

# Uncovering and Addressing Blink-Related Challenges in Using Eye Tracking for Interactive Systems

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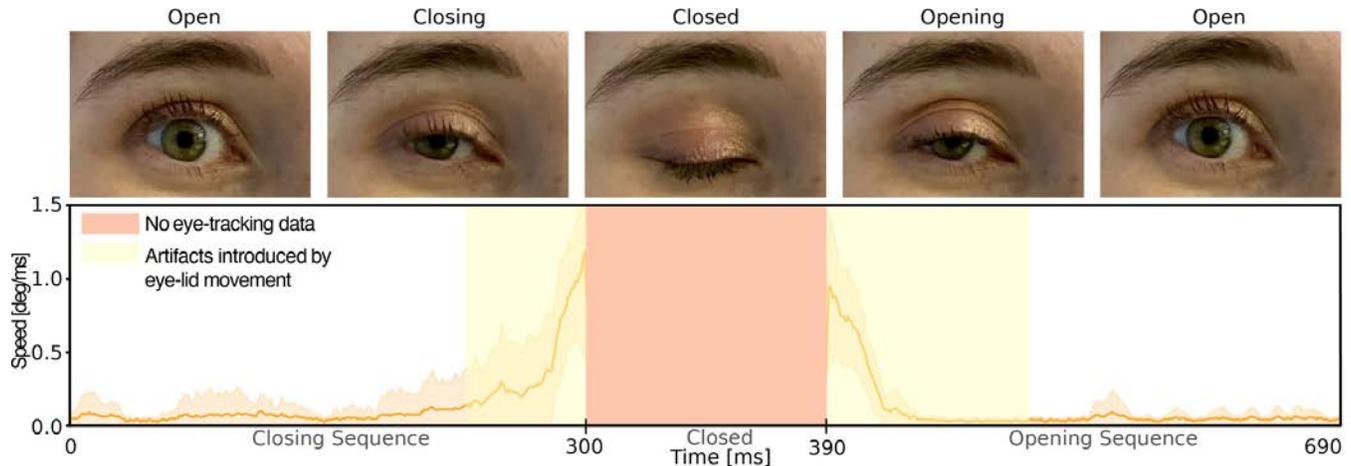


Figure 1: Raw eye movement speed before and after a blink with a gap of 90 ms where the eye tracker cannot obtain data. Highlighted in yellow are the areas before and after a blink that contain artifacts introduced by eyelid movements.

## ABSTRACT

Currently, interactive systems use physiological sensing to enable advanced functionalities. While eye tracking is a promising means to understand the user, eye tracking data inherently suffers from missing data due to blinks, which may result in reduced system performance. We conducted a literature review to understand how researchers deal with this issue. We uncovered that researchers often implemented their use-case-specific pipeline to overcome the issue, ranging from ignoring missing data to artificial interpolation. With these first insights, we run a large-scale analysis on 11 publicly available datasets to understand the impact of the various approaches on data quality and accuracy. By this, we highlight the pitfalls in data processing and which methods work best. Based on our results, we provide guidelines for handling eye tracking data for interactive systems. Further, we propose a standard data processing pipeline that allows researchers and practitioners to pre-process and standardize their data efficiently.

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## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → *Human computer interaction (HCI)*.

## KEYWORDS

human computer interaction, eye tracking, blinks, interactive systems

## ACM Reference Format:

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, eye tracking is a major additional input channel for multi-model interactions [54, 121, 197]. On the other hand, optical and infrared eye tracking data suffer from data loss. This data loss happens when the eye tracker cannot estimate the pupil direction from the image of the eye, as occurs at a high frequency due to human blinks, see Figure 1. However, both traditional methods of understanding user behaviors and prediction models (e.g., intent prediction) struggle with missing data and require additional pre-processing steps to handle this. Subsequently, we see diverse blink detection methods and how to account for the gaps in the input data stream. Grootjen et al. [68] recently demonstrated a lack of

standardized processes to overcome the challenges raised by eye blinks. The lack of standardized approaches for data processing presents a significant challenge to the reproducibility and comparability of results across different studies. Ignoring input affected by missing data in interactive systems is one approach commonly used. However, this introduces an input lag and unexpected jumps and jitters in the input stream, reducing the usability of systems drastically [124, 126]. Moreover, processing and predicting interactions using machine learning (e.g., using RNN and LSTM) is becoming more common; however, they typically require a consistent data input stream without gaps in the data. Therefore, we currently have no understanding of how removing or infilling data might impact real-world applicability and, thus, usability.

Various interactive systems make use of eye tracking for system enhancement, e.g., direct manipulation [121, 157], action prediction [214], and gestures [48, 216]. Lately, such systems used neural networks to improve on traditional feature extraction approaches, e.g., [4, 214]. However, neural networks cannot easily handle missing information as it occurs during a blink. Therefore, the most prominent way of dealing with missing data from the eye tracker is to remove the data containing blinks, e.g., [52, 69, 204]. Other studies have attempted to fill in the missing information, e.g., Stein et al. [184]. These systems employed use-case-specific and device-specific approaches. However, reproducibility and generalizability were not a concern; thus, they did not evaluate the impact of fine-tuning, e.g., the impact of the specific parameters for the infilling method. Additionally, blinks introduce artifacts into the remaining eye tracking data [2, 39, 53], see Figure 1. However, it is uncommon for current systems to address these artifacts; thus, systems generally ignore the input. It is therefore crucial to establish a comprehensive and consistent approach to pre-processing eye tracking data to ensure the reliability and validity of interactive systems using eye tracking.

Evaluating these different infilling methods on a large-scale dataset will bring an understanding of potential generalization issues and allow us to formalize recommendations to overcome them. Therefore, future researchers will know how to apply these methods to enable online processing and prediction in interactive systems effectively. Thus, we reviewed all scientific publications of eye tracking studies until the end of 2022 and how they deal with missing data from the ACM digital library and IEEE, inspired by the PRISMA method [145]. Here, we contribute an overview of common approaches to identifying blinks and processes to deal with the missing data. Based on these insights, we perform experiments to understand how today's approaches affect data quality. We used 11 open-source eye tracking datasets for our experiments in order to foster high rigor and external validity. First, we analyze the eye tracking datasets concerning potential data loss that occurs through blinks. Second, we analyze artifacts before and after gaps in the input stream as part of the blink sequence and use this to motivate additional data to be cut off. With these findings, we introduce artificial blinks into the datasets by varying the amount of missing data and window sizes for the different eye tracker frequencies. This allowed us to compare different infilling methods against each other.

In our literature survey ( $N = 140$ ), we found that 42.9% had shortcomings in the reporting, e.g., missed reporting about data

handling, lacked important reporting, or acknowledged the presence of missing data but did not include any further details or removed blinks, and 11.4% simply removed the samples affected by gaps. Finally, 45.7% of the literature surveyed explained ways to deal with the missing data, including interpolation and imputation methods. This highlights the need for standardization in processing eye tracking data for interactive systems. We show that there is a big spread in blink frequency from different datasets, which is in line with existing literature. When not processing samples containing missing data, we show that the combination of blink frequency and window size heavily influences the amount of usable data. We highlight the presence of artifacts introduced by eyelid movements surrounding missing data, which are not addressed in the majority of the reviewed literature. We show that these artifacts from eyelid movements can influence 70 ms of data proceeding and 118 ms following a “closed eye” and that these should be removed. Based on existing literature and our findings, we explore different infilling methods and propose a pipeline that standardizes pre-processing eye tracking data to deal with blinks and allows the resulting data to be used in interactive systems.

## 2 RELATED WORK

First, we provide a short overview of the reasons for blinks and how blinks are used in interactive systems for human-computer interaction (HCI). Next, we provide insight into different ways of blink detection. For the final part of our related work, we provide more use-cases for eye tracking in interactive systems.

### 2.1 Reasons for Blinks

A blink is defined as “a temporary closure of both eyes, involving movements of the upper and lower eyelids” [26]. One blink lasts roughly one-third of a second and human adults blink approximately 12 times per minute [56]. This natural eye motion is responsible for regularly replenishing the precorneal tear-film and protecting the eye from drying out. However, there is a variety of factors impacting the frequency of blinks outside of this responsibility, including but not limited to the presence of air pollutants [185], contact lenses [40], monitors [151], time of day [185], mental workload [31, 196, 198, 208], age [185], psychoticism [41], and individual differences [47].

While eyelid movements introduce a profound and transient modification in the position of the eyes, various human-computer interaction (HCI) studies use blink data in interactive systems such as driver fatigue detection [22, 73], lie detection [114, 128], detection of mild cognitive impairment [110], anti-face spoofing [63, 72, 148], and human-computer interfaces [3] among many others. However, the frequency of blinks is influenced by many factors, which can heavily impact the accuracy of these interactive systems.

### 2.2 Blink Detector

Many different methods have been developed for detecting blinks. Although the output is binary, i.e., either eye open or eye closed, we can divide the blink detection methods into a series of categories according to requirements. These methods can be intrusive, e.g., EOG [146], Doppler sensor [189], or glasses with special close-up cameras observing the eye [58]. However, many modern systems

rely on non-intrusive methods that use a camera with or without illuminators. In the following, we highlight two blink detection approaches that can be used in interactive systems.

**2.2.1 Built-In Blink Detector.** The EyeLink 1000 parser<sup>1</sup> (SR Research Ltd., Ottawa, ON, Canada) includes a blink detection mechanism. Here, a blink is defined as part of the eye position data, where the pupil size is very small or the pupil in the camera image is missing or severely distorted by eyelid occlusion. The EyeLink 1000 parser senses the partial occlusion of the pupil preceding and following a blink, marking these as a saccade. In their manual, the manufacturer recommends discarding fixations shorter than 100 ms proceeding and following a blink in order to eliminate most artifacts from the blink process.

