



# Core Behavior Assessment for Dogs Training Manual



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## Training Syllabus for Core Behavior Assessment for Dogs

### **Week 1**

- Social Behavior and Body Language Presentation
- Kennel Practice – On leash neutral observations
- Manual – Core Behavior Assessment Manual
- Homework
  - Observe one dog in kennel and write observations
  - Observe one dog in kennel with three stances (neutral, direct, soft) and write observations

### **Week 2**

- Manual – Dog Behavior and Physical Development
- Remove and return from kennels
- Proper leash control
- Manual – Defensive Handling
- Kennel Practice – Leash handling, remove and return
- Homework
  - Complete Dog Behavior and Physical Development worksheet
  - Practice remove and return from kennels
  - Find one dog with a soft behavioral appearance and write observations
  - Find one dog with a harsh behavioral appearance and write observations

### **Week 3**

- Discussion of Temperament Wheel™, Sociability and Arousal
- Manual – Asilomar Accords
- Kennel Practice – Observations in kennel
- Homework
  - Complete two Temperament Wheels™, one on a pet and the other on a person
  - Give example of a rehabilitatable behavioral condition, a manageable behavioral condition, and an unhealthy/untreatable behavioral condition

### **Week 4**

- Manual – Information About Dog Breeds
- Manual – Pit Bull Rescuer Code of Ethics
- Section 1 and 2 – Size, breed, safety assessment
- Kennel Practice – Sections 1 and 2
- Homework
  - Complete evaluation forms on two dogs for sections 1 and 2 and write observations

## **Week 5**

- Manual – Conditioning
- Section 3 – Social attraction, contact tolerance and environmental sociability
- Section 4 – Physical control
- Kennel Practice – Sections 1 – 4
- Homework
  - Conditioning worksheet
  - Complete an evaluation form on two dogs for sections 1 – 4 and write observations

## **Week 6**

- Discussion of dog interactions and dog introductions
- Manual – Dog to Dog Introductions
- Section 6 – Behavior with dogs
- Videos – dog to dog introductions
- Kennel Practice – Dog introductions
- Homework
  - Conduct an evaluation on one dog for sections 1 – 4 and write observations
  - Conduct four separate dog introductions and write observations

## **Week 7**

- Manual – Bonding / relationships
- Section 5 – Resource holding potential and frustration threshold
- Kennel Practice – Resource holding potential and frustration threshold
- Section 7 – Arousal and impulse control
- Section 8 – Control-related behavior
- Manual – Active Listening Skills
- Kennel Practice – Sections 1 – 8
- Homework
  - Complete evaluation form on two dogs and write observations. Do not discuss observations or findings with co-evaluator unless safety is in question. Each evaluator must write their own evaluation form and written observations for each dog.

## **Week 8**

- Manual – Healthy Coping
- Manual – Matching Child Age Groups with Shelter Dogs
- Manual – Sociability Preference Ladder
- Manual – Matching Child Age Groups for Dogs with Resource Aggression

- Manual – About Sociability
- Manual – Kennel Outreach and Placement Recommendations
- Kennel Practice – Full evaluations

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**Week 9**

- General videos
- Homework
  - Walk adoptable kennels and find two dogs to write recommendations about enrichment or need for re-evaluation and why.

**Week 10**

- Kennel Practice – Full evaluations
- Discussion of upcoming exam

**Week 11**

- Exam
- Kennel Practice – Full evaluations

**Week 12**

- Kennel Practice – Full evaluations
- Discussion of exam

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## **Core Behavior Assessment™ for Dogs**

We have been evaluating dog behavior for many years and the industry is filled with different “tests” to uncover the underlying temperament (i.e., personality) of a dog. Most evaluation procedures are modular, meaning they evaluate each aspect of a dog's behavior separately (e.g., the results of an evaluation indicate that a dog has possession aggression).

The Core Behavior Assessment™ for Dogs is an integrative procedure, as opposed to modular, that focuses on emerging patterns of behavior and their relation to a dog's defense mechanism, or how he or she handles conflict (e.g., the results of the evaluation indicate that this dog becomes defensively aggressive when he is in conflict). Most behaviors observed in an evaluation are examples of a dog's defense mechanisms. Evaluations are not just about the individual behavior; they are about what that behavior represents and how else that might play out in a home environment. By looking at what these behaviors represent, you will be better able to make decisions as to whether the dog you are evaluating is behaviorally healthy, treatable (i.e., behaviors can be treated or changed through training or behavior modification), manageable (i.e., behaviors can be successfully accommodated in a compatible environment) or unhealthy/untreatable.

