



**Navigating Task Complexity: Distributed Cognition Between New Users and Different LLM Architectures**

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# **Navigating Task Complexity: Distributed Cognition Between New Users and Different LLM Architectures**

A Study on Human-AI Collaboration in Robot Navigation Tasks

## **Master Thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

Large Language Models (LLMs) promise intuitive robot control through natural language, yet the gap between vague human intent and safe physical execution remains significant. This thesis investigates how the distribution of planning responsibility relates to the reasoning architecture of the model. In a study involving 226 participants who were new users in LLM-based robot prompting, a non-reasoning model (Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite) and a reasoning model (Gemini 2.5 Pro) were compared on a baseline navigation task, followed by an evaluation of the reasoning model across tasks of increasing logical complexity. Results indicate a clear divergence in safety profiles: non-reasoning models showed more collision-prone goal-seeking behavior, whereas reasoning models demonstrated stricter adherence to the safety constraints in the system prompt, preferring to refuse a request rather than generating an unsafe plan when the task exceeded the model’s capabilities. However, even reasoning models showed declining performance in high-complexity tasks, which hyperparameter tuning (temperature/tokens) did not resolve. Analysis of user interaction reveals that effective prompting is less about linguistic precision and more about "distributed cognition": while models can autonomously plan simple tasks, complex scenarios require the human to reclaim the task planning effort and provide low-level guidance to reduce the solution space. These findings suggest that safe language-driven robotics depends on a dynamic partnership where the distribution of task planning effort shifts based on task difficulty and the capabilities of the specific LLM.

**Keywords:** Large Language Models, Robotics, Human-in-the-loop, Robot navigation, Reasoning models, Prompting, Task complexity, Distributed cognition

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Controlling robots was once a skill reserved for experts who understood custom code and tooling. The field is moving toward natural interfaces instead, using human language as one of the main ways to guide embodied systems. Language is intuitive for people but often vague, messy, and context dependent, which creates a gap between what a human intends and what a machine executes. This tension has persisted throughout the history of robotics and human-automation interaction (Asimov, 1950).

Early attempts at language-driven robot behavior relied on tightly bounded domains where the robot’s world model and allowed actions were explicitly represented, but they often broke down as soon as users stepped outside that domain. A well-known example is Winograd’s SHRDLU: a simulated robot in a blocks world, where a user can type a command like “Pick up a big red block.” and the system can translate that into actions. This works because the world is fully pre-defined for that blocks setting, including the objects, relations, and allowed actions, so instructions that rely on entities, actions, or knowledge outside that world are not covered (Winograd, 1971). Probabilistic, data-driven approaches started learning the mapping from language to actions from paired examples, which made the command space a lot wider than hand-written rules. For example, Tellex et al. use commands collected for a robotic forklift in a warehouse setting, such as “Go to the first crate on the left and pick it up.” or “Pick up the pallet of boxes in the middle and place them on the trailer to the left.” At the same time, what the robot can handle is still strongly shaped by the training data and the exact task setup (environment representation, object types, and how instructions are phrased), which makes generalization to new wording or new situations difficult (Matuszek et al., 2013; Tellex et al., 2011).

The arrival of large language models (LLMs) changed this landscape by making it possible to go from a high-level goal to a multi-step action sequence without task-specific training. In Huang et al., the model is queried with only a task name in the VirtualHome environment and produces an executable-style program; for example,

for the task “Relax on sofa”, the action plan starts with steps like “[WALK] (living room)(1)” and later includes sitting on the sofa and watching television, showing how a single goal can be expanded into concrete actions (Huang, Abbeel, et al., 2022). This direction aligns with Hancock’s sheepdog metaphor for human machine systems, where a human steers at a high level while automation handles low-level details (Hancock, 1993). However, these models can also misunderstand instructions or generate unsafe plans, motivating research on aligning model-reported uncertainty with actual task risk, as well as on safety guardrails for LLM-steered robots (Hundt et al., 2025; Ravichandran et al., 2025; Ren et al., 2023). In many LLM-based robot planning papers, the model is queried with a researcher-written template that already spells out the robot’s role and its capabilities, for example: “You are a robot ... Available skills: Navigate(·), Pick(·), Place(·) ... Instruction: <goal> ... Output a step-by-step plan using only these skills.” That is quite different from how people normally ask for help, like: “Hey, could you grab my water bottle from the kitchen and bring it here?” (M. Ahn et al., 2022; Bode et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2024; Huang, Xia, et al., 2022; J. Liang et al., 2023). Moreover, the LLM landscape has expanded from standard, direct-response models, i.e. non-reasoning models, to reasoning models that are optimized to spend extra inference compute on solving harder tasks before answering. In practice, this shows up as additional internal deliberation, but the difference is broader than that: reasoning models are trained and evaluated to do better on multi-step problems, to keep intermediate constraints consistent, and to stick to a plan even when the prompt is messy, while non-reasoning models tend to prioritize fast, fluent answers and may only “reason out loud” if the user explicitly asks for it. This also comes with trade-offs: reasoning models are typically slower and more expensive per query, and their extra computation is not always needed for simple instructions, whereas non-reasoning models can be a better fit when speed and low cost matter more than robust multi-step planning (DeepSeek-AI et al., 2025; OpenAI, 2024b). Despite these developments, it remains unclear how prompts from new users, with different characteristics

(e.g. low-level instructions or high-level instructions), interact between reasoning and non-reasoning LLMs, and how these effects change as navigation tasks become more complex.

This thesis investigates how prompt characteristics of new users and model architecture influence whether generated robot navigation plans are safe and executable i.e., free of constraint violations and physically feasible. Using prompts from new users, this thesis first compares one reasoning model with one non-reasoning model on a single navigation task, and then analyzes the reasoning model across tasks of increasing complexity; this work addresses the following research question:

*How do reasoning capabilities of LLMs and task complexity influence whether LLM-generated navigation plans are safe and executable, and which prompt characteristics from new users help maintain plan quality as reasoning reaches its limits?*

## 2 RELATED WORK

Robotic planning has traditionally relied on symbolic methods such as the Stanford Research Institute Problem Solver (STRIPS), where experts manually specified operator schemata as explicit preconditions plus add and delete effects; for example, Fikes and Nilsson describe a  $\text{push}(k, m, n)$  operator that applies when the robot is at location  $m$  and object  $k$  is at  $m$ , and whose effects update the world model by deleting  $\text{AT}(k, m)$  and adding  $\text{AT}(k, n)$  while also replacing  $\text{ATR}(m)$  with  $\text{ATR}(n)$  (Fikes & Nilsson, 1971). To standardize symbolic planning domains and problems, the Planning Domain Definition Language (PDDL) introduced a shared, planner-neutral syntax that separates a domain (types, predicates, and action schemata with parameters, preconditions, and effects) from its problem instances. For example, in the PDDL manual’s briefcase-world domain, the  $\text{mov-b}$  action specifies that moving the briefcase also moves every object inside it via a universally quantified conditional effect (McDermott et al., 1998). In parallel, robotics adopted probabilistic decision-making frameworks such as Markov Decision Processes (MDPs) and partially observable variants to explicitly model uncertainty in both dynamics and perception. In an MDP, the robot is modeled as being in a state, choosing an action, and transitioning stochastically according to a transition model, so planning becomes finding a policy that maximizes expected long-term reward (or minimizes expected cost). When the state cannot be observed directly, a POMDP instead maintains a belief distribution over states that is updated using an action model and an observation model, and decisions are made with respect to this belief; for example, Kaelbling et al. describe office-building navigation where actions can overshoot and observations can be ambiguous, so the robot must plan while accounting for both motion uncertainty and sensor noise (Kaelbling et al., 1998; Puterman, 1994; Thrun et al., 2005). In the 2000s, heuristic search planners such as the Fast Forward (FF) planner improved the practical efficiency of classical planning by using informative heuristics to guide forward search toward the goal and by pruning the search space with additional guidance signals. For example, in the Gripper domain, Hoffmann and Nebel describe a state where the robot is in room A while holding two balls, which makes three actions applicable (move to room B, or drop either ball). FF’s relaxed plan suggests

moving first, and FF’s “helpful actions” then restrict expansion in that state to just  $\text{move } A \ B$ , reducing the branching factor from three to one (Hoffmann & Nebel, 2001). In the 2010s, research increasingly connected high-level task intent to robot execution by grounding natural-language instructions to concrete entities and actions, and by integrating symbolic task planning with continuous motion planning so that plans remain physically executable. For example, Tellex et al. show an autonomous forklift interpreting the command “Put the tire pallet on the truck” by grounding phrases like “tire pallet” and “truck” to objects and locations in the scene and then executing a corresponding pick-and-place action sequence. In parallel, learning-based control methods such as deep reinforcement learning provided a data-driven route to low-level behavior, complementing these structured planning pipelines (Kaelbling & Lozano-Pérez, 2011; Mnih et al., 2015; Tellex et al., 2011). These research directions motivated the development of methods that can interpret high-level task intent more directly, including recent LLM-based task planners (Huang, Abbeel, et al., 2022).

LLMs have introduced a different approach by enabling robots to generate plans directly from natural language. Instead of encoding rules explicitly, LLMs can perform zero-shot planning when given high-level instructions such as “clean the kitchen” (Huang, Abbeel, et al., 2022). Early systems treated LLMs primarily as text generators, which led to plans that appeared coherent but ignored physical constraints. For example, they could output a fluent multi-step sequence that implicitly assumes the right objects are present and reachable, without any explicit grounding or feasibility checks. Later work reduced this gap by constraining outputs to structured and executable representations. Examples include ProgPrompt and Code as Policies, where the model produces programs or policy-like code that can be executed and checked; ProgPrompt, for instance, elicits a Python-like plan for a task such as putting salmon in a microwave, and Code as Policies can produce reactive policy code with perception-driven loops like moving rightwards until an apple is detected (J. Liang et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2022). Multimodal models like PaLM-E extend this direction by allowing planners to reason over visual environments; for example, they can generate a multi-step stacking plan conditioned on an image, such as placing a white object on top of a red one (Driess et al., 2023). To bridge the gap between language and physical reality, systems such as SayCan and AutoGPT+P introduce grounding mechanisms and execution-time feedback loops to ensure actions are physically possible; for example, SayCan grounds a request like “I just worked out, can you bring me a drink and a snack to recover?” in feasible skill sequences, while AutoGPT+P can adapt when required objects are missing by proposing a substitution, such as using a cup when no glass is detected for a “glass of milk” request (M. Ahn et al., 2022; Birr et al., 2024).

A key distinction in this line of work is whether LLMs are used as high-level task planners or as direct command generators. In hierarchical designs, the LLM functions as a high-level planner that outputs abstract plans, which are then executed by lower-level controllers that enforce safety logic (M. Ahn et al., 2022; Vemprala et al., 2023). SayCan illustrates this by mapping a request like “bring me a drink and a snack to recover” to a sequence of high-level skills from a robot’s library, while execution is handled by controllers that keep actions feasible and safe. This separation can improve

robustness because failures can be localized to either the high-level decomposition or the low-level execution layer. In contrast, other approaches aim to generate more direct action sequences, ranging from discrete step-by-step commands to end-to-end action policies that map observations to robot actions (Aghzal et al., 2025; Brohan et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024). Aghzal et al.’s Path Planning with Natural Language (PPNL) benchmark, for instance, emits explicit step sequences such as repeated left/down moves with inspect actions, and vision-language-action models go further by predicting low-level robot actions directly from an image and an instruction, such as picking up a carrot and placing it on a plate. These two paradigms form a spectrum rather than a binary choice, but the distinction is useful because it affects how safety, verification, and human guidance are integrated into the planning system.

Other work makes the planning loop richer by introducing explicit self-correction and multi-agent architectures. Related approaches in this domain integrate task-and-motion structure by using LLMs as translators and checkers between language, symbolic constraints, and feasibility feedback (Y. Chen et al., 2024; S. Wang et al., 2024). Self-correction is typically implemented as an iterative plan-act-check-revise cycle, where the system detects execution failures or logical inconsistencies and revises the plan before continuing. LLM3 makes this concrete by feeding back motion-planner failures such as collision or unreachability, so the model can adjust parameters and try again (S. Wang et al., 2024). In parallel, multi-agent LLM architectures push this further by decomposing the planning architecture into role-specialized LLM agents rather than relying on a single monolithic model. Plan-and-Act illustrates this by separating a Planner that generates structured high-level plans from an Executor that translates these plans into environment-specific actions (Erdogan et al., 2025). Related multi-agent systems also distribute problem formulation across agents or use actor-critic roles for proposing and verifying actions (Babu et al., 2025; W. Wang et al., 2025).

The reasoning capabilities of planning models have improved significantly in recent years. Newer reasoning-oriented models, such as DeepSeek-R1, OpenAI’s o-series, and Gemini 2.5, perform internal deliberation before producing outputs (DeepSeek-AI et al., 2025; Google DeepMind, 2025; OpenAI, 2024b). While benchmark studies report higher success rates compared to non-reasoning models (OpenAI, 2024a; Wu et al., 2024), violations of domain constraints remain frequent enough to prevent their use as standalone planners in safety-critical settings (Goebel & Zips, 2025). For embodied navigation, Gemini 2.5 Pro outperforms earlier models but still struggles to produce human-like routes in complex real-world scenes: NaviTrace shows that even when the goal point is correct, its predicted traces still lag behind human experts due to imperfect path shaping (Windecker et al., 2025).

Several studies demonstrate that performance declines as task complexity increases, though they vary complexity through different mechanisms. Shojaee et al. scale problem difficulty through solution length and report that performance can drop sharply at higher complexity levels, such as Tower of Hanoi instances that require a 255-move solution (Shojaee et al., 2025). Aghzal et al. demonstrate that path-planning performance drops as environments introduce more obstacles and require longer paths, with fine-tuned seq2seq models exhibiting sharp performance declines

on larger grids (e.g.,  $7 \times 7$ ) in out-of-distribution settings, while interactive prompting methods such as ReAct remain more robust (Aghzal et al., 2025). Likewise, Zhang et al. report that prompt-only baselines already show low success on  $5 \times 5$  mazes and generally degrade further by  $10 \times 10$ , with the authors attributing this decline to amplified spatial hallucinations and reasoning drift as maze size scales up (H. Zhang et al., 2025). While each study has different experimental setups and their own ways of defining complexity, they roughly capture a similar pattern. Task complexity can be understood as a weighted combination of different problem factors, such as  $C = \sum_i w_i \cdot c_i$ , where  $c_i$  represents individual constraints (e.g., obstacle density, ordering requirements, no-revisit rules) and task horizon (e.g., number of steps, path length, number of subgoals), with each factor weighted according to its contribution to planning difficulty. Across these studies, success rate SR generally shows an inverse relationship with complexity:  $SR(C) = \alpha - \beta \cdot C$  with  $\beta > 0$ , meaning that as task demands increase, model performance tends to decline.

Given these limitations, keeping a human in the loop remains essential. Research on human-robot interaction indicates that users, especially new users, adapt their language over time. Users often begin with high-level goals but shift toward low-level commands when the robot fails to understand their intent, moving from an instruction like “Pick up the book and insert it into the bookshelf” to short online corrections such as “tilt down a little bit” or “left!” during execution (Cui et al., 2023). This highlights a broader challenge, as interactions remain fragile and new users often apply assumptions from human-to-human communication that do not transfer to robots, expecting the system to infer missing context even when instructions are ambiguous or mix addressees (Zamfirescu-Pereira et al., 2023).

To systematically evaluate these various design choices—including safety verification, complexity scaling, and the role of human guidance—researchers increasingly turn to grid-based planning as a controlled experimental testbed. Gridworlds offer several advantages for studying LLM-based navigation: they make domain constraints explicit, allow exact detection of collisions and invalid moves, and support systematic scaling of task complexity without the confounding factors of continuous-space physics or sensor noise. Within this simplified setting, recent work investigates whether LLMs can perform reliable navigation, and how hallucinations or constraint violations can be mitigated via prompting strategies or iterative refinement (Aghzal et al., 2025; Aravindan et al., 2025; Y. Chen, Hao, et al., 2025).

