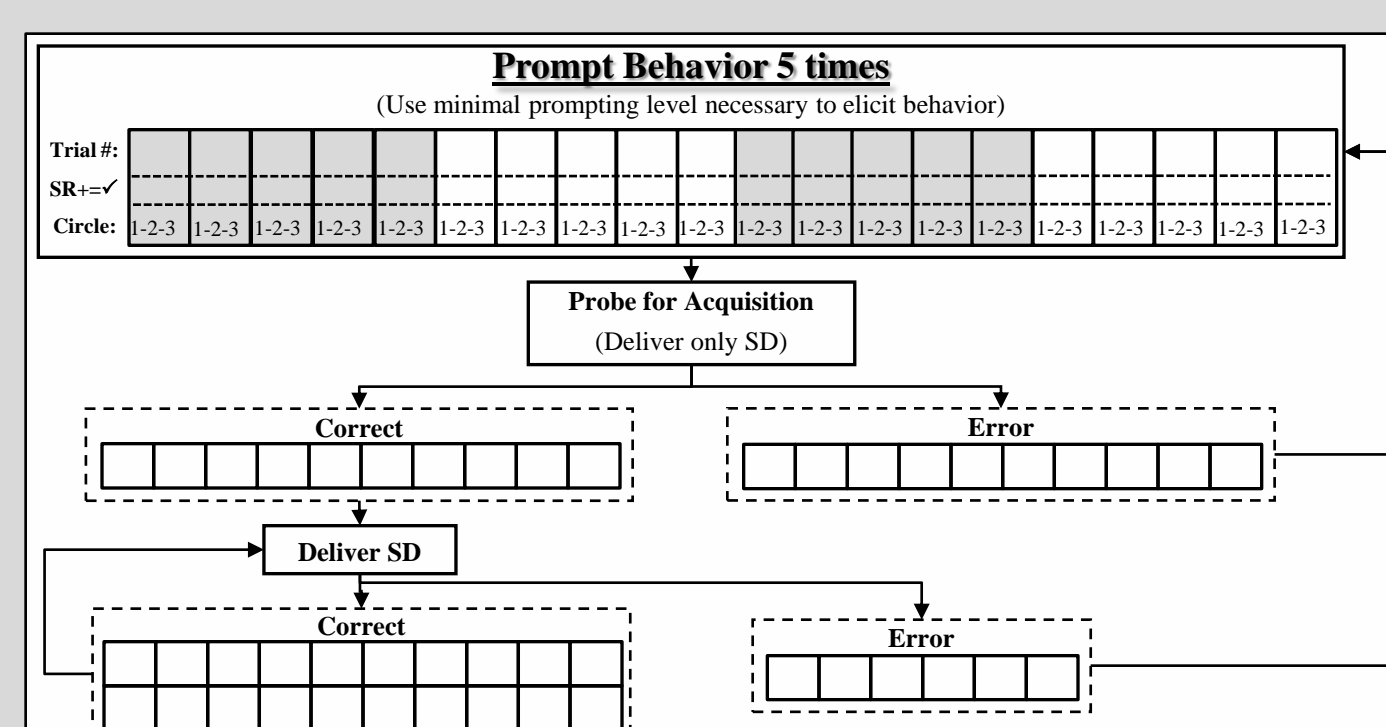
Canines housed at the Eau Claire County Humane Association were selected for the study if they did not appear to have aggressive tendencies, did not have the skill of sitting on command, and did not respond to name when called.

Canines were randomly assigned to either an experimental or a control group. The canines in the experimental group were first trained an attending response, while canines in the control group were on a leash for the same amount of time that it took to train the attending response to mastery. When trained attending was mastered, canines in both the experimental and control group were trained to sit.

Trainers began sessions by prompting the first 5 trials and then probing the next trial. If a correct response occurred during a probe trial, then trainers would deliver sit commands without prompting the correct response. If an error occurred trainers returned to prompting 5 trials then probing the sixth.

When canines engaged in ten independent correct responses for two consecutive sessions the skill was considered mastered.