In this course, you will first learn how to think in terms of emerging patterns of behavior and how it plays out in a home environment. From this understanding, you will learn how to interpret the behaviors that occur in a shelter environment during the evaluation. Finally, you will learn how to make decisions and recommendations based on this information.

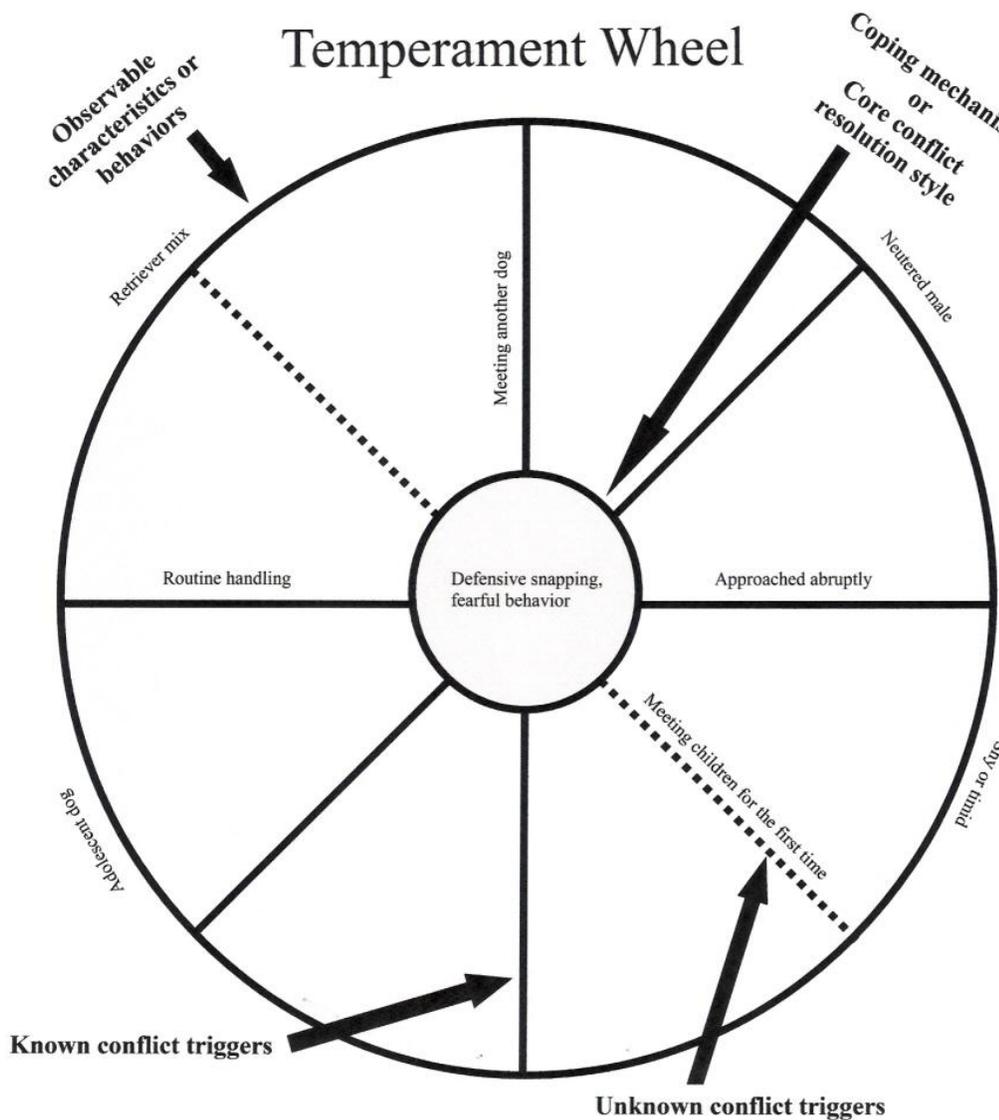
**What does a behavior evaluation tell us about a dog?** A behavior evaluation gives us a glimpse inside a dog's personality. It is a method to reveal how a dog deals with conflict, unveiling his defense or coping mechanism. This is similar to understanding human behavior. You never really know a person until you see how he or she behaves on a bad day. It is our coping mechanism that determines how we act when things are not going well. When we understand a dog's coping mechanism, we are better able to make recommendations as to that dog's adoptability (e.g., whether he is safe to place for adoption or if there should be restrictions on his placement).