The BeGaze parser<sup>2</sup> (SensoMotoric Instruments GmbH., Toltow, Germany) includes a built-in detector for blinks. Here, a blink is defined as a special case of a fixation, where eye data is not present, i.e., the pupil diameter is either zero or outside a dynamically computed valid pupil range. If either of these conditions is met, then a blink event is created where the event is expanded to include the transition period between valid gaze data and the blink. This transition period is set to look at pupil diameter changes; if these exceed an internal threshold value, then it is assumed to be a part of the blink. If the blink is shorter than 70 ms, then it is discarded.

Both of these built-in parsers have one limitation: they cannot differentiate between a true blink and a period where eye tracking was simply lost for other reasons. For both parsers, blinks do not have a maximum duration.

**2.2.2 Custom Blink Detector.** On the other end of the spectrum, building a custom blink detector is also an option. Over the last couple of years, there has been a plethora of publications that feature custom blink detection models (e.g., Al-Hindawi et al. [7], Appel et al. [11], Królak and Strumiłło [109]). Al-Gawwam and Benaissa [6] proposed a blink detection method using facial features from a video sequence instead of looking specifically at the eyes, which proves to be robust against various illumination and facial expressions. Another example of a custom blink detector comes from Hu et al. [80], where they showed a fast and accurate blink detection model based on AdaBoost and ANN that uses pictures of eyes to classify for a blink or not. While these approaches introduce interesting new blink detection methods, they are all camera-based and cannot be applied to data already gathered with existing eye trackers.

## 2.3 Eye Tracking in Interactive Systems

Eye tracking is used in interactive systems in various ways and has been used as, for example, as a tool for target selection, as input via gaze gestures, and as a measurement tool. The eye is sufficiently capable to allow interactions between humans and computers by using gaze gestures as input via an eye tracker [49]. Another study by Traoré and Hurter [195] showed that intentional blinks could be used as a technique to navigate through a menu and interact with the environment. More specifically, they showed that it is feasible

to use this technique also in an air traffic control system, which is a high-risk scenario.

Dwell time is another input parameter for gaze in interactive systems and has been the object of study on several occasions [9, 51, 99]. Using dwell time as an input, users can select an item or navigate a menu in an interactive system by placing their gaze at the target for a certain length of time. Versteeg [200] evaluated several eye tracking and manual input devices in the selection of visual targets, and demonstrated that the performance of eye tracking in combination with dwell time outperforms traditional input using a mouse.

Gaze predictions can allow for the evaluation of interactive systems without needing a user. Predicting gaze, e.g., through the use of saliency maps or task-specific models, such as EZ Reader for reading, can allow for the evaluation of what will be looked at. Examples of this are [61, 129], where they used gaze prediction in short videos, which can then be used in interactive media applications such as customized advertisements in videos through identified regions of interest. Another application of gaze prediction in interactive systems is pre-rendering scenes in VR [209].

One use-case of blinks for interactive systems uses eye tracking as an input method. The work of Krapic et al. [105] used blinks as the input modality to click. Other eye tracking studies using eye movements for interactive systems include Palacios-Ibáñez et al. [147]. Here, the authors reported nothing about the missing data. However, because they used the Tobii software, an assumption can be made they used a Tobii eye tracker, which in turn logs values that are missing as (0, 0) instead of NaNs. The work of Bremer et al. [30] used linear extrapolation based on the previous three frames to infill missing values for their prediction of locomotion intent from gaze data, which is the same as the work of Bremer et al. [29], Stein et al. [184]. Asish et al. [16] reported that about 10% of their data was missing per participant and infilled these missing values with the average of each participant.

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW ON CURRENT APPROACHES TO ADDRESS BLINKS

We conducted a structured literature review to identify the wide range of approaches used in dealing with eye tracking data in interactive systems. In detail, we aim to review the blink detection methods and algorithms used. For this, we follow the four-phase procedure of the PRISMA [145] guidelines on reporting systematic reviews. Figure 2 visualizes the PRISMA flowchart.

### 3.1 Method

We follow the PRISMA guidelines to review prior work, which is in line with other papers [17, 23, 75] in the HCI domain. The review focuses on three key aspects: the *Method* used for handling blinks, the use of blink *Detectors*, and the *Task* that users carry out.

**3.1.1 Identification.** We defined the eligibility criteria, namely, exclusion criteria as shown in Figure 2. We defined the inclusion criteria as papers involving eye tracking data and their handling of missing data. From the databases, we selected the ACM digital library and IEEE as they are representative of high-quality and mature research published in the field of interactive systems and eye tracking. At the same time, we acknowledge that this excludes other

<sup>1</sup><https://www.sr-research.com/eyelink-1000-plus/>, accessed 2024-02-27

<sup>2</sup><https://www.dpg.unipd.it/sites/dpg.unipd.it/files/BeGaze2.pdf>, accessed 2024-02-27

venues interested in eye tracking data (e.g., ARVO, Journal of Vision and Thieme Medical Publishers, and Journal of Academic Ophthalmology). However, the ACM Digital Library and IEEE Xplore are major libraries for interactive systems and, thus, best fit the aim of this review. We conducted our search given our inclusion criteria, selecting papers with terms relevant to eye tracking and terms that indicate the presence of missing data. Specifically, we used the following search string:

```
("eye tracking" OR "gaze tracking" OR "eye
movements" OR "gaze movements")
AND ("missing data" OR "missing value" OR
"data gaps")
AND E-Publication Date: (* TO 12/31/2022)
```

We manually saved all resulting records in a CSV file for screening.

**3.1.2 Screening.** We excluded all tables of content and posters, papers that do not include a study, and papers that do a study with non-human subjects as shown in Figure 2. For this, the first author then screened each paper while not using automated tools. The goal of the initial screening is to keep all papers that could help us understand how current papers deal with missing data. Thus, we excluded papers based on the exclusion criteria in Figure 2. We excluded 1) *table of contents* ( $n = 61$ ); 2) *posters* ( $n = 1$ ); 3) papers with *non-human subjects* ( $n = 1$ ) as they do not add to our investigation; 4) *not original work* as they only review or comment on others' work but do not process eye tracking data ( $n = 21$ ); 5) even though eye tracking was in the keywords, we had to exclude works, which is *not eye tracking* ( $n = 95$ ); and 6) we excluded results that do not entail a *user study* as no validation was done ( $n = 37$ ). In this step, we reduced the number of included papers from 402 to 186.

For the second step, the first two authors then read the remaining 186 papers after the initial screening. Here, we excluded papers based on two criteria: *not relevant* ( $n = 31$ ) to the inclusion criteria and *not an empirical study* ( $n = 15$ ), see Figure 2. The two people who screened the papers again did this independently to minimize potential bias. The inter-rater reliability was 97% on the exclusion criteria and discrepancies were resolved through discussions.

**3.1.3 Included Papers.** We included the remaining 140 publications in the review<sup>3</sup>. The first two authors independently coded each of these papers without the use of automated tools.

Without specifying a codebook beforehand, the two authors each coded the *Method* used for handling blinks, the possible use of blink *Detectors*, and the *Task* the users carried out. As we did not establish a codebook beforehand, we did not expect high inter-rater reliability on the open-ended text. Despite this, we had an inter-rater reliability of 79.5% for coding the *Detectors*, 53.4% for the *Method*, and 13.7% for the *Task*. As before, we resolved all discrepancies in discussions, resulting in the final codes reported in Table 1 and Appendix A.

## 3.2 Selected Papers

Table 1 gives an overview of how the 140 papers dealt with missing data. The earliest paper in our selected papers is from 1993. We note that 60 papers reported insufficient information on how they

<sup>3</sup>These 140 papers are marked with a • in the references of this paper.

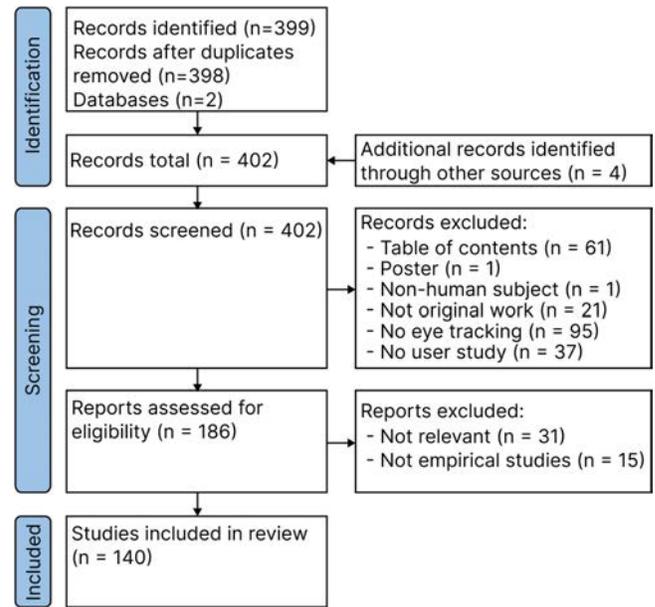


Figure 2: Literature search and inclusion phases and rates using the PRISMA flowchart.