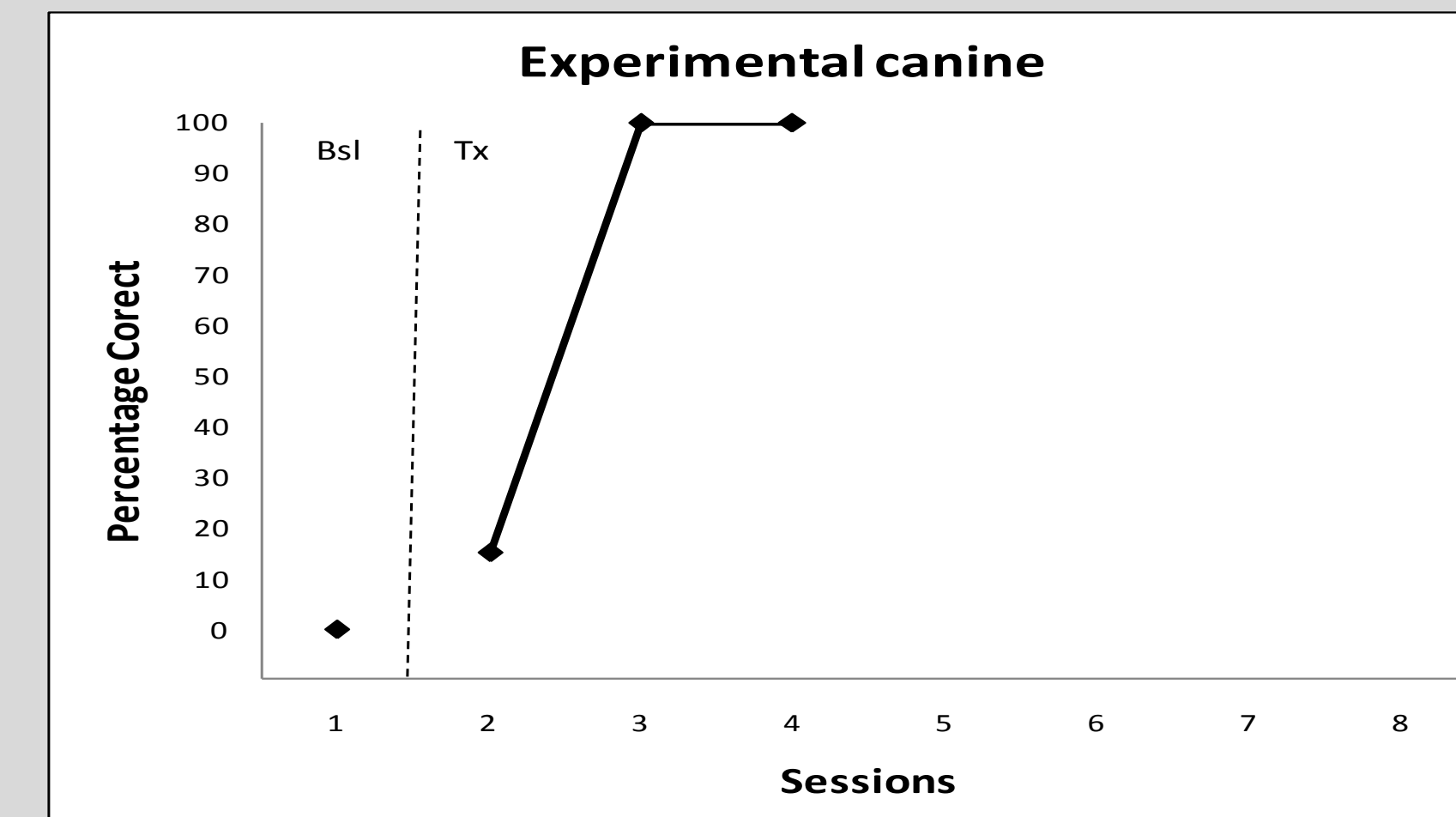
Treatment integrity was 100% for all sessions. Inter-rater reliability was taken for 20% of sessions and was 100%.



A flow chart of the procedure is provided on the left. A photo of a canine learning the skill of sit is provided on the right.