**Are behavior evaluations fair?** Yes, when conducted properly, behavior evaluations are fair. The conflict the dog is placed in during an evaluation is not outside the range of normal situations he may encounter in a home environment. Evaluations are conducted in a relatively brief period of time, and represent a “snapshot” of the dog's behavior. When conducted correctly, a pattern of behavior emerges that gives a good indication of responses to other situations not included in the evaluation. A dog's responses vary greatly, both in type and severity, and an evaluation gives information about the type and severity of the reaction an adopter is likely to encounter when his or her dog is in conflict.

**Why look at patterns of behavior instead of individual behaviors?** This can be best illustrated by the Temperament Wheel™. The outside of the wheel includes the basic

characteristics of the dog (e.g., breed, sex, demeanor, etc.). These are characteristics that are easily determined by simple observation. It does not require skill or training to see these obvious characteristics. With a behavior evaluation we are trying to uncover the center circle of the wheel which is his defense mechanism (e.g., biting or snapping in fear, controlling and dominant, defensive, etc.). Although a dog's responses will differ in degree, a pattern of responses will emerge giving rise to his conflict resolution style.

The solid spokes of the Temperament Wheel™ represent different types of conflict that a dog has faced. For example, one spoke may represent the dog meeting another dog. Another spoke may represent handling for examination. And yet another may represent the dog being handled while in possession of a high-value resource. By observing the dog's pattern of responses to these types of conflicts, we gain insight into the coping mechanism, represented by the center circle.



The dashed spokes of the Temperament Wheel™ represent potential conflicting situations the dog may face in the future. We can assume that the dog will handle the conflict of these additional scenarios in the same manner. Thinking of these potential scenarios is important when making placement recommendations.

For example, this Temperament Wheel™

represents a dog that responded to three types of conflict (represented by the solid spokes) with defensive snapping and fearful behavior (center circle/core coping mechanism.) The pattern of fear and defensiveness suggests that in the future, when the dog is faced with another situation that causes conflict (represented by the dashed spokes) his reaction will likely be one of fear and defensive snapping.

**Are behavior evaluations valid?** There are a number of limitations that must be taken into consideration. First, while the pattern of behavior that emerges will indicate the dog's coping mechanism, the severity and scope of that behavior may be inhibited or exacerbated by the environment. For example, a dog may be so frightened in the kennel environment that he is more apt to snap at the evaluator. Further, extenuating circumstances (e.g., recent trauma, injury, illness, abuse, etc.) may prevent a proper, thorough and fair evaluation. In addition, a dog's behavior often changes when he forms a primary attachment bond. For example, a shy dog that is inhibited during an evaluation may form a bond with a new owner and lose some of that inhibition. This may result in more outgoing behavior in a home or possibly aggression toward strangers. Also, some dogs are so inhibited by the environment that they "check out" or become entirely unresponsive. It is not possible to assess these dogs properly in this situation. Finally, evaluations are unable to determine the scope or threshold of an aggressive response. Given two dogs that demonstrate similar behavior during an evaluation (e.g., growling and snapping over a high-value resource), one dog may demonstrate this behavior with significantly more items than the other (e.g., not just bones or food, but found items and space as well). Two examples follow:

Alexis (2-year-old SF Retriever mix) – Alexis was evaluated as being appropriate with cats and dogs, but demonstrated a coping mechanism of growling and snapping (without biting) when faced with conflict (specifically when in possession of a high-value food item). In a home environment, this behavior played out as growling and snapping at the approaching resident cats when she was near the female owner (who was perceived to be a resource).