Table 1: Different methods for handling missing data

Method	Count	Publications
<b>Insufficient Information</b>		
Nothing reported	44	[8, 15, 24, 33–36, 44, 60, 66, 77, 89, 90, 100, 101, 108, 112, 123, 125, 135, 139, 142, 149, 152–155, 158, 160, 164, 172, 173, 176, 180, 188, 190, 193, 194, 202, 203, 206, 207, 210, 224]
No handling of missing data	15	[43, 50, 52, 57, 71, 83, 87, 111, 113, 122, 150, 170, 177, 215, 217]
Removing blinks, not defining them	1	[102]
<b>Included in Detailed Review</b>		
Removed missing data	16	[1, 13, 14, 21, 28, 32, 46, 69, 91, 96, 106, 137, 144, 167, 201, 222]
Interpolation – linear	19	[4, 5, 18–20, 28, 81, 85, 88, 97, 103, 104, 140, 141, 167, 169, 186, 199, 219]
Interpolation – polynomial	2	[95, 191]
Interpolation – bilinear	1	[118]
Interpolation – spline	3	[28, 204, 221]
Interpolation – cubic spline	4	[74, 136, 163, 179]
Interpolation – Other	14	[13, 45, 64, 67, 76, 119, 127, 162, 178, 192, 211, 218, 220, 223]
Imputation	7	[38, 117, 132–134, 187, 212]
WEKA	2	[82, 165]
Aggregating	4	[86, 120, 138, 166]
Winsoring	1	[25]
Reconstructing	1	[143]
Averaging	2	[70, 92]
Extrapolate	2	[27, 184]
Other	6	[42, 55, 159, 181, 205, 213]

handled missing data, see Table 1; thus, we cannot include them in further analyses. However, they provide evidence for the need for better reporting guidelines. We showcase a subset of 81 papers in Appendix A to highlight the work that deals with missing data.

*Papers with Insufficient Information.* An overwhelming majority of the papers (44/140) did not report how they dealt with missing data from their experiments or they acknowledged the existence of missing data but did not elaborate on how they handled the missing data, see Table 1. Some of these papers mention the removal of participants who are missing over a certain amount of data (e.g., [60, 111, 125, 142]) or trials where missing data reached a threshold (e.g., [46, 102]). However, they did not elaborate on what they did with trials and participants who had missing data but were not excluded in the analysis, i.e., how they dealt with remaining missing data was not described. Moreover, we identified 15 papers that did not handle missing data while acknowledging the issue around missing data. Finally, one paper did remove blinks but gave no information on the criteria for removal or how they were removed.

*Papers with Helpful Information.* Sixty papers had insufficient information to be fully included in this review. In the following, we will categorize the remaining 81 papers on how they dealt with missing data.

Although all reviewed work comes from either the ACM digital library or IEEE Xplore, the work reviewed was published in several venues. From the work reported in Appendix A and reports on dealing with blinks, the most predominant venue was the ACM Symposium on Eye Tracking Research and Applications (ETRA), with 12 papers. Beyond that there were venues like ICMI (6), IEEE EMBC (4), CHI (3), IEEE Access (3), and several others. Regarding eye tracking systems, the most popular brand is the Tobii brand, where 36 papers in the reviewed work used one of the Tobii eye trackers for their research; out of these, the Tobii 1750 (4) is the most popular. After Tobii, the SMI brand is also well-represented with 15 papers. Here the SMI RED250 is the most common (4). Studies that have used a mobile eye tracker also seem to favor the EyeTribe (6) and the Tobii Pro Glasses 2 (5).

The tasks we identified in the reviewed work are even more diverse than the selection of eye trackers. The most common task is visual search (15) and driving simulators (15), closely followed by free viewing (14), video watching (9), reading (8), and input method (4). Here, using eye tracking as an input method is interesting as it is the only task ( $n > 1$ ) where all reviewed work used an interpolation method to deal with the missing data from the eye tracker.

### 3.3 Findings on Detecting Blinks

Most (73/81) of the reviewed literature reports that they classified missing data as a blink. For the Tobii eye trackers without a blink detector, authors often classified blinks as points where the pupil size is outside a pre-determined range or when the tracker loses the pupil temporarily, e.g., [52, 69, 204]. Other papers (3/81) mention excluding data before and after the missing data. For example, Bafna et al. [19] specifies blinks as missing data 75–500 ms long and, additionally, they remove a further 200 ms before and after the missing data to combat the artifacts before and after the blink. Appel et al. [13] removed data up to 100 ms before and after a blink to counter artifacts, and Appel et al. [12] removed parts from the pupil signal that “had an unreasonably large slope right before and after a sequence of missing data” [12].

EyeLink provides users with a built-in parser<sup>1</sup> and SMI provides the BeGaze parser<sup>2</sup>. Thus, both have their own integrated parsers

for blinks; however, not all studies we found during our literature review using those eye trackers report on using the respective parser. More specifically, out of the surveyed papers, over half of the work using an EyeLink (e.g., [117, 153]) and using an SMI (e.g., [12, 13, 24, 34, 95, 104, 133]) did not report on using the built-in parsers or any other parser. However, they report the missing data, which they handled with use-case specificity. As such, we identified that *the methods used for blink detection are inconsistent in the current literature and improving this has a potential positive impact on research replicability and quality.*

### 3.4 Findings on Dealing With Blinks

As discussed in Section 3.3, there are integrated solutions for detecting blinks (e.g., EyeLink parser<sup>1</sup> and BeGaze parser<sup>2</sup>). However, there are no out-of-the-box solutions integrated into the current eye trackers that handle blinks once they are identified. Traditionally, researchers dealing with missing data have so far proposed a set of methods, such as replacing by mean/median [168] and last observed carried forward [175]. However, this does not work for time-series data due to the underlying speed and possible acceleration of the eye movement. As such, the most common method identified in our literature review applies linear interpolation (19/81) closely followed by removing the data containing missing data (16/81), see Appendix A. However, our review revealed numerous use-case-specific methods for handling missing data. Here, the most common method was interpolation (43) of various forms and imputation (7), followed by a wide range of adapted approaches. While these methods are less prevalent and more widespread in the reviewed literature, they have the advantage of retaining the data to be used in interactive systems.

*Interpolation.* Interpolation is the most popular option in our review as 43/81 papers employed a form of interpolation to replace the gaps in the data. In the reviewed work, we identified different kinds of interpolation, including linear (19), polynomial (2), bilinear (1), spline (3), cubic spline (4), and others (14). For example, Kinnunen et al. [97] assumed the continuity of the data and, thus, applied linear 1-D interpolation independently for both axes. In Wang et al. [204], the authors removed data when the pupil size was outside a pre-defined range, after which they applied spline interpolation to infill the missing values. As there is no consensus on how to interpolate eye tracking data, the effects of such methods also need to be more adequately understood. *This can lead to inaccurate or even wrong interactions in interactive systems with low reproducibility chances.*

*Remove Blinks.* Removing the data that contain blinks is the second most popular among the reviewed work (16/81). However, some papers reported elaborate criteria to be met to retain parts or all of the data affected by a blink. For example, Ishii et al. [86] and Nakano and Ishii [138] did not analyze samples with blinks longer than 200 ms; however, if the blink was shorter, then they cut out the missing values. Others allowed for 20% missing data during a trial [25, 164] or they retained trials where the missing data was less than 1 s [70]. *While it is clear that removing all missing data helps the overall performance, this approach is not useful for interactive systems.*

*Uncommon Methods.* Lastly, we identified a series of other methods using a variety of tools and methods, e.g., imputation (7), WEKA (2), aggregating (4), and winsoring (1). To impute missing values, Li et al. [117] used an unsupervised Expectation-Maximization algorithm on their data, and Cole et al. [38] used the observed session transition probabilities to fill in the missing data. We could not identify which specific method is most suitable for dealing with blinks based on the reviewed literature. A large portion of the reviewed work (16) removes missing data where this exists, additionally to the work that removes whole participants or trials. *This results in significant data loss; therefore, other ways of dealing with the missing data could be more appropriate.*

## 4 EVALUATING THE FITNESS OF APPROACHES

Although our literature review uncovered trends that researchers use more often, there is no overall consensus for the “best” approach. Additionally, we did not find any evaluations comparing the many approaches to establish guidelines for future interactive systems. Thus, in the following, we compare the different identified approaches. First, we collect a wide range of open-source eye tracking datasets, see Table 2. Second, we showcase the implications of the most common approaches to detecting and dealing with blinks. After that we use the acquired data to run the previously identified infilling methods (see Table 1) and evaluate against each other.

### 4.1 Datasets

To motivate the importance of our work and evaluate our identified infilling methods, we acquired 11 different open-source eye tracking datasets. All datasets retrieved are part of published and peer-reviewed work from various venues. An overview of the acquired datasets is provided in Table 2. We acquired all 11 datasets independently of the literature review. They are all available online via <https://osf.io/> and <https://github.com/>. For direct links, see Section 9 where we provide links to the datasets on our Eye Tracking Guidelines page, allowing us to extend the list with future published datasets.

### 4.2 Pre-Processing

We first processed the datasets so that they all had the same format, which enabled us to work with the data more easily. If needed, we used the parsers for the EyeLink<sup>1</sup> and SMI<sup>2</sup> data to create the initial tabular files. To format all data equally, we turned all x and y screen gaze coordinates into degrees of visual angle, allowing us to compare them independently from the specific apparatus used (e.g., distance to the screen and screen size). We included only data from the left eye whenever binocular eye tracking data was available. We sampled all time in milliseconds (ms); if there were gaps in timestamps that were bigger than one second (e.g., those created through pausing an experiment), then we split the data into different parts to ensure we do not associate pre- and post-gap data. Where there was missing data (i.e., zero or *Not a Number*), we consider the data as part of a blink. However, we did not consider the missing data of only one sample (e.g., 1 ms for 1000 Hz and 33.3 ms for 30 Hz) as part of a blink as prior work reported blinks to last about one-third of a second [56]. Thus, we did not analyze



Figure 3: Experimental setup used for the verification of data gaps.

such short occurrences<sup>4</sup>. With our pre-processing, we aim to reduce external factors not caused by a human eye blink (e.g., breaks in the experiment, looking away from the tracker). Hence, we argue that blinks primarily cause the remaining gaps.