Despite extensive research in these individual areas, there remains a gap in understanding how they intersect in the context of LLM-based robot navigation. Prior work has not systematically compared reasoning LLMs and non-reasoning LLMs when new users provide navigation prompts. Additionally, most studies have not combined safety-focused constraint analysis with controlled complexity scaling in navigation tasks. This thesis addresses both gaps by examining LLM-based navigation under realistic user interaction. It investigates whether reasoning capabilities can reduce operational constraint violations from imperfect user prompts and how model performance changes as navigation tasks become more spatially complex. Based on this, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **H1: Safety via Reasoning.** Reasoning LLMs (e.g., Gemini 2.5 Pro) will exhibit significantly lower rates of critical safety violations i.e., violations of the fundamental operational constraints established for the robot, compared to non-reasoning LLMs (e.g., Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite) in navigation tasks.
- **H2: Performance Decline with Task Complexity.** Performance of reasoning LLMs will decline as tasks increase in spatial logic complexity (e.g., more checkpoints, stricter ordering requirements, and tighter constraints on valid paths), reflecting the inverse relationship between complexity and success rate.
- **H3: Distributed Cognition.** In high-complexity tasks, prompts that provide more guidance (e.g., spatial hints) will yield higher success rates than prompts that only specify high-level goals, indicating a necessity for increased human involvement in planning.

### 3 METHODS

As established in the previous section, existing research has shown that LLMs can generate robot plans from natural language, but safety violations i.e., violations of the fundamental operational constraints established for the robot, and prompt characteristics (e.g. high-level goals or low-level instructions) remain critical concerns for deploying LLMs in real-world robotic navigation. To investigate how prompt characteristics and model type influence whether generated plans are safe and executable i.e., free of constraint violations and physically feasible, a controlled experimental platform was needed that could systematically evaluate LLM-generated navigation plans and detect and score constraint violations before real execution. This section describes the design and implementation of that system and the human study that evaluates how new users interact with the planners. It first presents the workshop design, participants, and procedure. It then explains the system implementation: how LLMs generate plans from user prompts, how the software stack evaluates these plans against safety and task constraints, and how plans are executed in simulation or on real hardware. Finally, it describes the data analysis methods used to assess model performance.

#### 3.1 Workshop design

The goal of this workshop is for participants to learn about and test the difference between non-reasoning LLMs and reasoning LLMs. The aim is to show that while non-reasoning LLMs are faster and cheaper, a reasoning LLM is usually needed to generate a robot navigation plan without violating operational constraints. A non-reasoning LLM acts like a translator, meaning the participant must act as the planner by giving exact instructions that the LLM converts into actions. In contrast, a reasoning LLM is hypothesized to act as a planner, allowing participants to give a general goal while the LLM figures out the path itself. However, as the task becomes more complicated, the LLM may start to struggle or violate operational constraints. When this happens, participants may need to step in and guide the model. If the task gets too difficult, participants may eventually take over the planning entirely again. In this situation, the LLM can be used as a translator to create a working

plan. Ultimately, participants need to decide how much planning to do themselves based on the model type and the difficulty of the task. This leads to the independent and dependent variables shown in Table 1.

#### 3.2 Participants

The study involved 226 Master’s students in Robotics and Mechanical Engineering at the Delft University of Technology. Participants came from different nationalities, all spoke English at a proficient level, and the majority was male. The students had a background in engineering and programming. Their strong technical and spatial reasoning makes this closer to a best-case scenario for new users than a general lay population, since visuospatial ability is associated with robot navigation performance (e.g., faster completion times and fewer collisions), so performance could be lower in groups with weaker spatial skills (Wong, 2009). Participation was a mandatory requirement to complete their Human-Robot Interaction course, but participants could opt out of having their data used. The study was officially approved by the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

#### 3.3 Procedure

The experiment was conducted as a controlled workshop over ten sessions between December 8, 2025 and January 8, 2026, with 9 to 30 participants per session (average: 23 participants). Session schedules and participant counts are detailed in Appendix A. During the first session, students worked in groups of three. In the second session, they worked individually, and for most of the remaining sessions, they worked in pairs. For sessions with few participants (often  $\leq 16$ ), including the last session, students were asked to work individually. If a student was left alone, they were asked to join another group to ensure no one worked solo during group tasks. The unit of analysis is the prompt: each submitted command is treated as a single observation, whether authored individually or collaboratively. To ensure that each attempt reflected participants’ immediate understanding without iteration, a “one-shot” rule enforced that prompts could not be revised after submission, also due to the time constraint of the workshop.

Each 80-minute session followed a structured protocol designed to progressively test model capabilities and prompt strategies across three navigation tasks of increasing complexity (detailed step-by-step procedure in Appendix B). The procedure began with a briefing on the difference between non-reasoning models, which guess the next token without pausing to think, and reasoning models, which use thinking tokens before outputting. This introduction set the stage for the first comparative task.

In Task 1 (Simple navigation), participants commanded the robot to visit three checkpoints (A, B, C) in any order on a grid with obstacles. To establish a baseline comparison, each pair submitted prompts to both a non-reasoning model (Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite) and a reasoning model (Gemini 2.5 Pro). Participants received no guidance on how to formulate their instructions, maintaining their status as new users. A subjective scoring system provided immediate gamified feedback (see Section 3.4.7 for details), allowing participants to see the consequences of different prompting approaches.

**Table 1: Experimental Variables.** The table details the independent variables and dependent variables used to evaluate the planning frameworks.

Variable Type	Variable Name	Description
Independent	Task Complexity	The difficulty level of the navigation problem, manipulated across three tasks: 1. <i>Simple Navigation</i> : Visit checkpoints A, B, C (any order). 2. <i>Sequential Order</i> : Visit A → B → C (strict order), with the cell-uniqueness constraint (not visiting any single cell more than once). 3. <i>Complex Logic</i> : Visit A → B → C → D, with the same cell-uniqueness constraint.
	Model Type	The architecture of the LLM used for planning: 1. <i>Non-reasoning</i> : Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite. 2. <i>Reasoning</i> : Gemini 2.5 Pro.
Dependent	Plan Quality Score	An integer score indicating plan quality based on constraint violations.
	Success	A binary metric indicating whether a plan achieved all goals without violating safety or strict task constraints (score = 1000).
	Failure	A binary metric tracking refusals where the model does not generate a plan (score = 0).

Building on this foundation, Task 2 (Sequential order) increased the difficulty by adding checkpoint ordering and the cell-uniqueness constraint to the same map: checkpoints had to be visited in alphabetical order (A → B → C) with no cell visited more than once. From this point forward, the focus shifted to examining how the reasoning model alone handles increased complexity. Testing before the workshop showed that the non-reasoning model already struggled with this easier task without human assistance on the plan, so it was not tested on the harder tasks (Task 2 and Task 3). Before this task, instructors explained that harder tasks benefit from human-LLM collaboration, suggesting that participants provide spatial hints rather than only stating the goal. The scoring system was updated to evaluate these new task requirements.

Finally, Task 3 (Complex logic) tested the upper limits of the reasoning model’s spatial planning capabilities by adding a fourth checkpoint (D), requiring navigation through A → B → C → D in order with the same cell-uniqueness constraint. This progression from simple to complex tasks enabled systematic observation of how model performance and prompting strategies evolved under increasing spatial constraints.

Between tasks, instructors facilitated learning by presenting example prompts and their resulting paths. While high-level collaboration strategies were suggested (e.g., providing spatial hints for complex tasks), participants formulated their own specific prompt language to preserve their status as new users. Each session concluded with a physical demonstration using a Boston Dynamics Spot robot to illustrate the simulation-to-reality transfer.

### 3.4 System

This subsection describes the technical implementation of the experimental platform. It covers the hardware setup, the LLM configuration and planning pipeline, the data collection interface, the software control pipeline, the simulation environment, and the scoring system used to evaluate generated plans.

**3.4.1 System architecture and hardware.** The system was built to work with a simulation of the robot and the real robot in the real world. It used a custom software layer that connected the planning logic to the specific software drivers of the robot. For the physical

experiments, a Boston Dynamics Spot Explorer robot with a Spot Arm was used. The underlying software used the Robot Operating System (ROS 1, Noetic) to communicate with the robot’s actuators and sensors.

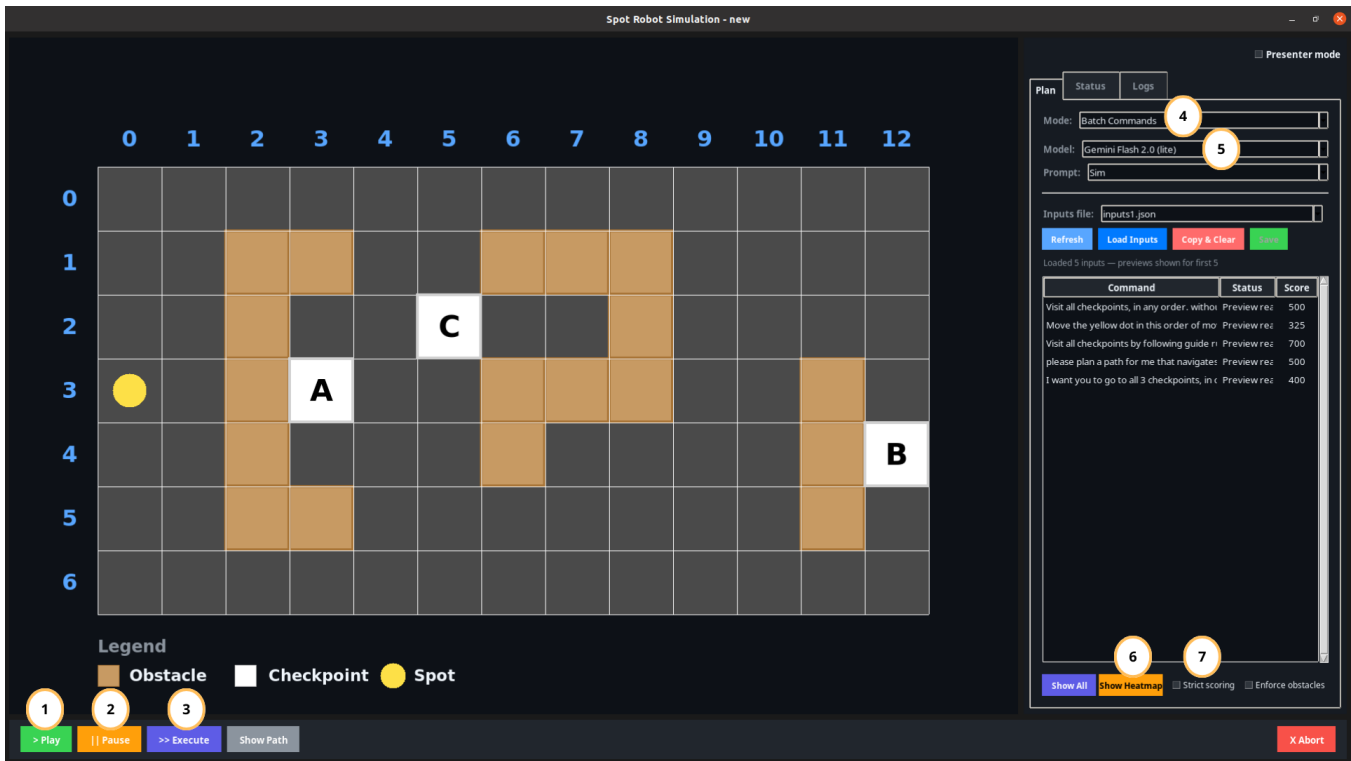
To handle the heavy computational demands of the system, the software ran on a powerful laptop (Lenovo IdeaPad Pro 5 16IRH8). This machine included an Intel Core i7-13700H processor (with 14 cores and speeds up to 5.0 GHz), 1 TB of NVMe SSD storage, and an NVIDIA GeForce RTX 4050 graphics card. This hardware was chosen to ensure the simulation and visual display ran smoothly. It also allowed the system to handle requests from many users in parallel.

**3.4.2 Operator GUI.** A custom Graphical User Interface (GUI) was developed to provide centralized control over the entire experimental platform. This GUI integrated the simulation environment (described in detail in Section 3.4.6) with control mechanisms for managing workshop sessions. Figure 1 shows the full GUI interface used during the workshop sessions. Screenshots of the GUI in different operational modes are provided in Appendix C.

The GUI provided several control buttons for managing robot behavior. The Play button (1) previewed the plan generated by the LLM in the simulation without executing it on the real robot, while the Pause button (2) paused the preview playback. The Execute button (3) executed the validated plan on either the simulated robot or the real robot, depending on hardware connection status.

To accommodate different experimental needs, the GUI supported three operational modes (4). Single Command Mode allowed processing of individual commands that could be sent to the LLM, previewed, and executed one at a time. Batch Command Mode, which was used for the workshop sessions, processed multiple prompts from participants in parallel by loading locally saved prompt files. Baseline Command Mode enabled loading of instructor-authored baseline prompts for comparison across different tasks.

Additional task-specific controls were integrated into the interface. For Task 1, the model selector (5) allowed switching between the non-reasoning and reasoning LLM models. For Task 3, a button enabled switching between world configurations (three checkpoints versus four checkpoints). The Show Heatmap button (6) displayed



**Figure 1: Complete operator GUI interface showing the main control elements: (1) Play button for previewing plans, (2) Pause button, (3) Execute button, (4) operational mode selector, (5) LLM model selector, (6) Show Heatmap button, and (7) strict scoring toggle.**

all trajectories in batch mode and generated heatmaps showing frequently traversed cells. For Tasks 2 and 3, the strict scoring toggle (7) activated the strict scoring mode that evaluated the additional task requirements (correct checkpoint order and the cell-uniqueness constraint).

This unified interface enabled the research team to maintain control over all workshop activities from a single control station, facilitating smooth session management and real-time adjustments.

**3.4.3 LLM configuration and planning pipeline.** As described in Section 3.4.2, the operator GUI enabled switching between two different LLM types: non-reasoning and reasoning models. This allowed for a comparison between models that simply predict text and models that use reasoning. The system connected to these models using standard internet requests (API calls). Specific settings were used to increase the consistency of the output. The temperature was set to 0.0, which enforces greedy decoding where the model always selects the most likely next token, making output deterministic for non-reasoning models. For the reasoning model, a thinking budget of 3000 tokens was used. The rest of the default settings were used. With temperature 0.0, the non-reasoning model produced fully deterministic outputs for identical inputs, as verified in Appendix G. The reasoning model, while significantly more consistent at this temperature setting than at higher values, could still exhibit some nondeterminism due to its internal thinking process, though this variability was minimal in practice. Details on how prompts

were executed with different hyperparameter configurations for sensitivity analysis are provided in Section 3.5.

Two distinct model types were evaluated to compare their planning capabilities:

- **Non-reasoning model:** The framework used Gemini 2.0 Flash Lite (gemini-2.0-flash-lite, version dated February 25, 2025). This model worked by predicting the next word directly. It created a list of actions right after reading the input text without pausing to “think”.
- **Reasoning model:** The framework used Gemini 2.5 Pro (gemini-2.5-pro, version dated June 17, 2025). This model used a step-by-step thinking process. Before showing the final plan, the model generated internal notes (“thinking tokens”) to check the map, follow rules, and test possible paths.

The planning process did not remember past interactions. For every new request, the system created a full prompt that defined a single action schema (`move_to_cell row=<int> col=<int>`) and a failure format (`FAIL <REASON>`) alongside the user’s specific command. The full text (system prompt) of these instructions, which defined the rules for the model, is provided in Appendix D.

**3.4.4 Data collection interface.** To collect data from a large audience easily, a separate web-based interface was created. It allowed the central laptop to run the GUI while receiving commands from

many different users at the same time. Figure 2 illustrates the two main components of this interface: the mobile input form and the central dashboard.

- **Mobile input:** Participants used a custom web form on their own smartphones (Figure 2a) by scanning a QR code. This form allowed them to type commands without needing direct access to the simulation computer. The interface guided users through the tasks and provided boxes to enter their text.
- **Central dashboard:** A main dashboard was shown on a large screen for the group (Figure 2b). This screen gave feedback to the participants. It showed a leaderboard with the top 5 highest and lowest scoring plans, which helped the researchers explain successful and unsuccessful strategies to the group.

**3.4.5 Software control pipeline.** Once a command was received through the web interface, a specific software process managed the robot from start-up to movement. When the system started, it automatically checked the network to see if a real robot was connected. If a robot was found, the system prepared for hardware mode. If not, it switched to simulation mode. To ensure the code worked the same way in both settings, a custom script named `message_bus.py` was used. In the simulation, this script copied the structure and timing of the real robot’s messages. This ensured the control code remained identical whether it was driving the digital version or the real machine.