Mugsy (5-year-old NM Pug/Beagle mix) – Mugsy demonstrated a coping mechanism of growling and offensively snapping when in conflict (e.g., when confronted at a barrier, when disturbed while in possession of high-value items, etc.). In a home environment, Mugsy's perception of confrontation generalized to such things as being disturbed while resting, being physically moved or handled, being approached by strangers or being disturbed with a variety of possessions. His response to these perceived confrontations was, as observed in the evaluation, to offensively growl and snap at the perceived offender.

**What is arousal and how does it impact a behavior evaluation?** Arousal is a physiological and psychological state leading to a condition of alertness and readiness to respond. It may manifest as a combination of many behaviors at once or one behavior very intensely. When aroused, a dog will experience a physiological reaction such as an increased heart rate, respiration and blood pressure, hair bristling (i.e., piloerection), pupil dilation, sweaty paws etc. Arousal intensifies a dog's reactions. When a dog is aroused, everything becomes hyper or excessive (e.g., hyperactive, hyper-intense, etc.). Arousal can occur in response to movement or unresolved

frustration. Dogs differ in the level of arousal they exhibit based on their temperament, and some breeds are more prone to arousal than others. Arousal may affect an evaluation by decreasing the length of time it takes before the dog engages in his defense mechanism (i.e., less warning). If the dog has a coping mechanism that includes aggressive behavior, it can make the aggression appear unpredictable. Arousal may also increase the number of triggers (spokes on the Temperament Wheel) the dog perceives as a conflict and/or increase the severity of his behavioral response. Dogs may become aroused in a chaotic kennel environment, by the frustration of being behind a kennel door, or on a leash. In a home, dogs may become aroused when the doorbell rings or there are things going on outdoors and the dog is behind the gate in the yard or in the house looking out the front window.

**What is “sociability” and how does it impact a behavior evaluation?** Sociability refers to the dog's tendency to seek social contact. Sociability is believed to be an innate component of a dog's personality and breed. Sociability may affect an evaluation by increasing the length of time it takes before the dog engages in its defense mechanism. If the dog has a coping mechanism that includes aggressive behavior, it can increase the aggression threshold, resulting in fewer instances of aggression. Sociability may also decrease the number of triggers (spokes on the Temperament Wheel™) the dog perceives as a conflict and/or decrease the severity of his behavioral response. Sociability generally moderates the dog's reactions during the evaluation.

**About evaluators:** Evaluations require a minimum of two trained evaluators for observation, dog introductions and safety in the event of a dog bite, dogfight or attack. The following training is required prior to conducting behavior evaluations: defensive handling, dog body language, dog introductions, breed identification (separate booklet), general dog behavior, and the evaluation process.

It is essential that evaluators remain neutral toward the dog (i.e., standing calmly without interacting with the dog) except as instructed for each test. Unless otherwise indicated, evaluators should maintain a neutral posture toward the dog (e.g., unlocked knees, weight on one leg at a time, slightly rounded shoulders, head slightly down, avoiding eye contact, not directly facing the dog, etc.) Evaluators should not make friends, pet, prevent jumping, administer a leash correction, reprimand or otherwise affect the behavior of the dog unless the evaluators' safety is in question.

Evaluators must be blind to their own prejudices and preferences when conducting evaluations. This neutrality must extend to breed issues except as indicated in the breed section of the evaluation. Problematic breed specific behavioral tendencies should be uncovered during the evaluation.

Evaluations must be conducted in an ethical and humane manner. It is critical that the process be minimally provocative to the dog. The instructions must be followed exactly as written.

**Evaluation area:** See your supervisor for the specific area designated for evaluations at each location.

**Format of evaluation form:** This form is to be used by evaluators as a guide for objectively measuring a dog's responses during a behavior evaluation. The evaluation must follow the order of the form. There are 14 parts in this evaluation that build on one another to give the information needed to make appropriate decisions. The various behaviors are color-coded based on increasing severity of the dog's reactions. Every behavior that is observed within the row for each section should be checked off. It is likely that multiple boxes will be checked within each color and it is possible to have multiple colored boxes checked within each row.

**Color-coding and point system:** Each color has a different point value for the boxes checked. The entire green column is neutral; therefore it has a zero point value. Each yellow box is 1 point, each orange box is 5 points and each red box is 30 points. Depending upon the number of points, the total will help determine if the dog is adoptable, adoptable with restrictions, a candidate for specialized placement, or if the dog should be euthanized.

