Behavioral Observation FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions | Behavioral Observation | Noldus Information Technology

1. Where do I actually start if I want to begin behavioral observation?

Start by picking one specific behavior or interaction you want to understand, focusing on a single scenario with limited scope. Define what you're looking for upfront by identifying the 3-5 behaviors that actually matter to your question. Get footage into NoldusViso or The Observer, then review the video together with your team, marking what you see and comparing notes. That's your starting point before you scale.

2. How long before I actually have usable observation data?

The timeline typically breaks down like this:

- **Week 1-2:** Define what you're observing and set up your recording system
- **Week 2-4:** Collect footage
- **Week 4-6:** Review and analyze what you've recorded

For a small pilot project, you're looking at roughly 4-6 weeks to have actual insights. Larger projects take longer, but the cycle remains the same: define what you're observing, collect data, review systematically, and then analyze.

3. How do I build a codebook for behavioral observation?

Define what you're coding using concrete examples rather than vague descriptions. Instead of "seemed engaged," write "eye contact equals sustained gaze for 3+ seconds" and clearly note what doesn't count. Test your codebook on sample video with your team to see where people agree and disagree, then refine those definitions. A good codebook is built through testing and practice, not invented at a desk.

Explore 7 tips for behavioral coding and learn about 5 coding-scheme decisions you cannot undo later.

4. What should I budget for behavioral observation?

The main costs are observation software (like NoldusViso), observer or coder time, and secure storage. Observer time is typically the largest investment depending on your project scope. The complexity of what you're observing, how many sessions you need to record, and how many observers you require will all affect your overall budget. Contact us to discuss your specific needs and get an estimate.

5. How do I align my team and ensure reliable observation data?

Have multiple observers watch the same video independently, then compare notes to see where definitions need clarifying or where observers caught different things. Refine definitions based on those differences and practice again. Measure inter-observer reliability using a metric like kappa or percentage agreement - aim for 90%+ agreement between observers on the same material.

If you're falling short, your definitions need clarifying or your team needs more training. Reliability isn't something to assume; it's something you need to actively measure and verify. Regular alignment sessions throughout your project prevent drift and make this an ongoing process. Learn more about establishing reliability.

6. What common mistakes do teams make when they start behavioral observation?

Teams often define too many behaviors at once, skip testing before scaling up, or assume one observer is enough. Many skip measuring reliability and rush through calibration sessions. The pattern is almost always rushing. Instead, slow down, test your approach on a small scale, establish that your observations are reliable, and only then scale up.

Questions about your behavioral observation setup?

Talk to our team about your setup, workflow, or software needs.

Contact Noldus