After starting up, the system entered a continuous loop with four distinct phases:

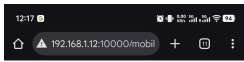
- (1) **Interaction:** The control module received the user command through the web interface. The system combined the user command text with live data from the robot (such as its current position) and the map details to create a complete prompt. This combined information was sent to the LLM, as can be seen in the system prompt in Appendix D.
- (2) **Planning:** The LLM translated the request into `move_to_cell` commands (row/col) or a FAIL message when the request was infeasible. Examples of both successful action lists and infeasible requests with their corresponding FAIL messages can be found in Appendix E.
- (3) **Evaluation:** Before moving, a scoring program tested the plan against the map rules to see if it was valid. The framework implemented two distinct scoring modes. The standard scoring mode, used for Task 1, evaluated basic safety constraints, while the strict scoring mode, introduced from Task 2 onwards, evaluated the additional task requirements (correct checkpoint order and the cell-uniqueness constraint) on top of the standard rules. This intentional switch means scores from Task 1 are not directly comparable to Task 2 or Task 3 without accounting for the different task requirements. The exact scores and rationale are described in Section 3.4.7. After scoring, users were able to preview the trajectory that the Spot robot would take in the GUI (shown as a yellow dashed line in Figure 4a) before actually executing.
- (4) **Execution:** Each action in the list of actions was sent to either the simulation of the world or to the robot (see Section 3.4.6 for details on how grid commands translate to actual movement). While executing, there was a Finite State Machine (FSM) which checked if an action was valid in the current state (e.g., not walking forward while the current state was sitting).

**3.4.6 Simulation & Real-world environment.** The robot’s world was represented as a grid map, which simplified the complex real world into a structure that the LLM could understand. The grid spanned 13 columns (0–12) and 7 rows (0–6), defining the edges of the workspace and marking which squares were safe to walk on, which ones were blocked by obstacles, and where the checkpoints were located. The coordinate system was defined with the top-left cell as (0, 0), and the robot started at position (3, 0) in all tasks. Figure 3a shows the simulated grid world with the precise coordinates of obstacles and checkpoints.

The simulation environment was embedded within the operator GUI described above. It displayed the robot’s position and the map layout simultaneously, showing the map in real time with obstacles, checkpoints, and safe areas. The first three phases of the software control pipeline (Interaction, Planning, and Evaluation) occurred within this simulation view. After evaluation, the planned path was projected onto the grid as a yellow dashed line, as shown in Figure 4. The system required a human check by locking the controls until the operator confirmed the path was safe before execution began. If the real robot was not connected, after the execute button was pressed, the simulated robot would actually move in the simulated world instead of only previewing. The interface also provided tools to review the data after the experiment. Figure 4 shows two ways the data was displayed: a trajectory plot that showed the path of a single plan (the yellow dashed line), and a heatmap that combined data from many runs to show which squares were used most often.

The real-world testbed mirrored the simulated grid layout, as shown in Figure 3. If the robot was connected, the fourth phase (Execution) happened in the real world. The `move_to_cell` commands generated by the LLM were executed differently depending on the mode. In simulation, these commands directly updated the robot’s grid position. The simulator updated the internal cell coordinates after a 1-second simulated movement delay. No coordinate transformation was needed because the simulation worked directly on the discrete grid representation. For the real robot, the system had to translate grid coordinates to body-frame deltas in meters. A custom `GridFrameMapper` converted target grid cells (row, col) to vision-frame coordinates using a cell size of 0.57m (matching the physical dimensions of the floor pads used in the real-world setup), then rotated these deltas to the robot’s body frame based on its current pose and orientation. The resulting body-frame translation (x, y) was sent to the Spot SDK through the `/spot_entrance/move_to_position` ROS service, which executed the movement using the robot’s native navigation commands. The system also tracked accumulated position offsets to compensate for odometry drift between expected and actual positions.

**3.4.7 Scoring system.** A point-based scoring system was implemented to evaluate plan quality and provide feedback to participants. The scoring system was subjective, as the penalty values



**Prompts 1 & 2**

Please fill in both responses below

Time remaining: 07:43

**Prompt 1 (non-reasoning)**

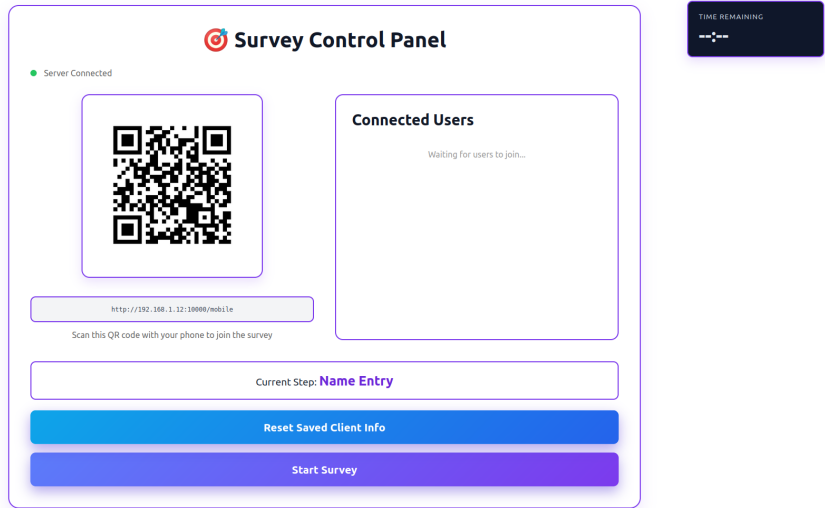
Type your response for Prompt 1 here...

**Prompt 2 (reasoning)**

Type your response for Prompt 2 here...

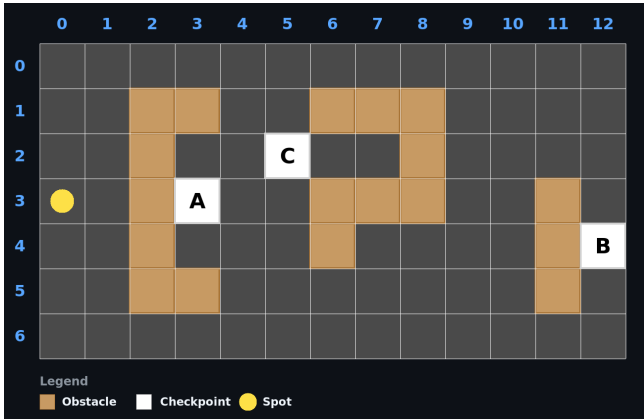
Save

(a) Mobile input form on participant smartphones.



(b) Central dashboard displaying leaderboard.

Figure 2: Web-based data collection interface components.



(a) Simulated grid world with obstacles and checkpoints.

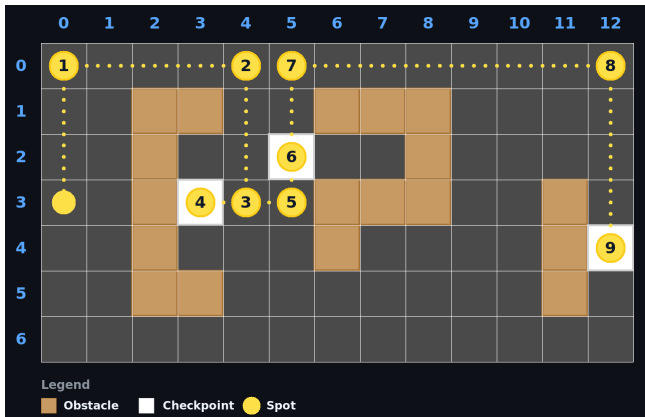


(b) Physical setup mirroring the simulated layout.

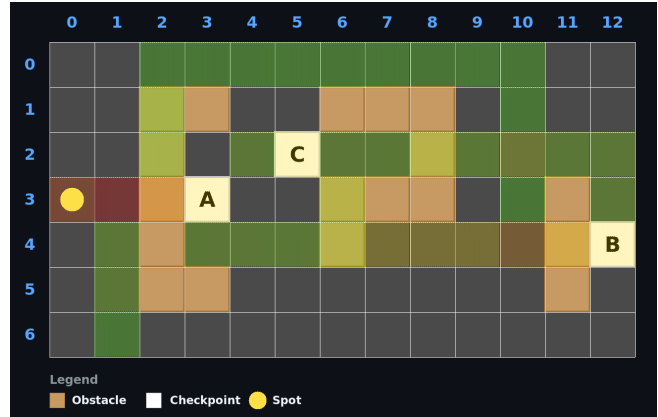
Figure 3: Side-by-side view of the simulated environment and the real-world testbed.

were determined by the researchers based on their assessment of the relative severity of different constraint violations. Two scoring modes were used to judge each plan. The standard mode focused on safety: it penalized collisions, off-map moves, and diagonal moves because these actions would either damage the real robot or break the grid rules. The strict mode, used for Tasks 2 and 3, added penalties for violating the additional task requirements of those tasks: visiting checkpoints in the correct order and the cell-uniqueness constraint. Every run started at 1000 points and deductions were applied for each violated constraint, resulting in an integer score. The penalty values were chosen to rank safety violations above task completion failures, surfacing LLM planning ability at each level:

- **Collision:** –150 points. As the most severe constraint violation, this penalty dominates because hitting an obstacle cell carries real-world risk of hardware damage.
- **Missing a checkpoint:** –125 points. This penalty reflects partial task noncompletion, ranking below safety but above other violations since failing to reach a target undermines the task goal and signals a major planning error.
- **Going outside the grid:** –125 points. Stepping off the defined workspace is treated as a critical safety violation, on par with missing a checkpoint.
- **Visiting a checkpoint in the wrong order (Task 2 and Task 3):** –125 points. For Tasks 2 and 3, ordering errors violate the core task requirements and are penalized equally



(a) Planned path shown as a yellow dashed line.



(b) Heatmap of frequently traversed cells across runs.

Figure 4: Visualization tools within the operator GUI.

to other major constraint violations, though below safety violations.

- **Moving diagonally:**  $-100$  points. Diagonal moves violate the grid abstraction but are penalized more mildly as they are neither the main goal of the task nor a safety violation.
- **Violating the cell-uniqueness constraint (Task 2 and Task 3):**  $-20$  points per repeat. The light penalty makes this constraint violation visible in the scores without overshadowing safety violations or making recovery impossible.

Concrete examples of score calculations for different scenarios are provided in Appendix E.

### 3.5 Data collection and experimental runs

After the workshop sessions concluded, prompts generated by students were collected and systematically rerun to enable controlled analysis. As mentioned in Section 3.2, participants could opt out of having their data used for research. Eleven students or groups exercised this right, and their prompts were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, runs that exhibited severe anomalies were excluded to maintain fair comparisons. Specifically, from Task 1\_NR, two runs were excluded due to very low performance and loop behavior where plans repeatedly passed through obstacles. Similarly, for the temperature 0.9 sensitivity analysis, one prompt was excluded for the same reason. These edge cases would skew performance metrics without providing meaningful insights into typical model behavior. The rerun procedure for the remaining data varied depending on the model type and the specific analysis being conducted.

For the baseline analysis comparing non-reasoning and reasoning models, each student-generated prompt was executed with the base configuration: temperature 0.0 and maximum thinking tokens 3000. Because the non-reasoning model with temperature 0.0 always produces exactly the same output for the same input, each prompt was executed only once. For the reasoning model, each prompt was executed three times with identical settings. Although temperature 0.0 significantly increased consistency compared to higher values, the reasoning model could still exhibit some variation due to its internal thinking process. Running each prompt

three times allowed calculation of standard deviation per prompt (computed over the three runs), providing a measure of output variability.

To verify whether performance limitations stemmed from the model architecture itself or from restrictive inference settings, hyperparameter sensitivity analyses were conducted. For these studies, only the first run from each prompt’s base configuration (temperature 0.0, thinking budget 3000 tokens) was used as the starting point to ensure consistency. Two sensitivity dimensions were evaluated:

- **Token budget sensitivity:** Maximum thinking token constraints were tested at 3000 tokens (baseline), 5000 tokens, and 7000 tokens to determine if allocating more computational resources improves performance.
- **Temperature sensitivity:** Three temperature settings were evaluated: deterministic (0.0, baseline), balanced (0.5), and creative (0.9), to test whether increased generation diversity resolves unsuccessful outcomes.

Table 3 in Appendix F provides a complete overview of the number of prompts tested per input set, the number of runs per prompt, and the specific hyperparameter configurations used for each analysis reported in the results section.

### 3.6 Data analysis

The data was analyzed using two complementary approaches:

- **Automated scoring:** Every plan generated during the experimental runs (described in Section 3.5) was checked by the automated scoring system, which used the rules described in Section 3.4.7 to give a final score and record violated constraints. A prompt was classified as successful if the generated plan reached all required checkpoints without violating any constraints (collisions, off-map moves, or diagonal moves). For Tasks 2 and 3, success additionally required visiting checkpoints in the correct order and the cell-uniqueness constraint. A prompt was classified as a failure (refusal) if the LLM returned a FAIL message instead of a plan.

- Prompt analysis:** User prompts were classified into mutually exclusive categories based on the level of planning responsibility assumed by the user. Low-level plans provide explicit waypoint sequences ( $\geq 3$  coordinates), reducing the model’s planning burden. Hybrid guidance provides partial direction (1-2 coordinates or route hints). High-level goals state only objectives and constraints, requiring the model to plan independently. Ambiguous steps use relative directions without coordinates. The classification system reflects *distributed cognition*, defined here as the dynamic allocation of planning responsibility between human and AI based on task demands: who does the planning work, human or AI? To ensure reliability, a subset of prompts was first manually labeled by the researcher. Subsequently, a custom LLM-based labeling tool called “Gem” was used to automate the labeling of the full dataset. Gem is a wrapper interface built on top of Google’s Gemini chat platform, similar in concept to OpenAI’s Custom GPTs. It uses the underlying Gemini models (Gemini Pro) and works by injecting predefined system instructions at the start of each conversation, eliminating the need to repeatedly explain the labeling task. This tool was selected after testing showed it could reliably classify prompt characteristics, as evidenced by the agreement scores reported below. The instructions provided to this tool are detailed in Appendix H, and the specific labeling criteria are defined in Appendix I. The distribution of prompts across categories is shown in Appendix J. A comparison between the manual and AI-generated labels for a sample set showed a high level of agreement (90.0% agreement rate), with an overall F1-score of 90.8% (Precision: 91.2%, Recall: 90.5%). This level of agreement is considered robust, as linguistic interpretation is inherently subjective and even multiple human annotators would likely not reach 100% consensus. Detailed examples of the labeled output and the agreement analysis are provided in Appendix K. Therefore, this automated approach with Gem was used to label all data collected across all workshop sessions.

In short, the Methods section describes a controlled workshop and a clear scoring and labeling process. This setup makes it possible to compare reasoning and non-reasoning models objectively and to see how prompt style affects safety and success.

## 4 RESULTS

This section presents the performance evaluation of LLMs in robotic navigation. The results are organized in two main parts: first, comparing a non-reasoning model against a reasoning model on a baseline task; second, testing the reasoning model across three levels of increasing task complexity.

First, baseline performance is established by comparing the two model architectures on their safety profiles and success rates for the same relatively simple navigation task (Task 1). The analysis then examines how specific prompting characteristics influence performance for both model types. Next, the results show how the reasoning model’s performance changes as task complexity increases across Tasks 1, 2, and 3. Finally, to investigate whether any

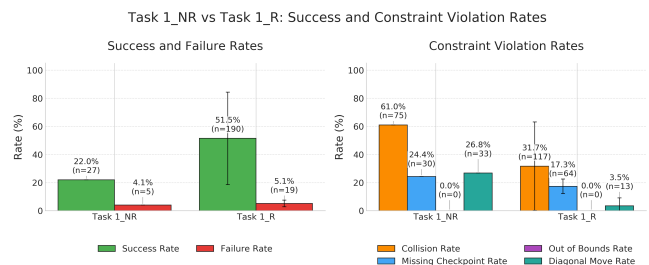
observed performance limitations are architectural or parameter-related, hyperparameter sensitivity is tested across different token budgets and temperature values.