### 4.3 Blink Verification

By comparing a high-speed RGB video stream of the eye to recorded eye tracking data, we can ensure that blinks indeed cause the gaps. To maintain high ecological validity, we first searched for publicly available datasets of paired data containing blinks. However, none of the datasets of eyes contain blinks. Thus, the data required for such a comparison are not publicly available. Thus, we decided to conduct an experiment to capture the real eye movement and the eye tracker data simultaneously.

In this experiment, we used an EyeLink 1000 plus from SR Research to capture the eye tracking data at 1000 Hz and a Motorola 30 Ultra to capture the RGB video stream from the blinks at 240 fps as shown in Figure 3. After a nine-point calibration and validation, we presented a dot on the center of a ViewPixx (22.5 inch, 1920 × 1200, 120 Hz) monitor and asked the participant to blink one time once this dot turned green. We had one participant perform 10 trials. The data from this experiment was used to verify that the missing data and the preceding and following artifacts follow a similar trajectory as real blinks<sup>5</sup>.

## 5 RESULTS

In this section, we first report on the statistics from the surveyed datasets, see Table 2. Namely, we investigate the blink frequency, duration of missing data, and inter-blink interval<sup>6</sup>. Second, we report on the effective data loss that occurs through the common rolling window approach and the fact that windows containing missing data cannot be processed (i.e., zero or *Not a Number*). Third, we investigate the behavior before and after a gap to understand the impact of the eye closing and opening. Finally, we investigate

<sup>4</sup>We acknowledge that this could include data missing for other reasons; however, due to the vast amount of data considered in the analysis this would only amplify our findings.

<sup>5</sup>We acknowledge that these are all voluntary blinks and that there are differences between voluntary and involuntary blinks, e.g., duration [79].

<sup>6</sup>In the following, we will assume all gaps in the data, i.e., missing data, as to be part of a blink.

**Table 2: Overview of the used datasets, listed from the oldest to the newest (and alphabetically for authors from the same year)**

	Author(s)	Year	Venue	Eye Tracker		Screen			
				Company	Device	Freq. [Hz]	Inch	Aspect Ratio	Distance [cm]
S01	Foster et al. [62]	2017	Psychol Sci.	EyeLink	1000 Plus	1000	17	16:9	100
S02	Marzecová et al. [131]	2017	Biolo. Psychol	EyeLink	1000	500	19	4:3	57
S03	Krstić et al. [107]	2018	EJPE	SMI	RED-m	60	15.6	16:9	60
S04	Marzecová et al. [130]	2018	Scientific Rep.	EyeLink	1000	500	19	4:3	57
S05	Schuetz et al. [174]	2019	ACM CHI	EyeLink	1000 Plus	1000	113	8:5	180
S06	Annerer-Walcher et al. [10]	2021	Cogn. Sci.	SMI	RED250	250	24	16:9	70
S07	Felßberg and Dombrowe [59]	2022	Vision Res.	EyeLink	1000 Plus	1000	27	16:9	85
S08	Hollenstein et al. [78]	2022	LREC	EyeLink	1000 Plus	1000	27	16:9	85
VR01	Stein et al. [184]	2022	IEEE VR	Tobii	Pro	90	3.5	9:10	–
VR02	Steil et al. [182]	2019	ACM ETRA	Pupil Labs	Add-on	30	5.7	8:9	–
M01	Steil et al. [183]	2018	ACM ETRA	Pupil Labs	Pro	30	–	–	–

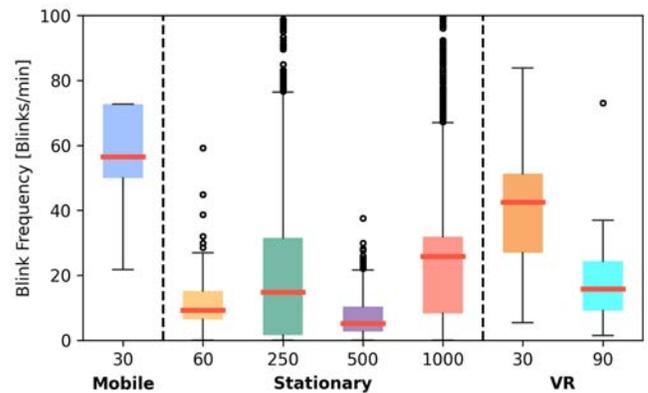
the impact of the five most common infilling methods found in the literature review, see Table 1.

## 5.1 Analysis

In this work, we adopt a Bayesian approach for data analysis, specifically employing Bayesian linear mixed models (BLMM). This approach has gained recent prominence [93, 115, 171] and offers several advantages over classical statistics. One of the advantages, as discussed by Kay et al. [94], is the incorporation of prior knowledge from eye tracking data. Additionally, Bayesian statistics facilitate effect estimation in small sample sizes and allow readers to evaluate effect sizes, including those close to zero, rather than solely determining the presence or absence of effects. Consequently, we utilize Bayesian parameter estimation to estimate effect sizes and quantify uncertainty surrounding these estimates by leveraging the information in our data and the applied priors. For all our models, we use the package *brms* to compute 10 Hamilton-Monte-Carlo chains with 20,000 iterations each and 10% warm-up samples. All Rubin-Gelman [65] statistics were well below 1.1 for effective sample size.

We explored the effect of different weakly informative priors on the data. None affected statistical inference. As a result, priors were chosen to resemble only weakly informative priors when standardizing with a prior on the Gamma distribution of the data of ( $\alpha = 5, \beta = 3$ ) without allowing negative numbers ( $\gamma > 0$ ). Additionally, we accounted for potential variability across datasets by incorporating a random factor on the shape parameter. This approach acknowledges that different datasets may exhibit varying characteristics and allows for more nuanced modeling. By explicitly modeling the dataset-specific effects, we capture the heterogeneity and better account for the underlying structure of the data.

Effects were considered meaningful when there was a particularly low probability ( $p_b \leq 2.5\%$ ) of the effect being zero or the opposite. We calculated  $p_b$  through the relative proportion of posterior samples being zero or opposite to the median. This metric has similar properties to the classical p-value and is an accepted substitution cf. [98, 116, 171]. Still, it quantifies the proportion of

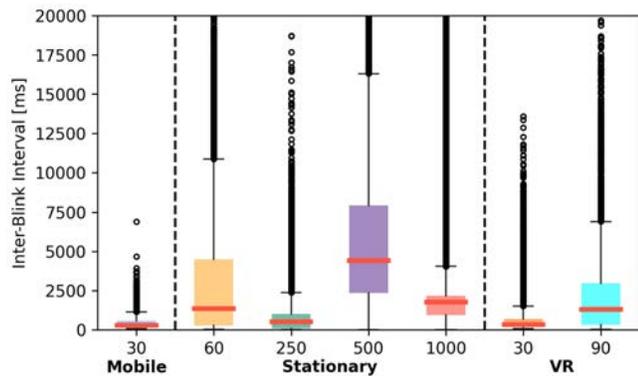


**Figure 4: We visualized the blink frequencies for the different types of eye trackers gathered in the dataset, i.e., mobile, VR, and stationary, and their respective frequencies. In the datasets we analyzed, we see that participants from the 30 Hz mobile dataset have a high blink frequency and participants from the 500 Hz stationary datasets have the lowest blink frequency.**

probability that the effect is zero or the opposite, given the data observed. Note that this is the reverse of the classical approach to inferential statistics, where one measures data probability given the test statistic's null hypothesis. In addition to the median of the parameter, we calculated the High-Density Interval (HDI) at 95% of the posterior distribution for all parameters, which indicates the possible range of effects given the data alongside the median of the respective parameter. Simple mean comparisons were made on standardized outcome variables. Therefore, all  $\hat{b}$  represent an effect size in standard deviations from the mean (corresponding to Cohen's  $d$  for simple effects of categorical predictors with two levels).

**Table 3: Bayesian statistics results of the priors for blink frequency, inter-blink interval, and closed-eye time (all results are contrasted against the whole dataset)**

Type	Freq.	Blink Frequency			Inter-Blink Interval			Closed-Eye Time		
		$p_b$	Med.	HDI <sub>95%</sub>	$p_b$	Med.	HDI <sub>95%</sub>	$p_b$	Med.	HDI <sub>95%</sub>
Mobile	30	<.001	1.549	[0.457, 2.980]	<.001	1.476	[0.341, 2.843]	<.001	1.388	[0.390, 2.785]
	60	<.001	1.334	[0.356, 2.689]	<.001	2.046	[0.569, 4.015]	<.001	1.714	[0.503, 3.029]
Statio.	250	<.001	1.282	[0.354, 2.521]	<.001	2.816	[0.830, 4.821]	<.001	3.693	[1.873, 5.323]
	500	<.001	1.139	[0.294, 2.342]	<.001	1.392	[0.316, 2.803]	<.001	1.433	[0.408, 3.032]
	1000	<.001	2.509	[1.491, 3.344]	<.001	3.597	[1.078, 5.658]	.018	1.734	[0.164, 3.216]
VR	30	<.001	1.472	[0.427, 2.848]	<.001	1.385	[0.402, 2.828]	<.001	1.397	[0.373, 2.730]
	90	<.001	1.358	[0.354, 2.726]	<.001	1.497	[0.469, 2.973]	<.001	1.520	[0.442, 2.822]



**Figure 5: We visualized the inter-blink interval for the different types of eye trackers gathered in the dataset, i.e., mobile, VR, and stationary, and their respective frequencies. In the datasets we analyzed, we see that participants have no inter-blink interval while participants from the 30 Hz mobile datasets have the inter-blink interval. Error bars indicate standard errors.**

## 5.2 Blink Frequency & Inter-Blink Interval

In Figure 4, we present the results of the blink frequency in blinks per minute across the different eye tracker frequencies and eye tracking modalities, i.e., stationary, mobile, or VR. Eye trackers with a low frequency had a generally higher blink frequency; here, the 30 Hz eye tracker had a mean of 49.3 blinks per minute ( $SD = 30.5$ ) while the mean of the others is 25.9 blinks per minute ( $SD = 37.8$ ). These results verify the findings that a lot of factors influence blink frequency, as is well established in the literature cf. Section 2.1. We visualize the *inter-blink interval* in milliseconds for the different frequencies and types of eye trackers in Figure 5. Next, we investigate how the different types and frequency as fixed effect affects blink frequency in a mixed effects model with the previously described intercepts and priors in Section 5.1. We found that all combinations of eye tracker TYPE and eye tracker FREQUENCY had a distinguishable effect on the *blink frequency*, see Table 3.

