Prospective school psychology graduate students must take the GRE. Test takers often prioritize studying for the verbal section (Loken, et al., 2004). We explored the application of Brief Experimental Analysis (BEA) for selecting vocabulary interventions for graduate-school bound university students. BEA produced idiosyncratic results for each participant. Extended analyses revealed BEA-indicated interventions increased participants’ correct definitions of vocabulary words.

BEA is a tool that “tests drives” different interventions to select a promising intervention for each participant, which can be implemented over time. Research indicates that for school-aged children Brief Experimental Analysis (BEA) can be used to select effective academic interventions, especially in oral reading fluency (Burns & Wagner, 2008). On the GRE, university students emphasize the verbal component because they perceive it as especially difficult (Loken, Radilinsky, Crespi, Millett, & Cushing, 2004).

We selected three interventions commonly used to teach word definitions: interspersal, incremental rehearsal, and traditional flashcard drill. Although traditional flashcard drill procedures have been used for vocabulary instruction (e.g., MacQuarrie, Tucker, Burns, & Hartman, 2002), research suggests that interspersal procedures yield better results than traditional flashcard drill procedures for definitional knowledge and retention of knowledge over time (Petersen-Brown & Burns, 2011).

We aimed to extend the traditional use of BEA to select an effective vocabulary intervention for college students. We then measured the effectiveness of this intervention across time in an extended analysis using a cumulative acquisition design.

Method
Interventions were delivered in a predetermined, random order. Immediate recall was tested after a 5-minute delay between each intervention. Delayed recall was performed approximately 24 hours after each BEA session. The two most successful interventions were carried out for the extended analysis.

Extended Analysis. The interventions were counterbalanced (e.g. interspersal in session 1, incremental rehearsal in session 2, interspersal rehearsal in session 3, and so on). Five minutes after the intervention, we tested the participant’s immediate recall of the words for that session.

Prior to administering the intervention, we tested the participant’s delayed recall for all the unknown words they had learned during all prior sessions and graphed their cumulative retention as part of a cumulative acquisition design. The extended analysis was carried out for approximately 3 weeks—approximately 72 unknown words total were introduced to each participant.

Outcome. Participants were tested on their cumulative retention of all the words presented across all sessions.

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