All rates reported here are calculated per prompt (not per participant). Where sample sizes are indicated in figures or text,  $n$  represents the total number of runs analyzed, calculated as the number of prompts multiplied by the number of runs per prompt, minus any excluded runs that exhibited severe anomalies as described in Section 3.5.

### 4.1 Non-reasoning vs reasoning LLMs

To establish baseline performance, both model architectures were tested on the same relatively easy navigation task (Task 1). Task 1\_NR represents the first user prompts sent to the non-reasoning model (Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite), while Task 1\_R represents the same prompts sent to the reasoning model (Gemini 2.5 Pro).

Figure 5 is split into two panels. Panel (a) shows success and failure (refusal) rates per input (see Table 1 for definitions). Panel (b) shows the average rates for each constraint violation type. Percentages are calculated as  $\frac{N_{in\ category}}{N_{total}}$ . A single prompt can have multiple violated constraints, like hitting an obstacle and also moving diagonally.



**Figure 5: Non-reasoning vs reasoning LLMs: success, failure, and constraint violation rates.**

The data indicates that a key difference lies not merely in success rates, but in the nature of the outcomes. Standard non-reasoning models (Task 1\_NR) frequently violate constraints in dangerous ways, showing a high incidence of “Collisions” (61.0% of prompts resulted in collision). As detailed in the heatmaps in Appendix L, these models often successfully locate the final checkpoint but ignore spatial constraints, traversing diagonally through obstacles or walls to reach the goal. This characterizes the non-reasoning model as a risk-prone path planner that obeys a short list of objective rules (reach the goal) while ignoring safety rules (avoid obstacles). Concrete examples of LLM outputs are provided in Appendix E, which shows both plans that violate constraints (e.g., colliding with obstacles while reaching checkpoints) and FAIL messages returned when the model cannot generate a valid plan. In contrast, reasoning models (Task 1\_R) show a higher success rate (51.5%) and much lower collision rates (31.7%). When they do fail, the failure mode differs significantly between the two architectures. The non-reasoning model shows a 4.1% refusal rate (of all prompts), while the reasoning model shows a 5.1% refusal rate. This means

that for the non-reasoning model, the refusal rate represents approximately 5% of total failures, whereas for the reasoning model this is approximately 11% of total failures. The distinction between architectures becomes clearer when examining how failures manifest: while both models refuse at similar low rates, the reasoning model achieves much higher success, meaning its failures more often result in refusals rather than constraint violations. As shown in panel (b), this distinction is critical: a refusal to generate a plan is preferred over a generated plan that violates constraints, as the former allows for a replanning attempt while the latter results in a physical collision. Thus, reasoning capabilities appear important for safety in autonomous navigation.

## 4.2 Prompt characteristics for non-reasoning and reasoning LLMs

Having established that reasoning capabilities improve overall performance, this section examines whether this advantage holds across different types of user input. Figure 6 presents success rates broken down by two of the four prompt categories (low-level plans, high-level goals), allowing identification of which prompting styles benefit most from reasoning capabilities. Success rates are calculated as the ratio of successful prompts to total prompts per category, with a mean showing the overall success percentage for each task.

Task 1\_NR and Task 1\_R: Success Rate by Selected Characteristics

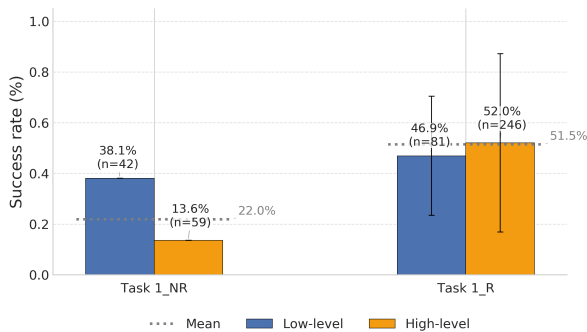


Figure 6: Success rates by prompt category for non-reasoning and reasoning LLMs.

Figure 6 compares success rates across prompt categories for both model types. For the non-reasoning model (Task 1\_NR), low-level plans achieved 38.1% success, significantly outperforming high-level goals at 13.6%. This pattern shows that the non-reasoning model requires users to take over the planning role by providing explicit waypoints. The model functions more as a translator than a planner. In contrast, the reasoning model (Task 1\_R) showed opposite behavior: high-level goals achieved 52.0% success, outperforming low-level plans at 46.9%. The overall mean success rate was 22.0% for the non-reasoning model and 51.5% for the reasoning model. The complete breakdown including all four categories is shown in Appendix M.

## 4.3 The limit of the reasoning LLM and how to reduce it

This subsection examines how reasoning models perform as task complexity increases. First, the overall performance trend is analyzed across the three tasks to identify whether a performance ceiling exists. Second, the effect of specific prompting strategies is evaluated to determine whether human guidance can help compensate for these limitations.

4.3.1 *Success decline with an increase in task complexity.* The success rate and failure (refusal) rate are plotted as lines in a graph with tasks 1 to 3 on the x-axis and percentage on the y-axis. Both rates are the ratio of their respective outcomes to total prompts. The plot can be seen in Figure 7.

Success and Failure Rates (Task 1\_R, Task 2\_R, Task 3\_R)

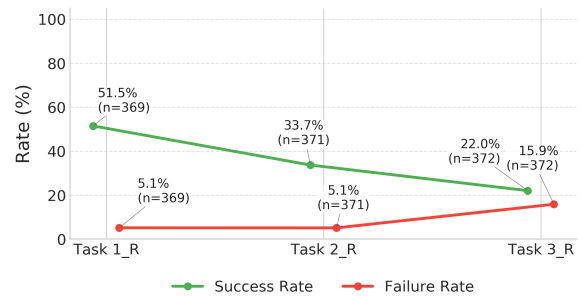
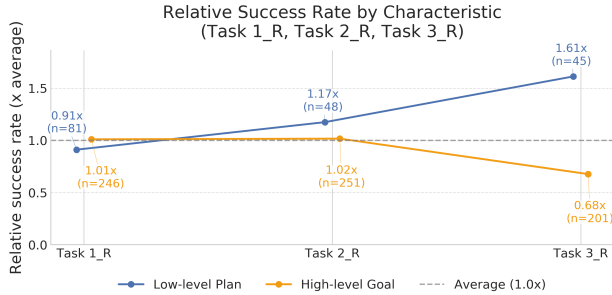


Figure 7: Success and failure rates across increasing task complexity.

While reasoning models did well on the simple task (Task 1\_R), they struggled when the task got harder. Task 2\_R and Task 3\_R added more constraints to the task. Figure 7 shows a clear drop in performance. For Task 1 (Task 1\_R), the success rate was 51.5% with a low failure rate of 5.1%. When moving to Task 2 (Task 2\_R), which added ordering and the cell-uniqueness constraint, success dropped to 33.7% while the failure rate remained low at 5.1%. However, at Task 3 (Task 3\_R), which added a fourth checkpoint with the same strict constraints, performance declined further. Success dropped to 22.0%, while the failure rate increased to 15.9%. This pattern shows that the model’s spatial reasoning capabilities are limited when task complexity increases. As constraints accumulate, the model struggles to maintain a consistent world state. When faced with these difficulties, the model often chose to refuse execution rather than generate unsafe plans, showing fail-safe behavior even when approaching the limits of its planning capabilities.

4.3.2 *Prompt characteristics for reasoning LLMs in complex tasks.* To examine how prompt categories affect success as complexity increases, normalized success rates were calculated. The following analysis focuses solely on the reasoning model tested across three task complexities: Task 1\_R (Task 1, relatively easy), Task 2\_R (Task 2, sequential with no-revisit), and Task 3\_R (Task 3, four checkpoints with strict constraints). For each task and category,

the success rate is divided by the overall task success rate, showing the relative advantage or disadvantage of each prompting strategy. A normalized rate above 1.0 indicates better-than-average performance; below 1.0 indicates worse performance. The baseline (average across all categories) is shown as a horizontal line at 1.0.



**Figure 8: Normalized success rates by prompt category across increasing task complexity.**

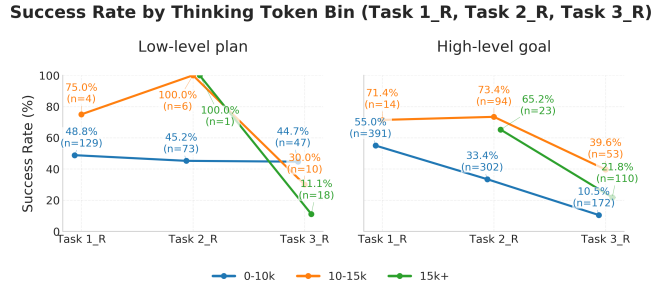
Figure 8 reveals a critical shift in the optimal prompting strategy as task difficulty increases. For Task 1 (Task 1\_R), high-level goals performed slightly above average (1.01x), while low-level plans underperformed (0.91x). This confirms that reasoning models can autonomously plan simple tasks. However, for Task 2 (Task 2\_R), the pattern reversed: low-level plans jumped to 1.17x relative success, while high-level goals remained near baseline (1.02x). This trend intensified dramatically in Task 3 (Task 3\_R), where low-level plans reached 1.61x relative success and high-level goals fell to 0.68x. This progression demonstrates distributed cognition in action: as tasks exceed the model’s autonomous planning capabilities, humans must reclaim the planning role by providing explicit waypoints to reduce the solution space.

#### 4.4 Validation of architectural limits via hyperparameter tuning

To verify whether performance limitations are inherent to the model architecture or result from restrictive inference settings, hyperparameter sensitivity is tested. First, token budget variations are analyzed to determine if allocating more computational resources improves performance. Second, temperature settings are adjusted to test whether increased generation diversity resolves unsuccessful outcomes.

**4.4.1 Token sensitivity.** The impact of computational resources was tested by examining how thinking token budget affects performance under different levels of human planning guidance. The thinking token budgets were set at 3000, 5000, and 7000 tokens. However, the model treats these settings as soft limits rather than hard constraints, meaning actual token usage can vary. Therefore, to accurately measure performance, the actual thinking tokens utilized were grouped into bins (0-10k, 10-15k, 15k+) based on observed usage patterns. Appendix N shows the distribution of actual token usage for each budget setting and presents the results grouped by the configured max-token settings (3k, 5k, 7k).

Figure 9 splits the analysis into two panels based on prompt category. The left panel shows low-level plans (explicit waypoints provided by humans), while the right panel shows high-level goals (model must plan autonomously). The x-axis represents task progression, and different colored lines represent the actual token usage bins.



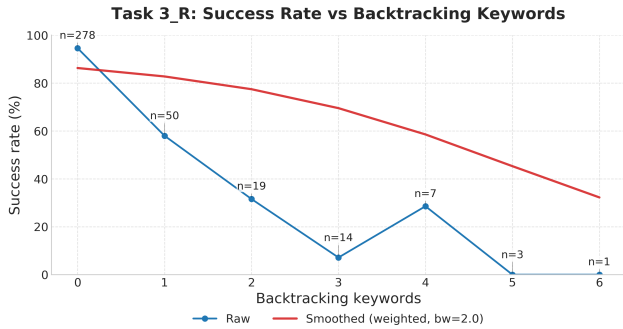
**Figure 9: Success rates by thinking token budget for low-level plans and high-level goals.**

The results show a clear interaction between token budget and planning responsibility. For high-level goals (right panel), performance declines across all token budgets as task difficulty increases. The 0-10k budget drops from 55.0% at Task 1\_R to 10.5% at Task 3\_R. The 10-15k budget shows stronger performance, rising from 71.4% at Task 1\_R to 73.4% at Task 2\_R, before declining to 39.6% at Task 3\_R. The 15k+ budget starts lower at Task 1\_R (65.2% at Task 2\_R, no data for Task 1\_R in this bin) but maintains 21.8% at Task 3\_R. This pattern suggests that higher token budgets can help with moderately complex tasks but cannot fully overcome the performance limitations at high complexity levels.

In contrast, low-level plans (left panel) show different behavior. Performance decline is less steep when humans provide explicit waypoints. The 0-10k budget shows relatively stable performance (48.8% → 45.2% → 44.7%), while the 10-15k budget improves from 75.0% at Task 1\_R to 100% at Task 2\_R, before declining sharply to 30.0% at Task 3\_R. The 15k+ budget maintains perfect 100% success at Task 2\_R and drops even further to 11.1% at Task 3\_R. Notably, at the hardest task (Task 3\_R), performance paradoxically decreases with higher token budgets. This suggests that when tasks approach high complexity levels, additional thinking tokens may cause the model to overanalyze or get trapped in unproductive reasoning loops rather than improving performance. Performance limitations persist even when humans provide low-level guidance, though the overall success rates are higher than with autonomous planning.

To clarify why increased computational time did not yield better results, the model’s internal chain-of-thought traces were analyzed. Inspired by recent work on chain-of-thought monitorability, which argues that reasoning traces can provide useful oversight signals beyond final outputs, the frequency of self-correction and impasse indicators such as "I was wrong", "I made a mistake", or "I cannot proceed" was tracked as a behavioral correlate of potential internal confusion. A complete list of all tracked keywords is provided in Appendix O, and an example trace containing these keywords is provided in Appendix P. Figure 10 plots the relationship between the number of these keywords and success rate for the hardest task

(Task 3\_R, Task 3) (OpenAI, 2025). Similar plots for Task 1\_R (Task 1) and Task 2\_R (Task 2) are provided in Appendix Q.

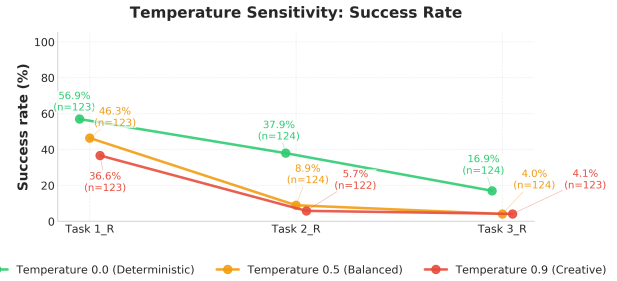


**Figure 10: Backtracking keyword frequency and success rate for Task 3 (Task 3\_R).**

The plot shows both raw success percentages per keyword bin and a kernel-smoothed curve. The smoothed curve weights bins by their number of runs using a Gaussian kernel (bandwidth 2.0), which gives more weight to bins with higher sample counts and reduces noise from bins with few observations. The results show a negative association between backtracking frequency and success. Runs with zero backtracking keywords achieved 94.6% success, demonstrating that when the model solves the problem without self-correction, it performs well. As backtracking increased, success dropped sharply: runs with one keyword showed 58.0% success, two keywords had 31.6% success, and three keywords dropped to just 7.1% success rate. However, this pattern should be interpreted carefully. The correlation does not prove that backtracking *causes* failure, as several confounds exist: longer outputs naturally create more opportunities to include self-correction phrases, and different prompt styles may elicit different reasoning patterns. Nonetheless, the consistent negative association suggests that backtracking keywords may serve as a behavioral marker of difficulty: when the model exhibits frequent self-correction on complex spatial problems, it typically fails to recover and produce a valid plan.

**4.4.2 Temperature sensitivity.** To verify whether unsuccessful outcomes resulted from a lack of generation diversity, the temperature parameter was adjusted. Three temperature settings were tested across the tasks: deterministic (0.0), balanced (0.5), and creative (0.9). Figure 11 displays the results of this sensitivity analysis regarding success rate. The x-axis represents the task progression from Task 1\_R to Task 3\_R, while the y-axis shows the success rate percentage. Separate lines indicate the performance under the different temperature settings.

The results show that increasing temperature actually decreased performance across all task levels. For Task 1 (Task 1\_R), the deterministic setting (temperature 0.0) achieved the highest success rate at 56.9%, while the balanced setting (0.5) dropped to 46.3%, and the creative setting (0.9) fell further to 36.6%. This pattern continued in Task 2 (Task 2\_R), where deterministic achieved 37.9% success, balanced dropped to 8.9%, and creative to 5.7%. At the hardest task



**Figure 11: Success rates across temperature settings and task complexity.**

(Task 3\_R), all settings performed poorly, but deterministic still led with 16.9% success compared to 4.0% for balanced and just 4.1% for creative. This consistent pattern indicates that increased generation diversity does not help the model handle complex spatial constraints. Instead, the deterministic setting produces the most reliable outputs. The fact that performance declined at Task 3\_R regardless of temperature confirms that the limitation is architectural rather than parameter-based. Even with maximum creativity, the model cannot overcome its spatial reasoning limits at high complexity levels.