## 5.3 Impact of Eyelid on Eye Tracking Quality

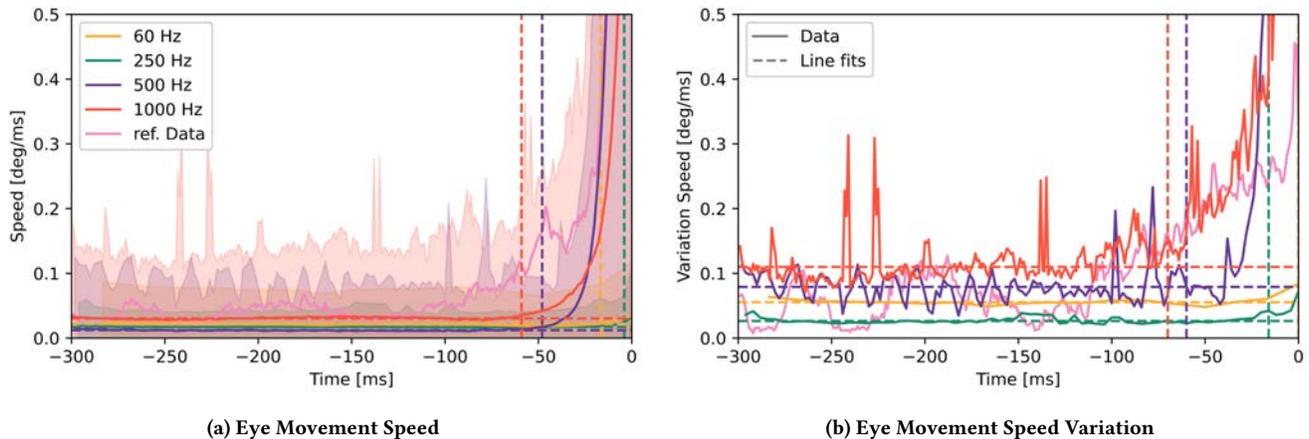
As illustrated in Figure 1, the eyelid’s movement can influence the eye tracking quality even before the tracker reaches the state that the eye tracker cannot recognize the pupil anymore. In this process, the eyelid might cover the pupil partly, but the eye tracker still assumes a circular pupil shape in its tracking algorithm. Thus, we investigate the potential impacts of the eyelid before and after a blink on the tracking quality. Uncovering such an influence will allow us to derive cut-off timings before and after the blink to facilitate better overall tracking accuracy.

For this, we investigate the eye movement speed and the speed variation before and after a blink, see Figure 6, 7, and 8. First, we looked at the change in speed before and after, see Figure 6a and 7a. We found that the speed increases surrounding the blink, which diverges from the time before and after. To study the behavior, we fitted horizontal lines to the speed trajectory (visualized as dashed lines) to the data -300 to -150 ms before and 150 to 300 ms after the blink. This illustrates the difference between with and without blinks. Next, we determined the points of divergence and visualized them as vertical dashed lines. Thus, when the average speed exceeds the fitted average linked plus epsilon for the first time, we determine this to be the cut-off, where the eyelid impacts the tracking resulting in inaccurate tracking, see Table 4.

As the variation, expressed by the standard deviation in Figure 6a and 7a, shows a similar trend, we next analyze the speed variation using the same methods. First, we fitted a horizontal line and then a vertical line to determine the point of divergence. The results show that the variation of the eye movement speed following a blink is high directly after a blink and decreases over time until it stabilizes

**Table 4: Identified time [ms] where data preceding and following a blink diverges from normal movement**

Freq. [Hz]	Closing Sequence		Opening Sequence	
	Speed	Var. Speed	Speed	Var. Speed
60	-16.6	-0.0	66.6	50.0
250	-4.0	-16.0	60.0	36.0
500	-48.0	-44.0	74.0	74.0
1000	-59.0	-70.0	59.0	118.0



**Figure 6: Illustration showing variation of the recorded eye tracking data 300 ms before a blink over all different stationary frequencies. a) Mean of the eye movement speed preceding a blink for the different frequencies of the stationary eye trackers in the data, including our reference data. b) Variation of the eye movement speed preceding a blink in for the different frequencies of the stationary eye tracking in the data, including our reference data. The vertical dashed lines represent the point the points identified as the first time the line crossed the fitted function plus epsilon. In both (a) and (b), we observe a steep increase in speed and variation of speed before missing data appears. These deviations from normal seem to happen around -60 ms and -70 ms for speed and variation in speed, respectively.**

around 0.1. This point depends on the frequency and eye tracker and, thus, must be individually determined.

#### 5.4 Closed-Eye Time & Length of Missing Data

Figure 9a presents the results of the blink length across the different eye tracker frequencies and eye tracking modalities. Our results show that between frequencies and modalities, the lengths are distinguishable. In Figure 9b, we show the normalized length distribution for the stationary eye tracker frequencies. We use a Generalized Inverse Gaussian distribution [156] to model the distributions of the lengths, see Figure 9b. Our regression models yielded an  $R^2$  value of 0.93 for 1000 Hz, 0.98 for 500 Hz, 0.99 for 250 Hz, and 0.67 for 60 Hz.

We investigated how the different types and frequencies as fixed effects affect blink frequency in a mixed effects model with the previously described intercepts and priors in Section 5. We found that all combinations of frequency and eye tracker type (stationary, mobile, and VR) had a distinguishable effect on the blink frequency. Our findings are reported in Table 3.

#### 5.5 Baseline Analysis of Removing Sample with Missing Data

In Figure 10a, we show the relation between the usable data (i.e., data without gaps) and window length. We show that as the window length increases the chance that a window contains one or more gaps increases. We note that the most predominant method for dealing with missing data in a window is to ignore it. We show that applying this method results in a decrease in usable data for further analysis. From an interactive systems point of view, this would hinder user interaction. The data from the different stationary frequencies follow a similar trajectory of a decrease in usable data as

the window size increases. We also evaluate the impact of different step sizes<sup>7</sup> on the usable data. These follow all the same trajectory, which suggests that there is no impact of step size on the usable data<sup>8</sup>.

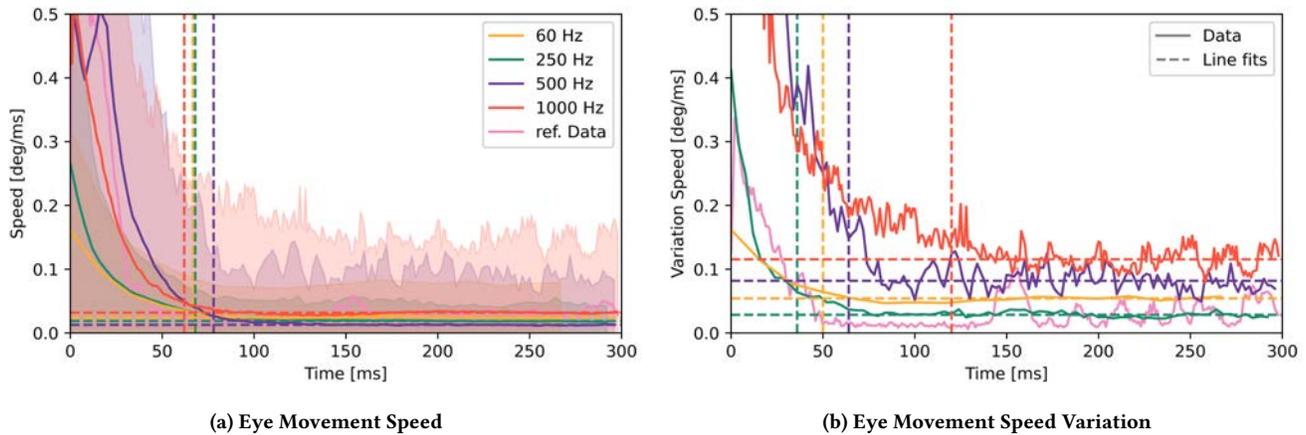
#### 5.6 Evaluating Infilling Methods

To evaluate the different infilling methods, we used the previously generated distributions from Figure 9 to create artificial blinks in our dataset where there were no natural blinks present. We used the most extreme value as an additional cut-off from Table 4 to simulate the additional data we should remove when dealing with blinks as this data would be data that contain artifacts from the blink. We applied this to our data from the stationary eye trackers and for each frequency individually to generate roughly 40,000 blinks evenly distributed throughout the data where there are no blinks naturally present, i.e., 750 ms before or after the artificial blink. The generated blinks are about half the actual blinks in the dataset.