There is a SAFETY STOP POINT built into the form. Once the combined points reach 30 or a red box is checked, **the test should be stopped** and adoptability should be considered. (Dogs should always be given the benefit of the doubt unless safety is in question.) If the test continues after the combined points reach 30, or a red box is checked, the risk of a bite or attack during the evaluation is much greater. The safety and liability risks of the dog's placement for adoption must also be considered.

**Purpose of each section:** Each section of the evaluation has one or more specific purpose.

**Safety** – Safety is the number one concern. The evaluator's safety, the safety of the dog being handled, and the safety of people and other animals in the environment are all priorities and must be considered throughout the entire evaluation.

**Liability** – Animal shelters have a responsibility to competently evaluate the dogs in its care. They should also disclose to potential adopters significant information regarding behavioral issues, particularly with regard to aggression. Once it has been determined that a dog has aggressive characteristics, through the evaluation process or other behavioral history, that dog may pose a greater liability risk to the agency as well as the potential adopter. There is an inherent risk for aggression with all dogs, but dogs that have demonstrated aggressive behaviors tend to recidivate (i.e., to return to a previous pattern of behavior; relapse). Without proper intervention, it is not a question of whether such a dog will aggress again, but a question of when and under what circumstances it will happen. Even with proper intervention there can be no guarantees as to future behavior. In addition, although some breeds are more prone to aggressive behavioral tendencies, this does not mean that all dogs of that breed are aggressive. As a result of these behavioral tendencies and some community restrictions, however, such breeds should be identified and held to a stricter behavioral standard during the evaluation process.

**Environment/Decompensation** – Some dogs do not kennel well and may do better in a foster environment vs. a kennel environment. The stress from the environment can cause dogs to act differently, which may affect their evaluation. For this reason, it is

essential that dogs be given the benefit of the doubt unless safety is in question. Dogs must be evaluated on an ongoing basis, especially if signs of stress or changes in their health or behavior are observed, as this may be an indication of decompensation. There may be another housing option (e.g., foster, Alternative Placement) for the dogs that are not doing well in a kennel environment. For these dogs, unless the safety of the evaluator is at risk, the evaluation should continue as outlined in order to obtain a fair and accurate assessment of the dog's behavior. All available resources should be exhausted prior to making any decisions or recommendations.

**Children** – Many adoptive families have children of various ages. The safety of the children and the dog's suitability for a family with children must be considered during the evaluation. The behavior observed throughout the evaluation will help with appropriate placement recommendations. The Sociability Preference Ladder will be explained during the classroom training.

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## **Glossary of Terms/Phrases on Evaluation Form**

1. Abrupt contact – jumps up and pushes off, climbs up and over, etc.
2. Actively avoidant – consistent pulling away or leaning away
3. Aggresses – a threat or a challenge resolved by any of the following behaviors: lip curls, snapping, attempting to bite, growling, snarling, etc.
4. Agonistic behaviors or agonism – threatening behaviors arising from competitive interactions or social conflict
5. Alarm barks – cautious barking with stiffer body language
6. Aligned body – body in a straight line from nose to tail
7. Allelomimetic behaviors – group facilitated behavior, imitative or contagious behaviors
8. Ambivalent posture – defensive, body or parts of body moving backward or appearance of getting smaller
9. Anthropomorphism – attribution of human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena
10. Appeasement behaviors – pacifying behaviors that inhibit attacks by others. E.g., incisor bared grin, paw raising, exposing inguinal region, lowered head w/ serpentine walk, ears back with squinty eyes, lowered posture, rolling onto back, low tail wag, sitting or downing in response to approach, uneven footing, etc.
11. Arousal – physiological and psychological state leading to increased heart rate and blood pressure and a condition of alertness and readiness to respond.
12. Body slams – jumps and forcefully slams body into evaluator
13. Boundless play – outpaces the evaluator's play, rude, little impulse control, plays at the expense of the evaluator by jumping onto, slamming<sup>13</sup> into and/or biting, grabbing at evaluator
14. Breed labeled potentially dangerous – “Bull” breeds, Mastiff breeds, Akita, Chow Chow, Doberman Pinscher, German Shepherd, Great Dane, Husky, Malamute, Rottweiler, Saint Bernard, Shar Pei or any mix thereof having the characteristics of one of these breeds
15. Compatibility – capable of efficient integration (e.g., capable of integrating into a home without causing injury to dogs or people)