Overall, the results demonstrate three key findings. First, reasoning models exhibit safer failure modes than non-reasoning models: when failures occur, reasoning models are more likely to refuse unsafe plans rather than generating constraint-violating outputs. Second, while reasoning capabilities enable autonomous planning on simple tasks, performance declines substantially as task complexity increases. Third, hyperparameter tuning confirms this limitation is architectural: neither increased token budgets nor temperature variations can overcome the performance decline at high complexity levels. Instead, distributed cognition emerges as the effective strategy: as tasks exceed autonomous planning capabilities, human-provided low-level guidance becomes essential to maintain performance.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The results address the three hypotheses introduced in the Methods section. **H1 is supported:** Reasoning models show substantially lower rates of critical safety violations than non-reasoning models. **H2 is also supported:** performance drops sharply as spatial logic complexity and constraint load increase. **H3 is also supported:** in high-complexity tasks, prompts that provide more guidance yield higher success than prompts that only specify high-level goals, indicating the need for increased human involvement in planning. These findings together suggest that safety and success emerge from a dynamic trade-off between the architectural limits of the model and the intervention of the human user.

### 5.1 The safety gap: risk-prone execution versus cautious deliberation

This study shows a clear safety gap between the two model types, and the gap shows up most strongly in their failure modes. The non-reasoning model (Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite) often produces a plan

that is pointed at the right checkpoints, but it still breaks the grid’s physical rules by stepping into obstacle cells or making invalid moves. That is a risky kind of failure because the plan can look aligned with the user’s intent, while the robot would still collide if the plan were executed. This mirrors findings from embodied safety benchmarks: high-level intent can appear correct, yet execution is still unsafe or not feasible. The gap becomes especially sharp when hazards depend on context or action order, where a plan is only safe if earlier steps were done correctly (e.g., foil must be removed before microwaving) (Son et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025).

The reasoning model fails in a different way. When the constraints in the prompt are confusing or conflict with each other, it often chooses not to output a plan at all. In robotics, that ability to stop under uncertainty is an important safety behavior because it prevents physical harm when the instruction is underspecified or inconsistent (K. Liang et al., 2025; Ren et al., 2023). In practical terms, the trade-off is straightforward: deliberation reduces collisions, but it can increase delays. The failure mode shifts from unsafe motion to waiting for a better instruction or a simpler formulation of the task.

At the same time, this conservative behavior is not always the better outcome. The refusals observed here suggest that the model can become overly cautious, which can make a robot less useful in settings where timing matters or where tasks must finish within a fixed window. This points to a robotics-specific need: refusal should not be a single fixed threshold borrowed from general LLM safety settings. Instead, the acceptable risk level should be adjustable to the context, so the system can be stricter in high-risk situations and less strict when speed is the priority (J. Zhang et al., 2025). A second caution is that fewer constraint violations do not automatically mean better decision-making inside the model. Even if a model produces an explanation that reads as coherent, that text is not reliable evidence of what actually caused the output. Work on chain-of-thought faithfulness shows that plausible reasoning can still be misleading or disconnected from the true drivers of the decision (Y. Chen, Benton, et al., 2025; Turpin et al., 2023).

Overall, the results suggest that internal deliberation helps, but it should not be treated as the final safety layer. Recent robotics work addresses this by separating high-level planning from execution and adding an independent runtime boundary that checks each proposed step before the robot acts. One approach uses reachability analysis to block actions that could lead to collision, even when the plan looks goal-aligned (Hafez et al., 2025). Another encodes safety as temporal rules about action order and removes any next action that would violate those rules (Yang et al., 2023). A third filters actions using semantic hazards, constraining execution based on what objects are and how they are being used (Brunke et al., 2025). Guardrail-style systems combine these ideas by monitoring candidate plans and preventing execution unless explicit safety requirements are satisfied (Ravichandran et al., 2025). This aligns with what is seen in this study: deliberation reduces unforced constraint violations, but it still leaves residual invalid actions and occasional refusals. For dependable robot behavior, safety needs an explicit runtime check that is separate from the planner, not only a more careful planner.

## 5.2 Performance decline with task complexity and architectural limits

The results show a clear pattern: reasoning models are safer and more reliable at low complexity, but they still break down when the task becomes more constrained. In Task 3 (Task 3\_R), success drops strongly once constraints and checkpoints accumulate. This matches the definition used in the framework: adding more constraints shrinks the set of valid solutions, so success becomes less likely. As described before, similar drops have been reported when difficulty is increased in a controlled way for reasoning models (Shojaee et al., 2025).

The hyperparameter tests suggest that this is not just a compute issue. Increasing the token budget or changing temperature did not restore performance at the highest complexity level, which means that more test-time “thinking” is not enough when many constraints interact (Shojaee et al., 2025). A more direct interpretation is that the task is stressing what the model can keep consistent in one pass: it has to track a growing spatial state, respect ordering rules, and avoid revisiting cells, all while producing a long sequence in a strict format.

That raises a practical question: what could still improve performance within this setup, without assuming the model will simply “think harder”? One option is to make the system prompt more explicit about how to track state, for example by forcing a short internal checklist for constraints, or by requiring the plan to be built in verified chunks rather than as one continuous stream. Another option is domain-specific fine-tuning for navigation-style planning. This can help the model learn common patterns and constraints, but it is not a guaranteed path to perfect reliability. Gains can saturate, and additional training can introduce trade-offs such as overfitting (P.-E. Chen et al., 2025). A third option is to rely on stronger future foundation models. Yet even if raw capability improves, scaling does not remove the basic issue that harder instances require disproportionately more compute to reduce the remaining errors. Scaling-law work suggests diminishing returns in error reduction as models grow, which can create a practical wall for reaching near-perfect reliability (Lin et al., 2026). In other words, better models should help, but some decline can still be expected on sufficiently demanding spatial logic tasks.

The backtracking analysis provides a concrete clue about what the breakdown looks like. Unsuccessful runs are associated with more self-correction phrases, which suggests that once the internal spatial state becomes too hard to track, the model starts revising local decisions without converging on a globally consistent route. In that regime, self-correction is not helping the plan recover, but instead becomes a marker that the model is stuck in a loop.

At the same time, it is important not to over-interpret the drop as a hard architectural boundary of reasoning models in general. Lawsen (Lawsen, 2025) shows that sharp drops can be amplified by benchmark design choices, such as output-length limits or strict grading that counts truncation as failure. The evaluation here also uses a strict step format and strict rule checks, so formatting mistakes and protocol constraints can make the decline look sharper than the underlying planning ability alone would suggest. For that reason, the observed drop is best framed as a task-specific limit of the current plan representation and evaluation protocol in this

study, rather than as proof of a universal limit of the model class (Lawsen, 2025).

Still, the failure pattern in Task 3 is consistent with what long-horizon planning benchmarks report: agents lose track of state and then act on incorrect beliefs about what is true in the world (Gonzalez-Pumariega et al., 2025). This is a common risk in single-shot planning, where one LLM call is expected to output a full multi-step plan without an external state store that updates after each step. Several robotics systems address this by separating generation from checking and revision. NESYRO, for example, combines LLM-generated specifications with symbolic verification and feedback, and adds extra validation when required observations are missing (S. Ahn et al., 2025). Related closed-loop planning work treats planning as iterative, updating a draft plan over multiple interactions using feedback (J. Li et al., 2025). Taken together, these results suggest a concrete implication for this study: reducing Task 3 failures likely requires moving away from pure single-shot plans and toward explicit state management or iterative refinement, so the system can detect drift early and correct it before the plan collapses.

### 5.3 Distributed cognition and the human role

The results fit a shared-autonomy view of human-robot interaction: reliable behavior does not come from the model alone, but from how control and intent are coordinated through language between the human and the LLM-based planner (Rajapakshe et al., 2024). In this study, that coordination is not fixed. Instead, the effective human role moves along a scale that depends on task complexity. When the task is simple, the model can carry more of the planning load. When the task becomes constraint-heavy, the human has to take more of that load back.

This shift is visible in how participants could instruct the reasoning model across tasks. At low complexity, high-level goal prompts were often enough. For example, participants could say: “Visit all checkpoints in any order, A, B and C. Remember to avoid obstacles and to not move diagonally.” The model could then fill in the missing details and produce a full step-by-step movement sequence without intermediate waypoints. This matches variable-autonomy work in LLM-mediated teaming, where natural language supports supervisory control as long as the robot can safely decompose the request into executable actions (Lakhnati et al., 2024). In other words, when the search space is still manageable, the model can act as a planner and the human can stay at the goal level.

However, as Tasks 2 and 3 introduced stricter ordering, non-repetition constraints, and more demanding state tracking, the same high-level style became less reliable. What changed is not only the model’s success rate, but also what kind of interaction worked. When participants struggled, instructors nudged them toward more detailed prompting strategies. Based on the suggestion of the instructors, participants then started behaving more like co-planners: they reduced the degrees of freedom by adding explicit waypoints or partial route hints. In the current experiments, this extra structure often made the difference between a feasible plan and a refusal or invalid route. This supports the interpretation that successful prompting at high complexity is not mainly about better phrasing, but about redistributing cognitive work so that the human

constrains the problem and the model translates that structure into actions.

This pattern also helps explain why one-shot prompting becomes fragile in long-horizon tasks. Interactive Task Planning (ITP) treats planning as an ongoing exchange: a user can interrupt execution, update the request, and the system replans using both the new goal and the history of what has already happened (B. Li et al., 2025). In contrast, the trials here used a single-turn prompt for Task 3, and many high-level requests failed once strict ordering and non-repetition constraints had to be satisfied. That gap suggests that part of the limitation is not only the model’s raw capability, but the interaction format. A related point appears in language-based shared autonomy: corrections like “a little more” are only well-defined when grounded in what came before, which is why Rajapakshe et al. model sequences of utterances rather than isolated commands (Rajapakshe et al., 2024). For navigation under tight constraints, the missing ingredient is often not another reminder in the prompt, but access to interaction history and a chance to refine the plan over turns.

Taken together, these findings reframe the human role in language-driven robotics. The key skill is not finding a perfect sentence, but managing initiative: deciding when the model should plan independently and when the human should pin down the route with constraints. Mixed-initiative dialogue frameworks make this a two-way process where both sides can steer (Yu et al., 2025). In this study, the system did not have that capability, so the burden of noticing “this is getting too complex” fell entirely on the user. At the same time, more human involvement is not free. Variable-autonomy work shows that constant low-level steering can increase workload and reduce the practical value of autonomy (Lakhnati et al., 2024). This supports a task-dependent switch: goal-level control when the model can handle the planning, and co-planning when constraints push the task beyond what one-shot autonomous planning can reliably solve.

Therefore, near-term reliable autonomy is unlikely to remove the human from the loop. Instead, it will depend on interaction policies and interfaces that help users recognize when to step in and provide more structure, so the human can reclaim the planning role when task complexity exceeds the model’s practical planning capacity. In that regime, the model is still useful, but more as an intent-to-action translator inside a shared planning workflow than as a standalone planner.

### 5.4 Limitations

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the comparison between model types is limited to the first task. The non-reasoning model was not evaluated on the subsequent, more complex tasks, which means the study cannot definitively assess how the performance gap between the two architectures evolves as difficulty increases. This creates a fairness issue: the reasoning model was tested under increasingly difficult conditions, while the non-reasoning model was only evaluated at the baseline complexity level. Moreover, the comparison may be fundamentally unfair because models were compared for different prompt types: participants may have provided different styles of prompts (e.g., step-by-step instructions versus high-level goals) to the two models during

Task 1, making it difficult to attribute performance differences solely to model architecture. For non-reasoning models specifically, it remains unclear whether they could successfully follow very long step-by-step plans for complex tasks without hallucinations, as this was not tested.

Second, the sequential design of the experiment introduces a learning effect. Since participants received feedback and reviewed successful examples after each round, the prompting strategies used in later tasks may have been influenced by this cumulative experience rather than solely by the task requirements.

Third, the participants were engineering students. Results may differ with a general population that is less familiar with logical thinking or coordinate systems.

Fourth, the one-shot nature of the trials does not fully capture the iterative dialogue that might occur in a real deployment, where a robot could ask clarifying questions to resolve ambiguity.

Fifth, the experiments were conducted in a grid-based simulation and validated on a robot in a controlled environment. This was a deliberate design choice, as the grid abstraction makes spatial reasoning tractable for LLMs and allows for controlled hypothesis testing. However, the continuous and messy nature of real-world environments poses additional challenges not captured here.

Sixth, grouping conditions varied across sessions, with participants working either in pairs or individually. The analysis treats data from individuals and groups equally, potentially overlooking qualitative differences such as the collaborative error-checking that occurs in pairs.

Finally, the labeling of the user prompts was performed using an automated LLM-based tool (Gem). While this approach showed high agreement with manual coding (90%), using an LLM to evaluate LLM-generated outputs introduces potential circularity. The error patterns of an LLM classifier may differ qualitatively from those of a human annotator, even when quantitative metrics like F1 score appear high. The LLM may systematically misclassify certain linguistic patterns that a human would catch, and it lacks the contextual judgment that comes from participating in the workshop sessions. This limitation means that subtle prompt characteristics correlated with model reasoning style could be systematically mislabeled in ways that a human coder would avoid.

## 5.5 Future work

The results in this thesis suggest that, for current-generation models, progress toward safe language-driven navigation will likely come from improving how planning responsibility is shared, and from designing systems that adapt when tasks approach the observed capability limits. However, this focus on coordination assumes that planning remains a fragile capability. An alternative view is that as foundation models evolve to natively handle long-context spatial reasoning and constraint satisfaction, they may eventually internalize these challenges, potentially reducing the long-term need for separate planning layers or human intervention.

A first direction is to study shared autonomy as an adaptive interaction process rather than a static prompting problem. The data indicates that as task complexity increases, performance improves when humans provide more guidance, which suggests that future systems should actively support this shift in roles. This motivates

research into interaction designs where the system helps users move from goal specification to co-planning when needed, and where the LLM-based planner can request clarification or additional guidance when ambiguity or conflict is detected.

A second direction is to treat performance decline at high complexity as a condition that can be detected and managed, instead of only as a static benchmark outcome. Since increasing token budget or tuning temperature did not recover performance at the highest complexity levels, future work can focus on implementing automated monitoring layers that recognize early signs of instability and trigger safer modes of operation. The backtracking keywords analyzed in this thesis offer a promising starting point: the negative association between self-correction markers and success suggests these keywords could serve as real-time triggers for an external safety governor or a request for human intervention. A system could monitor the frequency of phrases like "I was wrong" or "I cannot proceed" during planning and, when a threshold is exceeded, automatically prompt the human operator for additional guidance before proceeding. This would directly connect the behavioral marker identified in the analysis to the distributed cognition solution, creating an adaptive system that recognizes when it is approaching its limits. Such mechanisms can include shifting to broken-down subgoals, requiring partial routes, or introducing independent verification of candidate plans before execution, with the LLM functioning more as an intent interface than as a standalone planner when complexity is high.

A third direction is to test whether the same safety patterns hold outside the grid setting. The current setup enables controlled hypothesis testing, but real navigation involves continuous motion, perception uncertainty, and dynamic obstacles. Future studies can evaluate whether the safety gap between model types persists in more realistic environments, and whether the same human strategy shifts remain effective when constraints are no longer pre-defined by a simple grid but must instead be derived from noisy sensor data (e.g., avoiding obstacles identified through computer vision).

A fourth direction is to broaden the empirical basis for the findings by extending the evaluation across populations, tasks, and model families. The central claim is about distributed cognition between users and the LLM-based planning system, so it is valuable to test how general the findings are across users with different backgrounds, and across repeated interactions that capture learning over time. Studies that vary models, task families, and interaction time horizons would clarify which observed effects are stable and which are task or configuration specific.