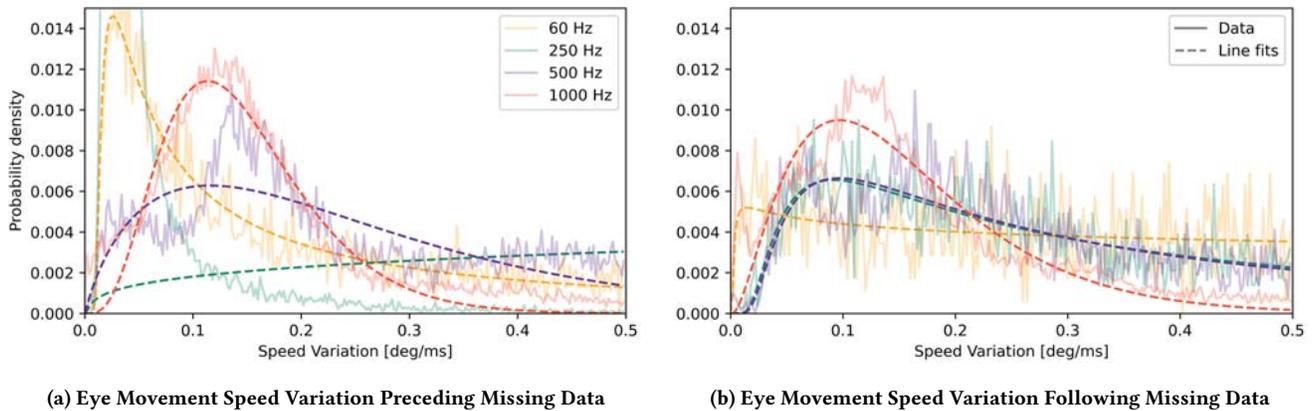
We calculated the error as the mean distance between the points generated by the interpolation methods and the actual data in degrees (ground truth). Following this, we applied linear, polynomial (3rd- and 4th-order), cubic spline, and spline interpolation methods over each generated blink and calculated the error. Our results show that the linear interpolation achieves the lowest mean error for 60 and 500 Hz data (0.43 and 0.09 mean degrees error, respectively) and that cubic spline interpolation achieves the lowest mean error for 250 and 1000 Hz data (0.18 and 0.54 mean degrees error, respectively). However, the results between linear and cubic spline are

<sup>7</sup>Evaluate the window every  $X$  samples.

<sup>8</sup>We acknowledge that there are adaptive window size algorithms to deal with gaps; however, adaptive sizes are not traditionally compatible with RNN and LSTM neural network models.



**Figure 7:** (a) Mean of eye movement speed following a blink for the different frequencies of the stationary eye trackers in the data, including our reference data. (b) Variation of eye movement speed following a blink for the different frequencies of the stationary eye tracking in the data, including our reference data. The vertical dashed lines represent the points identified as the first time the line crossed the fitted function plus epsilon. In both (a) and (b), we observe a steep decrease in speed and variation of speed after missing data appear. These deviations following missing data seem to normalize around 60 ms and 120 ms for speed and variation in speed, respectively.



**Figure 8:** (a) Distribution of speed [deg/ms] from 50 ms following missing data for the different frequencies of the stationary eye trackers in the data. (b) Distribution of the variation of speed [deg/ms] from 50 ms following missing data for the different frequencies of the stationary eye trackers in the data. All dashed lines represent an inverse Gaussian distribution fitted to the data with an  $R^2 > 0.98$ .

close. Polynomial interpolation on the 4th-order performs worst over all frequencies. We have visualized these findings in Figure 11. For more details of all the different errors, see Table 5.

## 6 DISCUSSION

In this work, we first reviewed the literature on processing eye tracking data and then compared these methods to determine their validity. From the literature review, we found 81 papers published in the ACM digital library and IEEE Xplore until the end of 2022 regarding eye tracking and dealing with missing data. We extracted the methods used to identify blinks and algorithms used to infill the missing data. Moreover, we found that the methods are inconsistent

throughout the literature. With this in mind, we performed a series of experiments to determine the impact of the different methods. For this, we used publicly available datasets recorded under various conditions, allowing us to highlight possible bias and generalizability. In the following, we discuss the most critical issues and discuss potential consequences if they are left unaddressed. These include the implications of the baseline approach on interactive systems, the effect of the eyelid on eye tracking data, the implications of infilling methods on position error, and recommendations for processing eye tracking data.

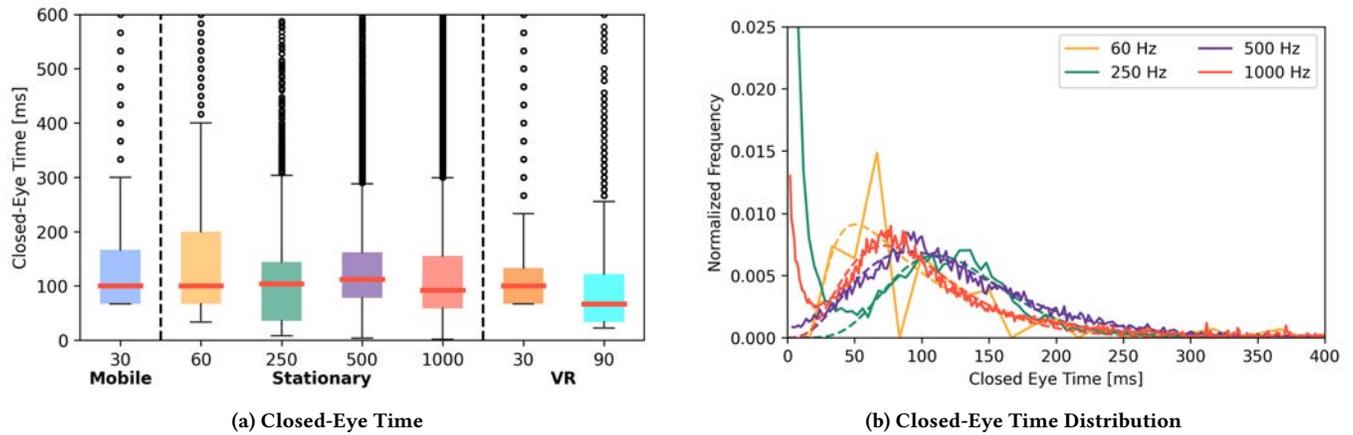


Figure 9: (a) We visualized the closed-eye time for the different types of eye trackers gathered in the dataset, i.e., mobile, VR, and stationary, and their respective frequencies. Error bars represent the standard error. (b) We visualized the normalized frequency and frequency of closed-eye time for the different frequencies for the stationary eye trackers. The dashed line represents an inverse Gaussian probability density function fitted to the data. In both (a) and (b), we can see that the closed-eye time is very similar independent of the frequency or type of eye tracker used, which suggests it is independent of task.

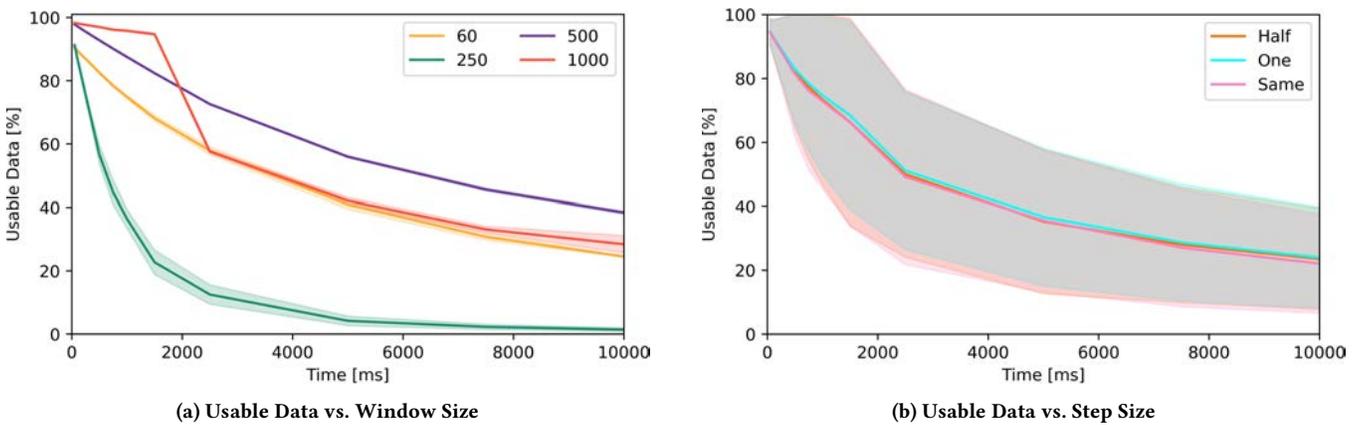
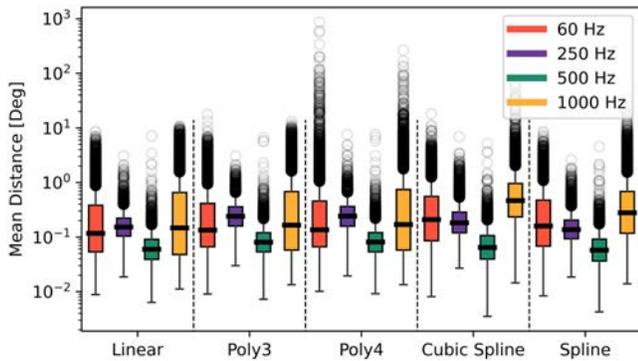


Figure 10: (a) We visualize the usable data for the different frequencies available in the stationary eye trackers. (b) We visualize the usable data for different step sizes, where half represents half the size of the window, the same represents the same step size as the window size, and one represents one step. The filled area represents the standard deviation. We observe a steep decrease in usable windows, where in a more than half of the data becomes not usable when creating windows of 10 seconds independent of frequency. In (b), we observe that step size all has a similar result in how much data is available.

