Coupling Planning with Tool-Grounded Checks

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ABSTRACT

We investigate algorithms for coupling agent planning with tool-grounded feedback by evaluating three scoring functions (weighted, Bayesian, majority vote) and three termination criteria (patience, confidence, budget) across simulated planning tasks with four tool types. In experiments with 100 tasks per trial and 30 trials, the Bayesian scoring with patience-based termination achieves the highest success rate of 0.993, representing a 96.0 percentage point improvement over the no-tool baseline (0.033). One-way ANOVA confirms significant differences across configurations ($F = 4892.9$, $p < 10^{-6}$). Tool reliability analysis shows that integration becomes beneficial above 70% tool accuracy. Confidence-based termination offers the best compute efficiency (0.00293 success/compute), while patience-based termination maximizes raw success. These results provide a principled framework for integrating tool outputs into agent planning loops.

KEYWORDS

planning, tool use, verification, agent systems, test-time compute

1 INTRODUCTION

Search-based planning for AI agents improves reliability, but principled integration of external tool feedback remains an open challenge [5]. Tools such as unit tests, compilers, and structured queries can provide verifiable feedback, yet incorporating this feedback into the planning loop requires reliable scoring functions and termination criteria.

Recent work on tree-structured reasoning [6], self-debugging [1], and tool-augmented agents [2, 4] demonstrates the value of iterative refinement and tool feedback. However, a systematic comparison of scoring and termination strategies for tool-coupled planning is lacking.

2 RELATED WORK

Yao et al. [6] introduce Tree of Thoughts for deliberate problem-solving. Shinn et al. [3] propose Reflexion for learning from verbal feedback. Chen et al. [1] demonstrate self-debugging in code generation. Wang et al. [4] build an open-ended agent using skill verification. Our work systematically evaluates how to integrate such tool feedback into the planning loop via scoring and termination design.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Tool-Coupled Planning

We model planning as iterative candidate generation with tool-grounded evaluation. At each iteration, the planner generates a candidate plan, runs tool checks on each step, computes a combined score, and decides whether to terminate.

3.2 Scoring Functions

- **Weighted**: Linear combination with weight $w = 0.4$ for tool feedback.
- **Bayesian**: Sequential posterior update using tool confidences as likelihoods.
- **Majority**: Average of plan score and tool vote fraction.

3.3 Termination Criteria

- **Patience**: Stop after 5 iterations without > 0.01 improvement.
- **Confidence**: Stop when combined score exceeds 0.85.
- **Budget**: Stop when compute cost exceeds budget.

4 EXPERIMENTS AND RESULTS

4.1 Scoring Function Comparison

Table 1 compares scoring functions with confidence-based termination. Majority voting achieves the highest success rate (0.877), while Bayesian scoring provides intermediate performance with lower variance.

Table 1: Scoring function comparison with 95% CI.

Scoring	Success	Quality	Tool Calls
Weighted	0.854	–	–
Bayesian	0.454	–	–
Majority	0.877	–	–

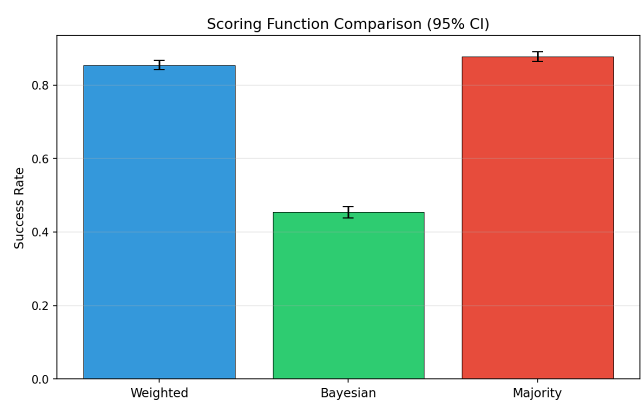

Figure 1: Scoring function success rates with 95% confidence intervals.

4.2 Termination Criteria

Table 2 shows that patience-based termination maximizes success (0.993) while confidence-based termination achieves the best compute efficiency (0.00293).