Finally, a fifth direction is to investigate whether scaling allows foundation models to fully internalize the planning process. While the results here highlight the importance of shared autonomy for today's models, future work should explore if sufficiently capable models can eventually handle high-complexity tasks without external guidance. This would involve testing whether planning shifts from a fragile, prompt-dependent behavior to a robust, emergent property of the model itself. Comparing such end-to-end capabilities against the distributed cognition approach explored in this thesis would clarify whether the "human-in-the-loop" remains a long-term necessity or primarily a bridge for current architectural limitations.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This thesis examined how LLMs can support robot navigation, with a focus on safety: whether safe autonomy depends more on a model’s reasoning capabilities or on the quality of human instructions.

A structured workshop was conducted with 226 participants who were new users. They provided natural-language navigation commands for a grid-based environment. Two model classes were compared on a baseline task: a non-reasoning model (Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite) and a reasoning model (Gemini 2.5 Pro). The reasoning model was then tested across tasks of increasing difficulty, from simple waypoint navigation to tasks with stricter constraints, to observe how interaction strategies change as complexity rises.

The resulting plans were evaluated with an automated pipeline that detects constraint violations before execution. This allowed comparison of safety behavior, not just task success. Prompt characteristics were analyzed to capture differences in user strategies, and hyperparameter tests examined whether more tokens or different temperature settings could reduce failures.

The results support three main findings. First, model architecture strongly influenced safety behavior. Non-reasoning models often violated constraints to reach goals, while reasoning models tended to refuse execution when uncertain. Second, performance declined as tasks got more complex, and this decline could not be prevented by allocating more tokens or tuning temperature. Third, successful control was best explained as distributed cognition rather than finding the right wording. As tasks got harder, better outcomes came from participants providing more structure and taking on more of the planning work, while the model served more as a translator of that structure into actions.

Overall, these results suggest that near-term safe autonomy will depend on adaptive role-sharing between humans and models rather than fully replacing human planning. These findings are grounded in controlled grid-based tasks with one-shot prompts; extending them to real robotics deployments with continuous environments and iterative dialogue remains an open question. Future systems can improve safety by detecting early signs of breakdown and shifting the model toward a translator role when task complexity increases beyond its planning capabilities.

## APPENDIX

### A WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Table 2: Workshop sessions: dates, times, and number of participants.

Date	Time	Number of Participants
December 8	13:45–15:15	29
December 8	15:45–17:15	26
December 10	13:45–15:15	28
December 10	15:45–17:15	25
December 11	10:45–12:15	29
December 11	15:45–17:15	28
December 12	13:45–15:15	16
December 15	15:45–17:15	22
December 17	13:45–15:15	14
January 8	13:45–15:15	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>226</b>

### B DETAILED WORKSHOP PROCEDURE

Each workshop session lasted approximately 80 minutes and followed a strict schedule with the following phases:

- (1) **Briefing and background:** The session started by comparing the current technology with a similar experiment conducted in 2023 and later published in 2025 (R. Zhang et al., 2025). Instructors showed a video from the previous study where students used voice commands. In that study, users had to memorize and speak exact, rigid commands like “Walk forward” to make the robot move. This comparison showed how LLMs now allow users to control robots using normal, everyday language instead of code-like commands.
- (2) **Introduction to the models:** Instructors explained the difference between the two types of LLMs used in the workshop. The first was a “non-reasoning” model, which guesses the next token without pausing to think. The second was a “reasoning model”, which uses thinking tokens before it outputs output tokens. While there are more architectural differences between these models, this distinction in token generation is the main difference.
- (3) **Connection to the setup:** Students then connected their phones to a local network and scanned a QR code to open the control website.
- (4) **Explaining the system rules:** Before the first task, the group learned about the “system prompt.” This is a hidden instruction sent to the LLM. Students were told that this prompt acts like a set of guidelines, defining the LLM’s role and the physical limits of the robot, such as not walking through walls.
- (5) **Task 1 (Simple navigation):** The first challenge used a grid map with obstacles and three checkpoints marked A, B, and C, which was displayed on the screen. The goal was to visit all checkpoints in any order. To see the difference in performance, pairs of students sent two requests: one to the simple non-reasoning model (Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite) and one to the smart reasoning model (Gemini 2.5 Pro). Instructors didn’t provide any guidance on how to write the instructions to make sure that the participants kept being new users. A subjective scoring system was used

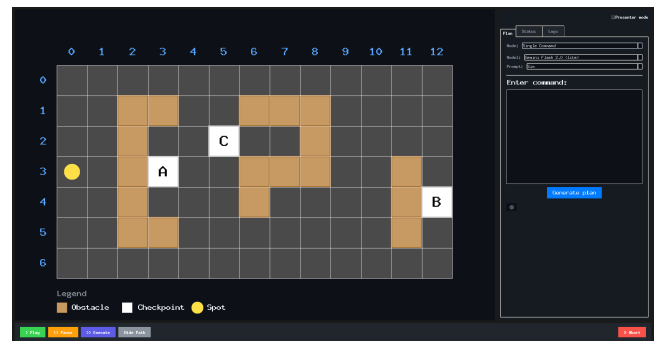
for gamification purposes to provide immediate feedback (see Section 3.4.7 for details): everyone started with 1000 points, losing points for hitting obstacles, missing targets, or moving diagonally.

- (6) **Prompting phase 1 (8 minutes):** Students had eight minutes to discuss ideas and write their instructions. They had to write separate messages for both models. When the time was up, their messages were sent to the LLM to create a plan and get a score.
- (7) **Review 1:** After processing, the students saw their results immediately on their phones, including the path the robot would take and why they lost any points. To help everyone learn, the instructors showed examples of both good and bad instructions. While discussing these examples, the system showed a preview of the robot’s path (a dot moving on the map) on the main screen. It was also shown that the reasoning model was much slower than the simple model. Finally, a leaderboard showed the top 5 and bottom 5 prompts.
- (8) **Task 2 (Strict order):** Using the same map, the task became harder. The robot now had to visit checkpoints in alphabetical order (A, then B, then C) and could not visit any single cell more than once. From this point onward, strict scoring was used, adding penalties for order errors and repeated cells, so Task 1 scores are not directly comparable. For this task, students only used the smart reasoning model. Instructors explained that for hard tasks, humans and LLM need to think together. As the problem gets harder, the human needs to help the LLM by giving it hints, such as “approach A from the top,” rather than just telling it the goal.
- (9) **Prompting phase 2 (4 minutes):** Students had four minutes to write a single instruction for the reasoning model. The rules were stricter this time: visiting points in the wrong order or stepping on the same square twice also resulted in point penalties.
- (10) **Review 2:** Students reviewed their own scores and plans on their phones. The instructors again picked out examples of both good and bad prompts. As they talked, they showed the simulated path of these plans on the big screen. The top 5 and bottom 5 scores were shown afterwards.
- (11) **Task 3 (Complex logic):** The final task tested the limits of the reasoning model. A fourth checkpoint, D, was added to the grid. The goal was to visit A, B, C, and D in order, without ever stepping on the same square twice. This required very careful planning.
- (12) **Prompting phase 3 (4 minutes):** Students had a final four-minute window to write their best instruction for the reasoning model to solve this complex puzzle.
- (13) **Review 3:** After processing the prompts, the scores came back and the group looked at the results. Unlike previous rounds, the instructors showed instructions that scored high but still had small errors. They showed the path moving on the screen to highlight exactly where the LLM failed, indicating that even smart models can struggle with very complex logic. Again, the top 5 and bottom 5 scores were shown afterwards.

- (14) **Final leaderboard:** The workshop ended with a leaderboard showing the teams with the highest total scores across all tasks.
- (15) **Cost and speed analysis:** Instructors showed data comparing the two models. The comparison used two prompts for Task 1 with end-to-end inference latency and token usage recorded from the API, and costs computed from the pricing sheet used in the workshop. On that example, the reasoning model was about 50 times slower and 600 times more expensive. Measurement details are provided in Appendix R.
- (16) **Conclusion:** The session closed with a summary. The main lesson was that while people can talk to robots in normal language, the best way to speak depends on the LLM. Non-reasoning models need exact steps (like coordinates), while smart reasoning models do better with high-level hints (like “approach from the top”) when the task is hard.
- (17) **Feedback:** Students scanned a final QR code to give anonymous feedback about the workshop.
- (18) **Physical demonstration:** To show the simulation to real transfer, a successful plan from a student was sent to the real Spot robot. The robot walked the path in the room while the simulation ran on the screen next to it.
- (19) **Camera demonstration:** Finally, the instructors showed how the robot can understand what it sees. They sent a live picture from the camera in the Spot robot’s arm to a multimodal LLM and asked it to find specific items, like a tomato can, showing that robots can now “see” and describe the world using language. The Spot robot then grasped the tomato can after taking the image, demonstrating the complete perception-to-action pipeline.

## C OPERATOR GUI SCREENSHOTS

This appendix provides visual documentation of the operator GUI in its three operational modes. The GUI served as the central control interface for managing the experimental platform during workshop sessions.



**Figure 12: Single Command Mode: Interface for processing individual commands with manual control over preview and execution.**

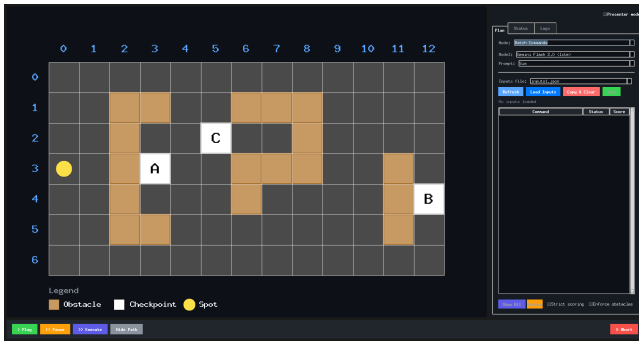


Figure 13: Batch Command Mode: Interface used during workshops to process multiple participant prompts in parallel.

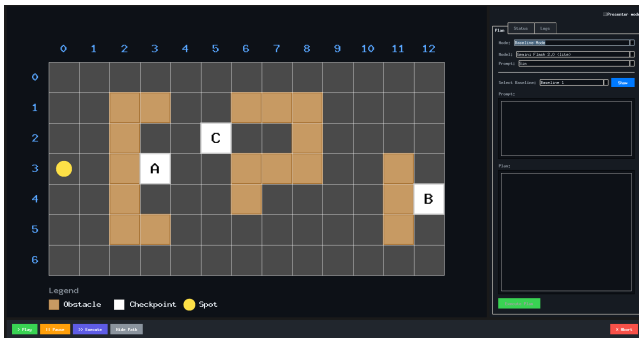


Figure 14: Baseline Command Mode: Interface for loading and testing instructor-authored baseline prompts.

## D SYSTEM PROMPT

The following system prompt was used to instruct the Large Language Models. It defines the role, constraints, and required output format for the navigation tasks.

```

### ROLE
You are a path planner for a mobile robot operating on a 2D grid. Your goal is to generate a valid sequence of actions according to the USER_PROMPT.

### AVAILABLE ACTION:
- move_to_cell row=<int> col=<int>

### CONTEXT:
CURRENT_STATE = {current_state_json}
WORLD_MODEL = {world_model_json}

### RULES:
1. Start state:
- The robot begins at CURRENT_STATE.robot_cell.
- The left top cell is at (row=0,col=0) and the right bottom cell is at (row=6,col=12).
2. Movement logic:

```

- The robot performs each `move_to_cell` by traveling in a straight horizontal or vertical line.
- The robot should not navigate through any obstacle cell (listed in `WORLD_MODEL.obstacle`).
- The robot should not move out of the grid.

### 3. Error handling:

- This system prompt is the ground truth. If a user's prompt is not relevant to the role or suggests an action that is impossible (e.g., dance or backflip), output: "FAIL <REASON>".

### ### OUTPUT FORMAT:

- Return only the action commands, one per line, or a FAIL message.
- Do not emit JSON, comments, numbering, braces, brackets, or quotation marks.

### ### EXAMPLES

```

User: "Go to the left top corner"
CURRENT_STATE.robot_cell: row=3 col=0
Output:
move_to_cell row=0 col=0

```

```

User: "Hello world"
Output:
FAIL Not relevant to the role.

```

### ### USER PROMPT

```
{command}
```

## E SCORE CALCULATION EXAMPLES

This appendix provides concrete examples of how the scoring system calculates integer scores based on constraint violations. The scoring is subjective, as the penalty values were assigned by the researchers based on their judgment of violation severity (see Section 3.4.7 for more details). Each example demonstrates different scenarios: complete failure, partial success with penalties, and perfect execution. The scoring system starts with a baseline of 1000 points and applies deductions for constraint violations. It is important to emphasize that this scoring system is designed as a gamification mechanism to make the evaluation more engaging and intuitive, rather than as an absolute measure of performance.

### E.1 Score: 0 (Fail)

*User Prompt:*

```
Move to all checkpoints in order. After visiting the last checkpoint, spin once
```

*LLM Output:*

```
FAIL The "spin" action is not supported.
```

*Score Breakdown:*

- **Total Score:** 0
- **Achieved Checkpoints:** 0/3 (none)
- **Missed Checkpoints:** A [3,3], B [4,12], C [2,5]

- **Final Position:** [3,0] (starting position, no movement)
- **Reason:** The model (Gemini-2.5-pro) immediately returned a FAIL message because the prompt requested a “spin” action, which is not part of the supported command set. The model correctly identified the unsupported action but failed to generate any valid movement commands, resulting in zero checkpoints visited and a total score of 0.

## E.2 Score: 650 (Partial Success)

User Prompt:

```
Move to the top left corner.
Move to (0,5)
Move to C
Move to A
Move to (3,4)
Move to the bottom
Move to B
```

LLM Output:

```
move_to_cell row=0 col=0
move_to_cell row=0 col=5
move_to_cell row=2 col=5
move_to_cell row=3 col=3
move_to_cell row=3 col=4
move_to_cell row=6 col=4
move_to_cell row=4 col=12
```

Score Breakdown:

- **Total Score:** 650
- **Achieved Checkpoints:** 3/3 (C [2,5], A [3,3], B [4,12])
- **Missed Checkpoints:** 0
- **Final Position:** [4,12]
- **Penalties:**
  - Diagonal move from [2,5] to [3,3]: -100 points
  - Diagonal move + obstacle collision from [6,4] to [4,12]: -250 points (combined penalty: -100 for diagonal, -150 for obstacle collision)
- **Final Score:** 1000 (baseline) -100 - 250 = 650
- **Note:** Despite reaching all checkpoints, the plan received significant penalties for diagonal movements and obstacle collisions. The diagonal move to checkpoint A and the combined diagonal+collision move to checkpoint B substantially reduced the final score.

## E.3 Score: 1000 (Perfect Success)

User Prompt:

```
Your goal is to move and stop at checkpoints A,B and C. Order does not matter. BUT FOLLOW THESE RULES: You can only travel like a rook (chess, i.e. vertical / horizontal movement). Never enter an obstacle cell (-150 points). Never miss a checkpoint (-125 points). Never go outside the grid (-125 points). Never move diagonally (-100 points).
```

LLM Output:

```
move_to_cell row=0 col=0
move_to_cell row=0 col=5
```

```
move_to_cell row=2 col=5
move_to_cell row=2 col=3
move_to_cell row=3 col=3
move_to_cell row=3 col=4
move_to_cell row=0 col=4
move_to_cell row=0 col=12
move_to_cell row=4 col=12
```

Score Breakdown:

- **Total Score:** 1000
- **Achieved Checkpoints:** 3/3 (C [2,5], A [3,3], B [4,12])
- **Missed Checkpoints:** 0
- **Final Position:** [4,12]
- **Penalties:** None
- **All actions valid:** No obstacle collisions, no diagonal moves, no out-of-bounds moves, no rule violations
- **Note:** Despite the typo in the prompt (“ceckpoints” instead of “checkpoints”), the model successfully understood the task and generated a perfect path that visited all three checkpoints while avoiding all obstacles and adhering to all movement constraints. The explicit listing of penalty values in the prompt may have contributed to the model’s careful planning.

## F EXPERIMENTAL RUNS AND SETTINGS

This appendix provides a complete overview of the experimental configurations used for each analysis reported in the results section. Table 3 details the number of prompts tested per input set, any excluded runs, the total number of runs executed, and the specific hyperparameter settings (maximum thinking tokens and temperature) applied for each experimental condition.