Table 5: Mean error in degrees for the different infilling methods over the different frequencies of the stationary eye trackers, where M stands for Mean, SD stands for Standard Deviation, LL stands for Lower Limit, and UP stands for Upper Limit for a 95% confidence interval

Freq [Hz]	Linear				Poly 3				Poly 4				Cubic Spline				Spline			
	M	SD	LL	UP	M	SD	LL	UP	M	SD	LL	UP	M	SD	LL	UP	M	SD	LL	UP
60	0.43	0.79	0.41	0.45	0.48	1.02	0.46	0.51	1.68	15.83	1.31	2.04	0.49	0.86	0.47	0.51	0.61	1.24	0.58	0.64
250	0.19	0.21	0.19	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.29	0.3	0.31	0.74	0.29	0.33	0.18	0.18	0.17	0.18	0.25	0.27	0.25	0.26
500	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.1	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.21	0.11	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.12
1000	0.56	1.17	0.53	0.58	0.6	1.34	0.58	0.63	1.2	6.74	1.06	1.33	0.54	0.93	0.52	0.56	0.73	1.08	0.7	0.75
Avg.	0.32	0.56	0.3	0.33	0.37	0.69	0.36	0.39	0.82	5.88	0.69	0.96	0.33	0.52	0.32	0.34	0.42	0.68	0.41	0.44



**Figure 11: Error in mean distance from the ground truth in artificially introduced blinks into the data over different infill methods and frequencies for all stationary eye trackers. We see that the infilling using linear or cubic spline interpolation overall results in the least amount of mean distance; additionally, 4th-order polynomial infilling results in the worse.**

## 6.1 Validity

Compromising the internal validity of eye tracking studies is a critical concern as this issue may confound any conclusions drawn from such studies. Threats to the external validity of eye tracking research pertain to specific conditions within the study rather than the broader nature of the study itself. Our literature review revealed instances where the preservation of internal validity was not consistently evident due to limited descriptions of procedures even when we only consider the data processing. For instance, we excluded 36 studies that did not report on missing data in their work, an additional 15 studies in our literature review as they did not describe how missing data is processed, and one study that reported on removing blinks but never defined blinks or reported on how they were detected. For those that removed missing data, it was only clear in a few cases if data were removed within a certain time span, trial, or participant.

For the identified papers that did report on the method of not processing eye tracking samples containing missing data, we only encountered three papers where they account for artifacts introduced around missing data, e.g., because of the movement of the eyelid. Leaving artifacts surrounding missing data in compromises the internal validity of the data even if these artifacts are not necessarily from eyelid movements. Where parsers were used (6 papers), none of these reported the settings that were used for the parsers. As things currently stand, 60/140 papers failed to provide sufficient information in this regard. As such, this presents an implication for the internal validity of their work and the conclusions drawn from such studies as they can be confounded with this issue.

## 6.2 Replicability

Reflecting recent concerns regarding the lack of transparency in statistical reporting within various fields considering interactive systems [37, 84], similar issues arise when considering the replicability of studies using eye tracking data. Across various instances, we

observed a scarcity of clarity and essential detail necessary for successfully replicating research involving eye tracking methodologies. Descriptions and methodologies often suffer from selectiveness, incompleteness, and a non-standardized presentation of information. A significant portion of the analyzed papers lacked essential information regarding the specifics of the eye tracking data analysis used. Furthermore, we observed missing participant characteristics and experimental protocols, and various other factors.

The utilization of non-standard terminology, self-defined terms for eye tracking parameters, and occasional confusion between distinct gaze-related attributes contributed to the challenges in comprehending papers and, in some instances, rendered them practically indecipherable to readers. The decision to diverge from established terminology not only complicates the understanding of these studies but also poses a more profound threat: it undermines the broader community's ability to retrace and replicate the findings presented. This paper aims to rectify this issue by clarifying the terminology surrounding eye tracking and delineating the necessary components for effectively planning, conducting, and reporting studies involving this methodology.

## 6.3 Understanding External Impacts on Eye Tracking Data

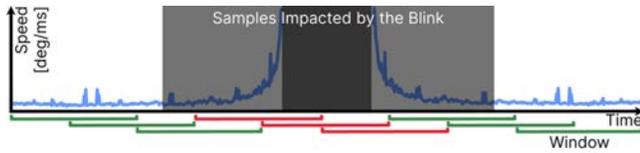
In general, there are many reasons for blinks (cf. Section 2.1), which are impacted by many external factors. Especially as the mental workload has an effect (cf. [31, 196, 198, 208]), we have to assume a task dependency. With this, we expect that the datasets, recorded under various conditions, impact the blink frequency, inter-blink interval, and closed-eye time. Our Bayesian linear mixed models showed effects that the tracker type and frequency are good indicators to show that the datasets are different with respect to the three measures (blink frequency, inter-blink interval, and closed-eye time). Thus, a one-size-fits-all approach for detecting blinks in various situations is improbable. Moreover, this showcases that detection parameters that worked for one setup do not transfer to another setup. This highlights the need for adaptive approaches when detecting blinks in different interactive systems.

## 6.4 Effect of Eyelid

Preceding and following a blink, the eye tracking data become highly unstable. We analyzed the variation in data over the different frequencies for the stationary eye trackers. Our findings show that assuming that the blink starts when it is detected by the default parsing software, e.g., by having missing data, and following the provided recommendations by their respective manual will leave artifacts in the data. These blink artifacts could have implications for the accuracy of interactive systems and, as such, we show that up to 70 ms before a blink and 118 ms after should be additionally excluded from the samples (see Table 4).

## 6.5 Implications of Baseline Approach on Interactive Systems

As the window size increases, the chance of a blink appearing in this window naturally increases. The baseline approach is to remove data that contain a blink, which is, in turn, the most common approach used in the reviewed work. Using smaller sections (e.g.,



**Figure 12:** To showcase the implications and delay an interactive system would experience if fed eye tracking data containing missing data points, we highlight the following. The green area shows a window that is usable. Over time, this window moves toward the right where it will encounter missing data (e.g., through blinks). At this point, the interactive system can no longer use the input because LSTM / RNN models cannot handle missing data. This continues while there is at least one missing data point inside the window until it once again contains a window without missing data.

< 1 s) of eye tracking data allows for a large portion of the data to be usable. However, using larger window sizes, e.g., 10 seconds and beyond as used by Bixler and D’Mello [25] and Qvarfordt and Lee [164], results in less than half the data being usable, independent of frequency. For interactive systems, this would mean that a suspension of updates to the system will depend on the selected window size and blink length, e.g., a window size of 10 s and a blink of 100 ms will suspend the update for 20.1 seconds. Given that larger window sizes increase the accuracy of interactive systems, e.g., [161], filling in the missing data presents the opportunity to have no or fewer unusable data windows. This, in turn, will result in a smoother experience in interactive systems.

To showcase the implications of an approach that removes data containing blinks or simply ignores the presence of blinks, there will be a reduction in usable data as shown in Figure 10a. To further highlight why this introduces delays in the system, we highlight this further in Figure 12. Here, we show that all areas that are underlined with red are affected by at least one data point missing, which means that in turn, the interactive system would not be able to give a response during this time. Depending on the window size, the amount of delay would be:

$$2 \times \text{window size (ms)} + \\ \text{missing data duration (ms)} +$$

188 ms (from the artifacts before and after the missing data) – 1 ms

A window size of 1000 milliseconds and missing data of 100 milliseconds would result in a delay of 2287 milliseconds, where the interactive system would be unable to respond.

## 6.6 Implications of the Position Error

Given the distribution of blink length and the effect of the eyelid on variability, we created artificial blinks evenly distributed throughout the data that do not contain blinks. We then applied five interpolation methods, of which four are used in the reviewed literature. We calculated the error for each of these methods on the different frequencies of the stationary eye trackers. Our findings show that linear and spline interpolation produces the least error in mean distance to the ground truth and that a 4th-order polynomial interpolation gives the largest error.

## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROCESSING EYE TRACKING DATA

Given the diverse set of applications of eye tracking in the context of interactive systems, we advocate for the collaborative development of community-sourced guidelines tailored to the specific needs and practices of researchers in and around the field of interactive systems. Drawing inspiration from the approach of the Special Interest Group on Transparent Statistics from the HCI field and previous work published at CHI, we present analogous efforts in the realm of eye tracking research. Our initiative has created an initial set of guidelines, accessible at <https://eyetrackingguidelines.github.io>. These recommendations aim to ensure a minimum scientific quality for future eye tracking data analysis.

To allow for easy use of our recommendations, we made our code for the above-mentioned results open source, see Section 9. These include the pre-processing and formatting of the raw eye tracking data from the EyeLink and BeGaze parsers as well as the output from the Tobii and Pupil eye trackers. The evaluation of the different blink metrics, i.e., blink frequency, length, and inter-blink interval. It visualizes the data loss for several window sizes and allows for visual inspection to identify additional cut-off points preceding and following blinks. Lastly, the code allows for infilling blinks using different interpolation methods.

To use eye tracking in interactive systems to its fullest potential, we need to perform pre-processing actions beyond the abilities of the current parsers. Even when the included parsers mark blinks, certain artifacts remain in the data. Removing windows/trials/instances where blinks are present will significantly decrease available data and introduce a delay in interactive systems. As such, we recommend the following processing steps for eye tracking data.

- (1) Do not remove data that contain blinks as it will cause interaction delays.
- (2) Remove data with high variation preceding and following a blink based on inspection of the given dataset.
- (3) Use linear or cubic spline interpolation to interpolate between blinks.

(1). We recommend against removing data that contain blinks. While this is one of the most predominant approaches in the literature reviewed, it can, depending on the window size, result in over 50% of the data becoming unusable. It can also lead to temporarily suspending updates to the interactive system, which takes more than double the time of the set window size. While we acknowledge that interactive systems in human-computer interaction rely on blinks for various interactions, the susceptibility of blinks is subject to a variety of factors, like age, air pollutants, and time of day, among others, which could impact the accuracy of interactive systems.