16. Conflict behaviors – stretching, panting, yawning, sniffing ground or objects, licking lips or nose, moving in slow motion, indirect approach, wet dog shake, snorting or huffing, scratching or grooming, sweaty paws, sudden shedding, sudden dandruff, bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils, pacing, etc.
17. Controlled play – keeps pace with or plays within boundaries of evaluator's play
18. Counter conditioning – a process to establish a new response as a replacement for an old response
19. Cut off signals – actively ignoring interaction by doing something else
20. Decompensation – the inability to maintain a defense mechanism in response to stress – these dogs may deteriorate in their health or behavior.
21. Defensive when handled – little follow through (more fearful) – quick, nervous snaps, nervously poking with mouth or nibbling, mouthing with increasing jaw pressure
22. Desensitization – process of reducing sensitivity
23. Displacement behavior – appears out of context for the situation, performed to change the situation in order to escape the conflict
24. Dominance – ability to control access to resources
25. Epimeletic behaviors – care giving behaviors
26. Et-epimeletic behaviors – care seeking behaviors
27. Extinction – withholding consequences that reinforce a response
28. Freezing – momentarily stilling – 1 second or less
29. Friendly – seeking social contact
30. Frontal body – body completely facing evaluator
31. Habituation – process of acclimation by repeated exposure
32. Hard glance or stare – direct eye contact, eyelids pulled back exposing round eyeball with dilated pupils
33. Harsh behavior – forceful and rough, jumping or moving excitedly, tail up, etc.
34. Hoards – keeps hidden or private
35. Inguinal – groin area

36. Instinct – the inherent disposition of a living organism toward a particular behavior. Instinct provides a response to external stimuli, which moves an organism to action, unless overridden by intelligence, which is creative and more versatile. Instinct is pre-intellectual. Also known as a drive.
37. Intense play – extremely competitive play – plays to win
38. Monitors leash – checks leash by bumping or touching with muzzle or paws
39. Mouthy – chews on person
40. Non-yielding or oppositional – dog resists evaluator's attempts to move him by pushing against force instead of yielding
41. Offensively aggresses – body or parts of body moving forward or appearance of getting larger
42. Paedomorphism – evolutionary tendency to retain infantile or juvenile traits into adulthood
43. Passively avoidant – not pulling away but oriented away
44. Passively reprimands – multiple freezes and/or stilling with hard glance or stare
45. Plays when handled – tries to change the context of the interaction by playing, more controlling
46. Reactive – barking, extreme leash pulling, jumping, lunging with or without aggressing
47. Reconnects – socially interacts immediately following stimuli
48. Redirects aggressive behavior – directing aggressive behaviors toward closest target (e.g., when dog is in a high state of arousal<sup>11</sup>, he redirects his aggressive behavior toward the handler or another closer target instead of the intended target)
49. Reprimanding of contact – pushes hand away or quickly and abruptly pokes at hand with mouth, paw and/or body in a stern manner. (This does **not** include quickly orienting to the stimulus or general mouthing.)
50. Resource Holding Potential – (RHP) is the drive of an animal to win a battle to retain a resource. The term “potential” serves as a reminder that the individual with greater RHP does not always prevail.
51. Rude with dogs – plays at the other dog's expense – regardless of receptivity of other dog

52. Seeks safety – hides near evaluator, nervously leans into evaluator for protection
53. Seeks solitude with item – turns away, walks away or otherwise positions to get away from the evaluator while retaining the item
54. Sloughs off when handled – flings hand or shakes hand off part of body being handled
55. Social hierarchy – relationship between individuals based on the outcome of social conflict
56. Socialization – process by which interspecies/intraspecies attachment bonds are formed
57. Soft behavior – deferential, courteous, yielding, submitting
58. Stiff – tense, tight body, no fluidity
59. Stilling – maintained freezing – more than 1 second
60. Tolerates – accepts, permits or endures
61. Whale eyes – head is still with eyes moving, showing the whites of the eyes multiple times

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