For the baseline analyses (Figures 1-4, 6), each prompt from the workshop sessions was executed with the base configuration (temperature 0.0, maximum thinking tokens 3000). Non-reasoning model prompts (Task 1\_NR) were executed once, as the model produces deterministic outputs at temperature 0.0. Reasoning model prompts (Task 1\_R, Task 2\_R, Task 3\_R) were executed three times to quantify output variability. Task 2\_R and Task 3\_R each have one additional prompt (124 instead of 123) because one participant group joined the study after Task 1 was completed.

For the hyperparameter sensitivity analyses, prompts were executed once for each setting. In the token budget sensitivity study (Figure 5), prompts were executed with 3000, 5000, and 7000 maximum thinking tokens. In the temperature sensitivity study (Figure 7), prompts were executed with temperatures 0.0, 0.5, and 0.9. For Task 2\_R, 2 runs were excluded due to scores below -1000. For Task 3\_R, 1 run was excluded due to a score below -1000.

Table 3: Overview of experimental runs and hyperparameter configurations for each analysis.

Figure	Input	Nr. of prompts	Excluded runs	Runs	Thinking tokens	Temp.	Explanation
5	Task 1_NR	123	0	123	3000	0.0	Baseline-only
	Task 1_R	123	0	369	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
6	Task 1_NR	123	0	123	3000	0.0	Baseline-only
	Task 1_R	123	0	369	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
7	Task 1_R	123	0	369	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
	Task 2_R	124	0	372	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
	Task 3_R	124	0	372	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
8	Task 1_R	123	0	369	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
	Task 2_R	124	0	372	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
	Task 3_R	124	0	372	3000	0.0	Rerun prompts 3x
9	Task 1_R	123	0	369	3000, 5000, 7000	0.0	run 1x for every thinking budget
	Task 2_R	124	0	372	3000, 5000, 7000	0.0	run 1x for every thinking budget
	Task 3_R	124	0	372	3000, 5000, 7000	0.0	run 1x for every thinking budget
10	Task 3_R	124	0	372	3000	0.0	Requires detail file + thinking trace
11	Task 1_R	123	0	123/123/123 (t=0.0/0.5/0.9)	3000	0.0, 0.5, 0.9	run 1x for every temperature
	Task 2_R	124	2	124/124/122 (t=0.0/0.5/0.9)	3000	0.0, 0.5, 0.9	run 1x for every temperature, 2 runs below a score of -1000
	Task 3_R	124	1	124/124/123 (t=0.0/0.5/0.9)	3000	0.0, 0.5, 0.9	run 1x for every temperature, 1 run below a score of -1000

## G NON-REASONING MODEL DETERMINISM VERIFICATION

To verify that the non-reasoning model (Gemini 2.0 Flash-Lite) produces fully deterministic outputs at temperature 0.0, five prompts from the first workshop session were executed three times each with identical settings. Table 4 shows the results, demonstrating that all five prompts produced identical scores across all three runs, confirming the model’s deterministic behavior at this temperature setting.

Table 4: Determinism verification: Scores for five prompts executed three times each with temperature 0.0.

Prompt	Run 1	Run 2	Run 3	Identical?
1	600	600	600	Yes
2	500	500	500	Yes
3	875	875	875	Yes
4	350	350	350	Yes
5	1000	1000	1000	Yes

The prompts tested were:

- (1) “We need to control a spot robot in a 13 by 7 grid. Both starting at 0. You start...”
- (2) “There is a Grid map with 0-12 columns and 0-6 rows. In this grid map here are ob...”

- (3) “Walk to row 0 and stay in the same column. Walk to column 5 while staying on row...”
- (4) “You are an agent tasked with controlling a robot (Spot) to checkpoints on a grid...”
- (5) “Walk to row 0, column 0. Then walk to row 0, column 12. Then walk to row 4, column...”

Since all prompts produced identical outputs across all three runs, this confirms that the non-reasoning model operates deterministically at temperature 0.0, validating the decision to execute each non-reasoning prompt only once during the baseline analysis.

## H GEM PROMPT

The following instruction was provided to the custom Gem to automate the classification of user prompts. The Gem applies a mutually exclusive category system where each prompt receives exactly one label based on the distribution of planning responsibility.

```
# Role and Objective
You are an expert data classifier specializing in
analyzing prompts for robot navigation tasks.
Your goal is to read a JSONL file provided by the
user, analyze the specific "input_text" field,
and output a structured Markdown Table based on
the classification definitions below.

# Context & Task Definitions
```

The input files are numbered (e.g., Task 1\_NR, Task 1\_R, Task 2\_R, Task 3\_R).

You must apply the labels consistently across all inputs.

Inputs 1 & 2 (Task 1: Simple Navigation)

- Goal: Guide the robot to three specific locations.
- Rules: Avoid walls, move in straight lines only (no diagonal movement, no rotations).
- Grid Size: 13 columns (0-12) by 7 rows (0-6).

Inputs 3 (Task 2: Order & Efficiency)

- Goal: Guide the robot to three locations in strict alphabetical order (A -> B -> C).
- Rules: Same safety rules as Task 1, plus no revisiting any square.

Inputs 4 (Task 3: Complex Spatial Logic)

- Goal: Larger map with four locations (A -> B -> C -> D) in strict order.
- Rules: Same as Task 2 (strict order, no repeated visits).
- Context: Most difficult task targeting reasoning limits.

# Classification Definitions & Rules

Analyze the "input\_text" against the following definitions.

Each prompt must be assigned exactly one label (single category).

## 1) Low-level plan

Meaning: The user takes over the planning role and gives a concrete route with multiple explicit waypoints.

Criteria (label if true):

- The prompt contains 3 or more explicit coordinates (e.g., (r,c) or row=X col=Y), OR
- The prompt contains explicit move\_to\_cell commands.

Examples:

- "Go to (3,0), then (6,0), then (6,4), then (3,4)."
- "Row 3 col 0 -> row 6 col 0 -> row 6 col 5."
- "move\_to\_cell row=4 col=0; move\_to\_cell row=2 col=5."

## 2) Hybrid guidance

Meaning: The user gives partial guidance (a single waypoint or route hint), but not a full plan.

Criteria (label if true AND not low-level):

- The prompt contains 1-2 coordinates, OR
- The prompt contains route-hint language like "via", "along the edge", "perimeter", "around".

Examples:

- "Go to (3,0), then follow the left edge."
- "Use the perimeter route to reach C."
- "Head to (4,2) and from there plan the rest."

## 3) Ambiguous steps (noise-type)

Meaning: The user specifies relative moves without a coordinate reference, which is ambiguous.

Criteria (label if true AND no coordinates are present):

- Relative step instructions like "up 3, right 2", or
- A sequence of relative moves (even if sequenced with "then/next").

Examples:

- "Move up 3, then right 2, then down 1."
- "Go left twice, then up."

## 4) High-level goal

Meaning: The user only states goals and constraints; no route or waypoints.

Criteria (label if true):

- No coordinates, no route hints, no relative step sequence.

Examples:

- "Visit all checkpoints without hitting obstacles or leaving the grid."
- "Reach all targets in any order; avoid obstacles."

# Label Priority (if multiple match)

Apply in this order:

1. Low-level plan
2. Hybrid guidance
3. Ambiguous steps
4. High-level goal

# Output Format

Output the result ONLY as a Markdown Table.

Headers must be exactly:

Prompt	Low-level plan	Hybrid guidance	High-level goal	Ambiguous steps
--------	----------------	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------

Rules:

- Use full, untruncated prompt text.
- Put x when a label applies.
- Only one label per row (exactly one x).

## I LABELING CRITERIA

This appendix describes the classification system used to categorize user prompts based on the level of planning responsibility assumed by the user versus the model. Each prompt was assigned to exactly one category using a priority-based decision tree. The categories

reflect the distribution of cognitive load in the human-AI planning partnership.

### I.1 Category definitions

- Low-level plan**  
 Meaning: The user takes over the planning role and provides an explicit route with multiple waypoints. This strongly reduces the model’s planning burden.  
 Criteria: The prompt contains  $\geq 3$  explicit coordinates (e.g., (r, c) or row=X col=Y), OR the prompt contains explicit move\_to\_cell commands.  
 Examples: “Go to (3,0), then (6,0), then (6,4), then (3,4).”; “Row 3 col 0 → row 6 col 0 → row 6 col 4.”; “move\_to\_cell row=4 col=0; move\_to\_cell row=6 col=0; move\_to\_cell row=6 col=5.”
- Hybrid guidance**  
 Meaning: The user provides partial guidance (a single waypoint or route hint), but leaves significant planning to the model.  
 Criteria (only if NOT low-level): The prompt contains 1–2 coordinates, OR the prompt contains route-hint language such as “via”, “along the edge”, “perimeter”, or “around”.  
 Examples: “Go to (3,0), then follow the left edge.”; “Use the perimeter route to reach C.”; “Head to (4,2) and from there plan the rest.”
- High-level goal**  
 Meaning: The user states only objectives and constraints, requiring the model to plan independently.  
 Criteria: No coordinates, no route hints, no relative step sequence.  
 Examples: “Visit all checkpoints without hitting obstacles or leaving the grid.”; “Reach all targets in any order; avoid obstacles; no diagonal moves.”; “Find a safe path to A, B, C.”
- Ambiguous steps**  
 Meaning: The user specifies relative moves without absolute coordinate references, creating interpretation ambiguity.  
 Criteria (only if no coordinates present): Relative step instructions like “up 3, right 2”, or a sequence of relative moves.  
 Examples: “Move up 3, then right 2, then down 1.”; “Go left twice, then up.”; “Forward 4, turn right, forward 2.”

### I.2 Label priority

When multiple categories could potentially apply, the following priority was used:

- Low-level plan
- Hybrid guidance
- Ambiguous steps
- High-level goal

This priority system ensures each prompt receives exactly one label, reflecting the primary characteristic that defines the user’s planning contribution.

## J PROMPT DISTRIBUTION ACROSS CATEGORIES

This appendix shows how many prompts fell into each category across all four input sets. All prompts from all workshop sessions were included in this analysis with no exclusions.

**Table 5: Number of prompts per category for each input set.**

Category	Task 1_NR	Task 1_R	Task 2_R	Task 3_R
Low-level plan	42	27	16	15
Hybrid guidance	10	10	16	29
High-level goal	59	82	84	67
Ambiguous steps	12	4	9	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>124</b>

The distribution shows that across all input sets, participants predominantly used high-level goals, ranging from 59 to 84 prompts per set. Low-level plans were the second most common category for Task 1\_NR (42 prompts) but decreased substantially for the other inputs (27, 16, and 15 prompts respectively). Hybrid guidance remained relatively low across all sets, ranging from 10 to 29 prompts, with a notable increase in Task 3\_R. Ambiguous steps were the least common category, with 4-17 prompts per input set. The total number of prompts was relatively consistent across inputs (123-124), with Task 2\_R and Task 3\_R each having one additional prompt compared to Task 1\_NR and Task 1\_R because one participant group decided to join the study after Task 1 was completed.

## K LABELING ANALYSIS AND EXAMPLES

This appendix provides a comparison between manual and automated labeling, followed by the complete labeled dataset from the validation sample.

### K.1 Manual vs. AI labeling agreement

To validate the reliability of the automated labeling process, a sample set of 10 prompts from Workshop 1, Task 1 was manually labeled by the researcher and compared against the output of the custom LLM tool (“Gem”). Under the new mutually exclusive classification system, each prompt receives exactly one category label, resulting in a total of 10 classification decisions. The results showed a high degree of consistency, as summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6: Agreement between manual and AI labeling (Sample n = 10).**

Metric	Value
Total Decisions	10
Identical Decisions	9
Agreement Rate	90.0%
Precision	91.2%
Recall	90.5%
F1-Score	90.8%

The single discrepancy occurred on Prompt 3, where the manual coder classified it as hybrid guidance (mix of explicit obstacle coordinates and high-level checkpoint goals), while the AI interpreted it as a low-level plan (providing partial coordinate information with incomplete goal specification). This difference reflects the inherent subjectivity in interpreting incomplete prompts that provide some waypoints but lack clear task completion criteria. The 90.0% agreement rate is considered robust, reflecting that the automated process matches human judgment as closely as different human annotators would likely match each other in a subjective linguistic task.

## **K.2 Complete labeled validation sample**

Tables 7 and 8 show the complete AI-generated and manual labels for the 10-prompt validation sample from Workshop 1, Task 1, including the full text of each prompt. Each prompt receives exactly one category label based on the level of planning guidance provided.

**Table 7: AI labeling of validation sample (Workshop 1, Task 1).**

Prompt	Category
Find all checkpoint, you can move up(row-1), down(row +), left(col-1 or right col+1, You cannot hit obstacles at row,col 1,2 1,3 2,2 3,2 4,2 5,2 5,3 1,6 1,7 1,8 2,8 3,6 3,7 3,8 4,6 3,11 4,11 5,11 You cannot go outside 6,12(size is 0-6,0-12) Start at 3,0 Checkpoints are 3,3 4,12 2,5 You cannot go diagonally	High-level goal
Walk to row 0, column 0 Then walk to row 0, column 12 Then walk to row 4, column 12 Then walk to row 6, column 12 Then walk to row 6, column 5 Then walk to row 2, column 5 Then walk to row 2, column 3 Then walk to row 3, column 3	Low-level plan
We need to control a spot robot in a 13 by 7 grid. Both starting at 0. You start in column 0 row 3. There are 3 obstacles that you are not allowed to hit. They are at the following places: Obstacle 1: coordinates (row, column): (1,2) (1,3) (2,2)(3,2)(4,2)(5,5)(5,3) The second obstacle is: (1,6), (1,7), (1,8), (2,8), (3,6), (3,7), (3,8), (4,6) You are only allowed to move horizontally and vertically. Your goals is to move to(3,3) and (	Low-level plan
You have a grid map 0-6 rows and 0-12 columns, you need to move a robot from cell (3,0) which is start cell and reach all three checkpoints A,B,C at cells 3,3 for A then 4,12 for B and 2,5 for C. There are obstacles that you need to avoid: they are a different color which is light brown. You cannot go outside the grid and cannot move diagonally. Obstacles are a column from 1,2 to 5,2 then 1,3 then 5,3 then 1,6 to 1,8 and from 3,11 to 5,11	Hybrid guidance
Walk to row 0 and stay in the same column. Walk to column 5 while staying on row 0. Walk to row 3 while staying in column 5. Walk to column 3 while staying in row 3. Walk to column 5 while staying in row 3. Walk to row 6 while staying in column 6. Walk to column 12 while staying in row 6. Walk to row 4 and stay in column 12	High-level goal
You are an agent tasked with controlling a robot (Spot) to checkpoints on a grid. You goal is to visit all checkpoints in any order. At each time step, perform one of the following actions: - move right - move left - move up - move down You must ensure before each movement that there is no collision with obstacles on the grid. Keep track of each checkpoint that has been visited in a log, tracked in each prompt-response. You can only visit each checkpoint once.	Ambiguous steps
There is a Grid map with 0-12 columns and 0-6 rows. In this grid map here are obstacles located on second row: column index (2, 3, 6, 7, 8); third row columnindex(2, 8); third row columnindex(2,6,7,8,11); forth row columnindex(2, 6, 11); fifth row columnindex(2, 3, 11). The starting position of the robot is columnxrow(0x3). The goal is to go over the three checkpoint without moving diagonally and moving up and down. And to not go off the grid. The checkpoint are on (3x3), (5x2), (12x4). Please drive the robot at the best path	Hybrid guidance
You're in a grid with 0 to 6 rows and 0 to 12 columns and there are obstacles and targets to be reached. Visit all targets without crashing into the obstacles. I'll give you the coordinates of everything now. The obstacles are in column 2, rows 1 to 5. Column 3, rows 1 and 5. Column 6, rows 1, 3 and 4. Column 7, rows 1 and 3. Column 8, rows 1 to 3. Column 11, rows 3 to 5. The targets are in cells column 3 row 3, column 5 row 2, column 12 row 4. You are in column 0 row 3. Generate a trajectory, moving non diagonally from cell to cell, where you can visit all targets without entering any of the obstacle cells or going outside the grid. Give me the trajectory in (row, column) form for each step	Low-level plan
Finding a path will include a sequence of directions (up, down, left, right) just to clarify From the starting position, find a path to checkpoint A without hitting any obstacles, going outside the grid and don't move diagonally. From checkpoint A find a path to checkpoint C without hitting any obstacles, going outside the grid and don't move diagonally. From checkpoint C find a path to checkpoint B without hitting any obstacles, going outside the grid and don't move diagonally.	Ambiguous steps
Visit all checkpoints, First move in the straight line to (0,0) Then turn right and move 4 cells Go straight until (0,5) and then turn right and continue to (0,12). Turn right again and move to (4,12)	Low-level plan