(2). We recommend inspecting the variation in speed [deg/ms] and variation in speed [deg/ms] preceding and following a blink. This will uncover any artifacts in the data related to blinks. The moment the eye tracker identifies a blink it can no longer track the pupil. This leaves the data from where the eyelid moves down and up dependent on the sensitivity and settings of the eye tracker, whether this is included in the blink or not. Visually inspecting the data allows for more careful interpretation. Using a linear function

on the data of 300-150 ms preceding the blink and setting an epsilon enables us to set a cut-off point between relevant data and artifacts.

(3). We recommend using either linear or cubic spline interpolation to interpolate within blinks. We identified several infilling methods during our literature review and compared the most represented ones against one another. Using linear or cubic spline interpolation results in the least amount of mean degrees of error compared to ground truth data.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Interactive systems that employ eye tracking use several detection methods and algorithms to deal with the missing data introduced by blinks. However, we identified that there is no consensus among the reviewed works for a general approach. For this, we reviewed all eye tracking studies until the end of 2022 that deal with blinks to identify the different blink detection methods and algorithms used to infill the missing data. In this work, we made four recommendations for interactive systems to handle missing data introduced by blinks, allowing for a smoother interaction. These include cutting off data with high variability preceding and following a blink, not removing data that contain blinks, and using linear or cubic spline interpolation to infill the missing data.

## 9 OPEN SCIENCE

We encourage readers to reproduce and extend our results and analysis methods. Therefore, our experimental setup, links to the collected datasets, and analysis scripts are available at <https://eyetrackingguidelines.github.io>.

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## A APPENDIX

**Table 6: Overview of the 81 papers that reported on how they dealt with missing data, listed from the oldest to the newest (and alphabetically for authors from the same year)**

	Author(s)	Year	Task	Method	Detector	Additional info
P61	Qian et al. [162]	2009	Visual Search Sequence	Interpolate	Missing Data	
P62	Oliveira et al. [141]	2009	Visual Search	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P63	Kinnunen et al. [97]	2010	Video Watching	Interpolation	Tobii Studio	Linear Interpolation
P64	Li et al. [120]	2010	Game	Aggregate	Missing Data	
P65	Nakano and Ishii [138]	2010	Wizard of Oz	Aggregate or Split	Missing Data	Data were combined
P66	Veneri et al. [199]	2010	Visual Search	Interpolate	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P67	Muñoz et al. [137]	2011	Game	Remove	Missing Data	
P68	Owens et al. [144]	2011	Semantic Search	Remove	Missing Data	
P69	Broz et al. [32]	2012	Holding a Conversation	Remove	Missing Data	
P70	Babiker et al. [18]	2013	Audio Stimuli	Interpolate	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P71	Bekele et al. [21]	2013	Virtual Reality	Remove	Missing Data	
P71	Ishii et al. [86]	2013	Holding a Conversation	Aggregate or split	Missing Data	
P72	Onorati et al. [143]	2013	Holding a Conversation	Reconstruct	Missing Data	Singular Spectral Analysis
P73	Yekshatyan and Lee [211]	2013	Driving Simulator	Interpolation	Missing Data	
P74	Dechterenko and Lukavsky [46]	2014	Visual Search	Remove	Pupil Size	
P75	Gwizdka [70]	2014	Visual Search	Average	Missing Data	
P76	McIntire et al. [132]	2014	Screen Watching	Imputation	Missing Data	
P77	Stuart et al. [186]	2014	Free Viewing	Interpolate	0, 0 coordintes	Linear Interpolation
P78	Tien et al. [192]	2014	Visual Attention	Interpolation	Missing Data	
P79	Cole et al. [38]	2015	Visual Search	Imputation	Missing Data	
P80	Rosa et al. [167]	2015	Video Watching	Remove / Interpolate	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P81	Taşkın and Gökçay [191]	2015	Game	Interpolate	Missing Data	Polynomial Interpolation
P82	Bekele et al. [20]	2016	Social Task	Interpolate	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P83	Romberg et al. [166]	2016	Free Viewing	Aggregate	Missing Data	
P84	Bodala et al. [27]	2017	Driving Simulator	Extrapolate	Missing Data	I-CT filter algorithm
P85	Fajnzylber et al. [55]	2017	Video Watching	"filtered"	Missing Data	
P86	Gavas et al. [64]	2017	Memory Task	Interpolate	Missing Data	
P87	Hutt et al. [82]	2017	Learning	WEKA	Missing Data	
P88	Jerčić et al. [88]	2017	Game	Interpolate	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P89	Merenda et al. [133]	2017	Driving Simulator	Imputation	Missing Data	Satterthwaite Approx.
P90	Ojha et al. [140]	2017	Reading	Interpolate	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P91	Raisi and Edirisinghe [165]	2017	Video Watching	WEKA	Missing Data	
P92	Zaid et al. [213]	2017	Manual Task	Ignore	Missing Data	
P93	Brambilla et al. [28]	2018	Free Viewing	Interpolation / Remove	Missing Data	Linear or Cubic
P94	Greiter et al. [67]	2018	Go/NoGo	Interpolation	Missing Data	
P95	Jia et al. [90]	2018	Free Viewing	Only Clean Data	Noise / Tracking Loss	
P96	Krieger et al. [106]	2018	Watching Video	Remove	Tobii Eye Tracker	
P97	Merenda et al. [134]	2018	Driving Simulator	Imputation	Missing Data	Satterthwaite Approx.
P98	Morales et al. [136]	2018	Video Watching	Interpolation	EyeLink Parser	Cubic Spline Interpolation
P99	Appel et al. [13]	2019	Game	Interpolate / Remove	Missing Data	
P100	Couceiro et al. [42]	2019	Programming / Coding	Resampling	Missing Data	Iterative SSA
P101	Gunawardena et al. [69]	2019	Surgical Intervention	Remove	Missing Data	
P102	Huang and Bulling [81]	2019	Input Method	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P103	Karthik et al. [92]	2019	Visual Search	Replace	Missing Data	
P104	Korotin et al. [103]	2019	Game	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P105	Saluja et al. [169]	2019	Reading	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P106	Sinha et al. [179]	2019	Reading	Interpolation	Missing Data	Cubic Interpolation
P107	Zhu et al. [222]	2019	Free Viewing	Remove / Replace	Missing Data	
P108	Aftab et al. [4]	2020	Input Method	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P109	Bafna et al. [19]	2020	Typing Task	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P110	Dan et al. [45]	2020	Visual Search	Interpolation	Missing Data	Case by case
P111	Ioannou et al. [85]	2020	Programming / Coding	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P112	Keshava et al. [95]	2020	Align Objects in VR	Interpolation	Missing Data	Polynomial Interpolation

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	Author(s)	Year	Task	Method	Detector	Additional info
P113	Koskinen and Bednarik [104]	2020	Operate Joystick	Interpolation	BeGaze Parser	Linear Interpolation
P114	Li et al. [117]	2020	Free Viewing	Imputation	EyeLink Parser	Expectation-Maximization
P115	Li et al. [119]	2020	Target Tracking	Interpolation	Missing Data	Hierarchically Interpolation
P116	Subburaj et al. [187]	2020	Game	Imputation	Missing Data	
P117	Zhou et al. [220]	2020	Driving Simulator	Interpolation	Missing Data	
P118	Zhu et al. [221]	2020	Input Method	Interpolation	Missing Data	Spline Interpolation
P119	Abdrabou et al. [1]	2021	Typing Task	Remove	Missing Data	
P120	Aftab et al. [5]	2021	Driving Simulator	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P121	Bixler and D'Mello [25]	2021	Free Viewing	Winsorization	Missing Data	Replace outliers
P122	Hettiarachchi et al. [74]	2021	Game	Interpolation	Missing Data	Cubic Spline Interpolation
P123	Jun et al. [91]	2021	Drone Flying	Remove	Missing Data	
P124	Li et al. [118]	2021	Learning	Interpolation	Missing Data	Bilinear
P125	Pillai et al. [159]	2021	Driving Simulator	Moving Window Infilling	Missing Data	
P126	Vrzakova et al. [201]	2021	Video Watching	Remove	Missing Data	
P127	Wang et al. [204]	2021	Driving Simulator	Interpolation	Missing Data	Spline Interpolation
P128	Zahabi et al. [212]	2021	Driving Simulator	Approximated	Missing Data	
P129	Arefin et al. [14]	2022	Visual Discrimination	Remove	Missing Data	
P130	Hirzle et al. [76]	2022	Virtual Reality	Interpolation	Missing Data	
P131	Khan et al. [96]	2022	Video Watching	Remove	Missing Data	
P132	Malladi et al. [127]	2022	Free Viewing	Interpolation	Missing Data	
P133	Qin et al. [163]	2022	VR Task	Interpolation	Missing Data	Cubic Spline Interpolation
P134	Simione et al. [178]	2022	Free Viewing	Remove / Interpolate	Missing Data	
P135	Souchet et al. [181]	2022	Stroop task	Tobii Pro I-VT software	Missing Data	No Settings Specified
P136	Stein et al. [184]	2022	VR Task	Extrapolate	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P137	Wang et al. [205]	2022	Questionnaire	Infill with 0	Missing Data	
P138	Zheng et al. [219]	2022	Driving Simulator	Interpolation	Missing Data	Linear Interpolation
P139	Zheng et al. [218]	2022	Input Method	Interpolation	Missing Data	Nearest Neighbours
P140	Zhu et al. [223]	2022	Driving Simulator	Interpolation	Missing Data	