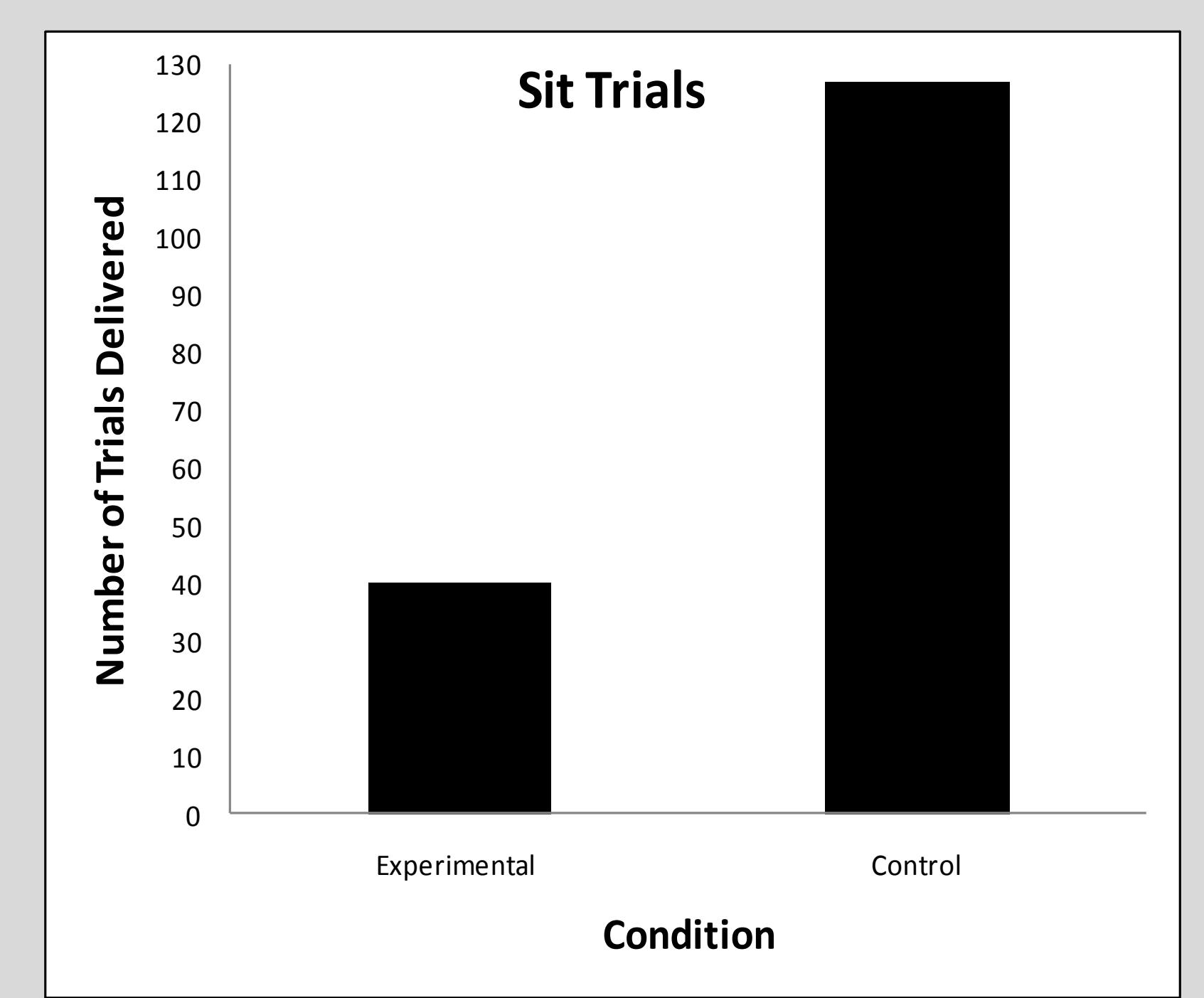
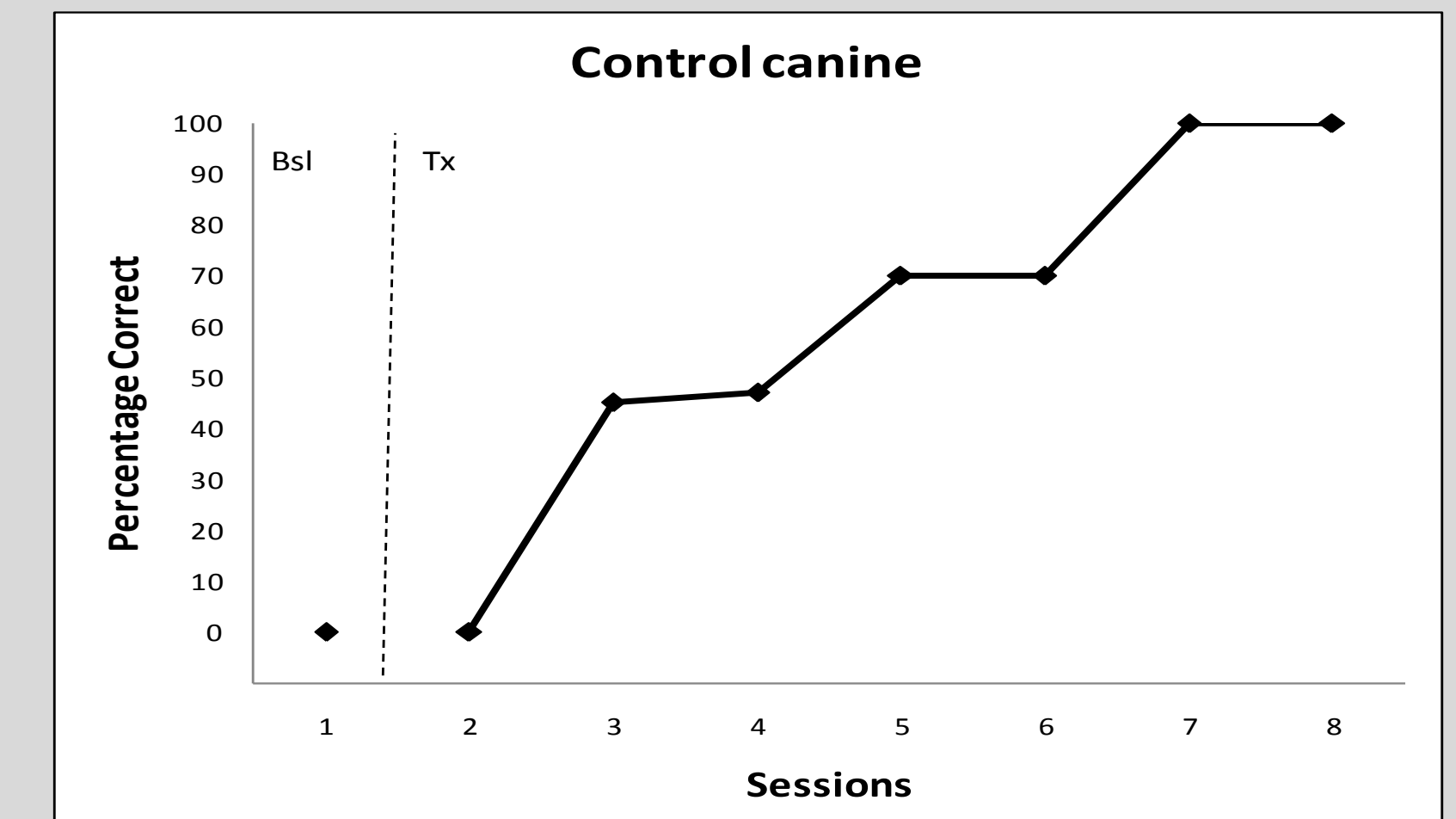
## Results



The experimental canine met the mastery criterion for sit after 3 treatment sessions.

The control canine met the mastery criterion for sit after 7 experimental sessions.

Forty sit trials were delivered for the experimental canine, while 127 trials were delivered for the control canine.



## Discussion

The present study set out to assess the effect of a trained attending response on rate of acquisition of a sit skill. The data suggest that training an attending response facilitates rate of acquisition of the sit skill.

Although both canines experienced the same amount of handling, a rapport confound can not be completely eliminated. Canines in the experimental group were reinforced contingent on correct responses during attending training, while canines in the control group were not reinforced.

Future research on attending may alleviate the potential rapport confound by delivering the same number reinforcers to canines in the control group on a random time schedule.

## Acknowledgements

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