**Table 8: Manual labeling of validation sample (Workshop 1, Task 1).**

Prompt	Category
Find all checkpoint, you can move up(row-1), down(row +), left(col-1 or right col+1, You cannot hit obstacles at row,col 1,2 1,3 2,2 3,2 4,2 5,2 5,3 1,6 1,7 1,8 2,8 3,6 3,7 3,8 4,6 3,11 4,11 5,11 You cannot go outside 6,12(size is 0-6,0-12) Start at 3,0 Checkpoints are 3,3 4,12 2,5 You cannot go diagonally	High-level goal
Walk to row 0, column 0 Then walk to row 0, column 12 Then walk to row 4, column 12 Then walk to row 6, column 12 Then walk to row 6, column 5 Then walk to row 2, column 5 Then walk to row 2, column 3 Then walk to row 3, column 3	Low-level plan
We need to control a spot robot in a 13 by 7 grid. Both starting at 0. You start in column 0 row 3. There are 3 obstacles that you are not allowed to hit. They are at the following places: Obstacle 1: coordinates (row, column): (1,2) (1,3) (2,2)(3,2)(4,2)(5,5)(5,3) The second obstacle is: (1,6), (1,7), (1,8), (2,8), (3,6), (3,7), (3,8), (4,6) You are only allowed to move horizontally and vertically. Your goals is to move to(3,3) and (	Hybrid guidance
You have a grid map 0-6 rows and 0-12 columns, you need to move a robot from cell (3,0) which is start cell and reach all three checkpoints A,B,C at cells 3,3 for A then 4,12 for B and 2,5 for C. There are obstacles that you need to avoid: they are a different color which is light brown. You cannot go outside the grid and cannot move diagonally. Obstacles are a column from 1,2 to 5,2 then 1,3 then 5,3 then 1,6 to 1,8 and from 3,11 to 5,11	Hybrid guidance
Walk to row 0 and stay in the same column. Walk to column 5 while staying on row 0. Walk to row 3 while staying in column 5. Walk to column 3 while staying in row 3. Walk to column 5 while staying in row 3. Walk to row 6 while staying in column 6. Walk to column 12 while staying in row 6. Walk to row 4 and stay in column 12	Low-level plan
You are an agent tasked with controlling a robot (Spot) to checkpoints on a grid. Your goal is to visit all checkpoints in any order. At each time step, perform one of the following actions: - move right - move left - move up - move down You must ensure before each movement that there is no collision with obstacles on the grid. Keep track of each checkpoint that has been visited in a log, tracked in each prompt-response. You can only visit each checkpoint once.	Ambiguous steps
There is a Grid map with 0-12 columns and 0-6 rows. In this grid map here are obstacles located on second row: column index (2, 3, 6, 7, 8); third row columnindex(2, 8); third row columnindex(2,6,7,8,11); forth row columnindex(2, 6, 11); fifth row columnindex(2, 3, 11). The starting position of the robot is columnxrow(0x3). The goal is to go over the three checkpoint without moving diagonally and moving up and down. And to not go off the grid. The checkpoint are on (3x3), (5x2), (12x4). Please drive the robot at the best path	Hybrid guidance
You're in a grid with 0 to 6 rows and 0 to 12 columns and there are obstacles and targets to be reached. Visit all targets without crashing into the obstacles. I'll give you the coordinates of everything now. The obstacles are in column 2, rows 1 to 5. Column 3, rows 1 and 5. Column 6, rows 1, 3 and 4. Column 7, rows 1 and 3. Column 8, rows 1 to 3. Column 11, rows 3 to 5. The targets are in cells column 3 row 3, column 5 row 2, column 12 row 4. You are in column 0 row 3. Generate a trajectory, moving non diagonally from cell to cell, where you can visit all targets without entering any of the obstacle cells or going outside the grid. Give me the trajectory in (row, column) form for each step	Low-level plan
Finding a path will include a sequence of directions (up, down, left, right) just to clarify From the starting position, find a path to checkpoint A without hitting any obstacles, going outside the grid and don't move diagonally. From checkpoint A find a path to checkpoint C without hitting any obstacles, going outside the grid and don't move diagonally. From checkpoint C find a path to checkpoint B without hitting any obstacles, going outside the grid and don't move diagonally.	Ambiguous steps
Visit all checkpoints, First move in the straight line to (0,0) Then turn right and move 4 cells Go straight until (0,5) and then turn right and continue to (0,12). Turn right again and move to (4,12)	Low-level plan

## L HEATMAPS OF CONSTRAINT VIOLATIONS

Each image below has two panels: Task 1\_NR (non-reasoning) and Task 1\_R (reasoning). The heatmaps are plotted on the same 2D grid as the task maps.

**Collision heatmap.** This shows how often the plan collided with obstacle cells. Higher values mean more collisions on those obstacles.

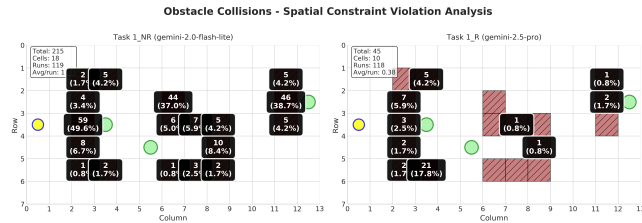


Figure 15: Collision heatmaps for Task 1\_NR (non-reasoning) and Task 1\_R (reasoning).

**Diagonal move heatmap.** This shows where diagonal moves occurred and the direction of those moves across the grid.

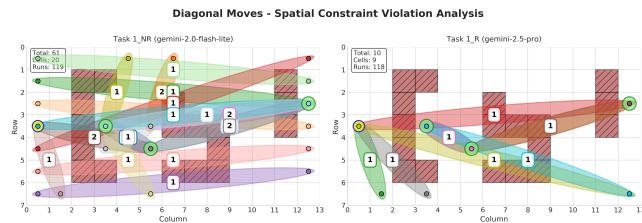


Figure 16: Diagonal move heatmaps for Task 1\_NR (non-reasoning) and Task 1\_R (reasoning).

**Missed checkpoint heatmap.** This shows how often each checkpoint was not reached.

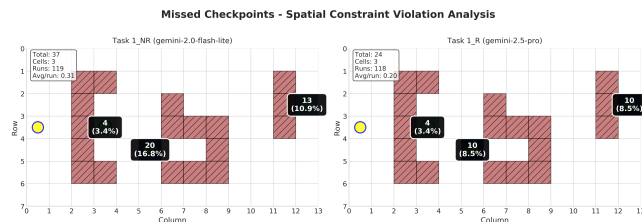


Figure 17: Missed checkpoint heatmaps for Task 1\_NR (non-reasoning) and Task 1\_R (reasoning).

## M PROMPT CATEGORIES (FULL SET)

This figure shows the success rates for all four prompt categories across Task 1\_NR (non-reasoning) and Task 1\_R (reasoning). For the main Results section, low-level plans, high-level goals, and ambiguous steps were emphasized as they represent the outer spectrum of planning responsibility: low-level plans where humans provide

maximum guidance (38.1% success for non-reasoning, 46.9% for reasoning), high-level goals where the model plans autonomously (13.6% for non-reasoning, 52.0% for reasoning), and ambiguous steps where spatial grounding is minimal (25.0% for non-reasoning, 50.0% for reasoning). Hybrid guidance, which provides partial direction, performed best for the reasoning model (60.0% success) but was not successful with the non-reasoning model (0.0% success, n=10).

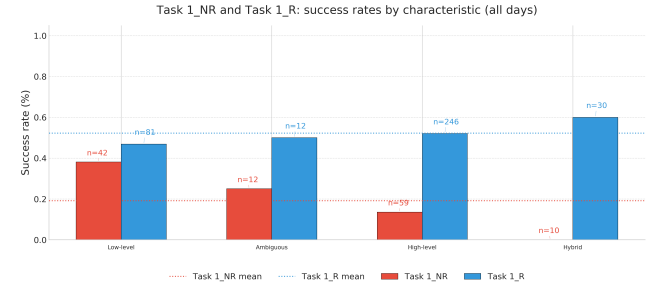


Figure 18: Success rates for all four prompt categories.

## N TOKEN USAGE VS MAX-TOKEN SETTINGS

The model does not always use the exact maximum token setting. The mean actual token usage for each max setting is shown below.

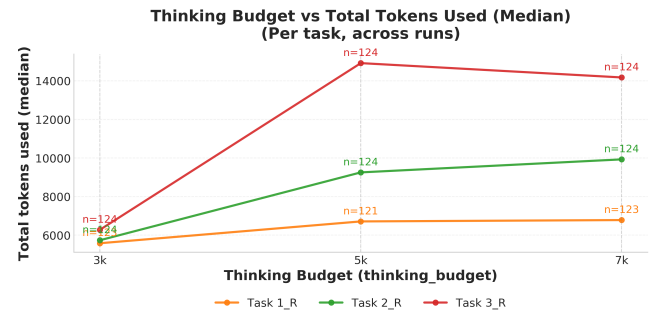


Figure 19: Actual token usage distribution for max-token settings of 3k, 5k, and 7k.

A version of the success results grouped by the max-token settings is also provided.

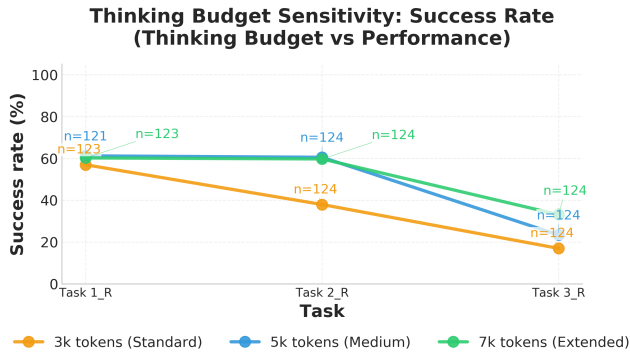


Figure 20: Success rates grouped by max-token settings (3k, 5k, 7k).

## O COMPLETE LIST OF BACKTRACKING KEYWORDS

This appendix provides the complete list of keywords that were tracked in the analysis of reasoning model thinking traces. These keywords serve as indicators of internal confusion, self-correction, or reaching an impasse. The keywords were identified through manual inspection of thinking traces and are grouped into two categories:

### Explicit self-correction indicators

These keywords signal that the model has recognized an error in its previous reasoning:

- I was wrong
- I'm wrong
- I was incorrect
- I made a mistake
- my mistake
- I made an error
- that was my mistake
- that was my error
- that was wrong
- that's wrong
- that is wrong
- that's incorrect
- that is incorrect
- that's not right
- that is not right
- that's not correct
- that is not correct
- scratch that
- on second thought
- I just realized
- I now realize
- I see now

### Impasse/forced course correction

These keywords indicate that the model has reached a dead end or cannot find a solution:

- no way

- impossible
- I cannot proceed
- I can't proceed
- I can't find a way
- I cannot find a way
- I can't solve
- I cannot solve
- I can't do this
- I cannot do this

## P EXAMPLE THINKING TRACE WITH BACKTRACKING KEYWORDS

This appendix provides a real thinking trace extracted from the evaluation metadata. The trace includes a clear self-correction indicator aligned with the backtracking keywords used in the paper (e.g., "I was wrong").

### Initial Assessment and Navigation Attempt

Okay, the user wants me to chart a course for the Spot robot, hitting checkpoints A, B, C, and then D. Hmm, a problem arises immediately: the WORLD\_MODEL doesn't have a CHECKPOINT\_D. Is this a typo? Should I stop at C? The instructions say, "If the command is unclear, return FAIL unclear\_command," and an undefined destination certainly makes the command unclear. But, maybe I should just ignore D, and process A, B, C. Let me double-check the command - "Move to points in the order of A to B to C to D" against the WORLD\_MODEL. Checkpoint A is at (3,3), Checkpoint B at (4,12), Checkpoint C at (2,5), and there's no D.

### Navigation for A, B, and C (Failed Attempt)

I'll start with the robot at [3,0] facing East. Let's go to Checkpoint A:

- (1) From [3,0], the path would be: [3,1], [3,2], [3,3]. Problem: [3,2] is an obstacle.
- (2) Need to reroute around this obstacle.
- (3) Let's try [0,0] as a starting point, and see how to get to [3,3]. There's a wall at column 2.
- (4) Obstacles listed: [1,2], [1,3], [2,2], [3,2], [4,2], [5,2], [5,3].
- (5) A valid path to [3,3] would be [3,0] → [3,1] → [2,1] → [1,1] → [0,1] → [0,2] → [0,3] → [3,3]. This is a very long, circuitous path.
- (6) Need to find a shorter route that avoids obstacles.
- (7) **I was wrong**, let's re-analyze. [3,1] → [2,1] → [1,1] → [0,1] → [0,2] → [0,3] → [0,4] → [3,3].
- (8) I've found a path: move\_to\_cell row=3 col=1, move\_to\_cell row=0 col=1, move\_to\_cell row=0 col=4, move\_to\_cell row=3 col=4, move\_to\_cell row=3 col=3.

### Backtracking keywords found:

- "I was wrong" (line: "I was wrong, let's re-analyze.")

## Q BACKTRACKING MARKER PLOTS FOR TASK 1\_R AND TASK 2\_R

These plots mirror Figure 10, but for Task 1\_R (Task 1) and Task 2\_R (Task 2).

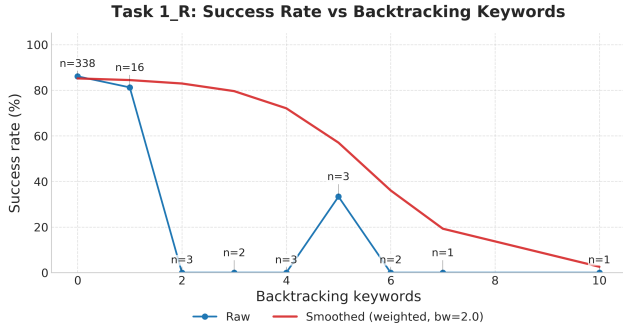


Figure 21: Backtracking keyword frequency and success rate for Task 1 (Task 1\_R).

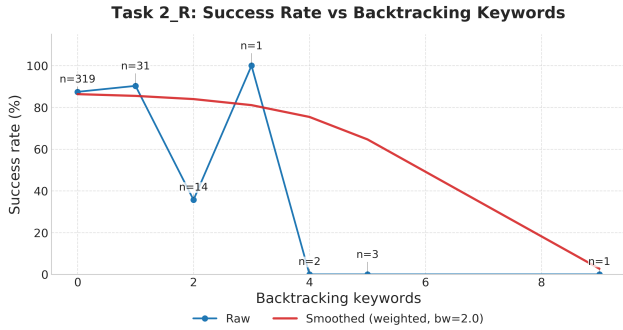


Figure 22: Backtracking keyword frequency and success rate for Task 2 (Task 2\_R).

## R COST AND SPEED MEASUREMENT DETAILS

This appendix documents the measurements behind the cost and speed comparison presented in the workshop. The comparison is based on a single Task 1 prompt sent once to each model. End-to-end inference latency was measured as wall-clock time from request send to response receipt on the workshop laptop. Token usage (input, output, and thinking tokens) was taken from the API usage metadata. Total tokens are the sum of input, output, and thinking tokens; the non-reasoning model does not emit thinking tokens.

Costs were estimated using the provider list pricing in use during the workshop, applied to the measured token counts (input, output, and thinking tokens billed at their respective rates). Table 9 reports the raw measurements and the resulting cost estimate for this example prompt.

On this example, the reasoning model is approximately 50 times slower and about 600 times more expensive than the non-reasoning model.

Table 9: Cost and speed comparison for one Task 1 prompt.

Metric	Non-reasoning LLM	Reasoning LLM
Inference time (s)	0.96	50.3
Token usage for input	1378	1388
Token usage for output	37	110
Token usage for thinking	–	7102
Token usage total	1415	8600
Total cost (USD)	0.00011	0.074

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