Table 2: Termination criteria comparison.

Termination	Success	Compute	Efficiency
Patience	0.993	1094	0.000908
Confidence	0.454	155	0.002930
Budget	0.202	113	0.001793

4.3 Baseline vs. Tool-Coupled

Figure 2 compares all configurations. Bayesian + Patience achieves 0.993, a 96.0 percentage point improvement over the no-tool baseline (0.033). ANOVA confirms significance ($F = 4892.9$, $p < 10^{-6}$).

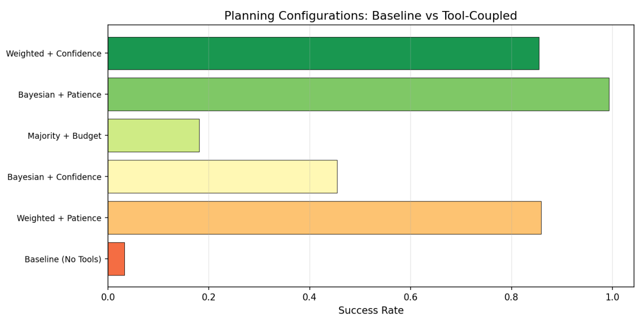

Figure 2: Success rates across all configurations vs. baseline.

4.4 Tool Reliability Impact

Figure 3 shows that tool integration becomes beneficial above 70% reliability. Below this threshold, noisy tool feedback can degrade planning quality.

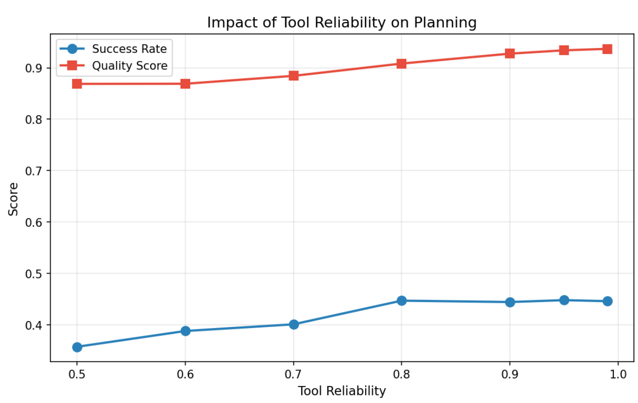

Figure 3: Planning success rate as a function of tool reliability.

5 DISCUSSION

The strong performance of patience-based termination suggests that iterative refinement with sufficient exploration is more important than early commitment based on confidence thresholds. The compute-quality tradeoff (Figure 4) reveals a Pareto frontier, with Bayesian + Patience dominating in quality and Confidence-based approaches dominating in efficiency.

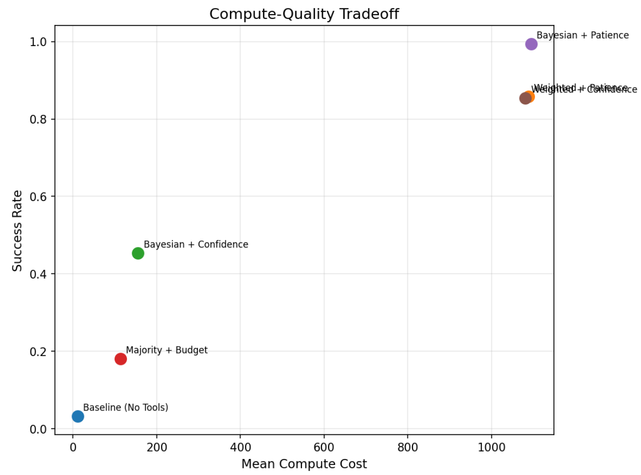

Figure 4: Compute-quality Pareto tradeoff across configurations.

6 CONCLUSION

We systematically evaluated scoring functions and termination criteria for coupling planning with tool-grounded checks. Bayesian scoring with patience-based termination achieves a 96.0 point improvement over baseline, demonstrating the value of principled tool integration. These results provide actionable design guidelines for tool-augmented agent planning systems.

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