

I-TRAIN #6: Advanced Self-Calibration Topics

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with thanks to Perley, Fomalont, Kloeckner and others; *Taylor et al. Synthesis Imaging 1999* and *Brogan et al. 2018*



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of Sciences





Advanced Topics & Background Explanations

1. [Choosing a solution interval](#)
2. [When not to self-calibrate](#)
3. [Other aspects of self-calibration](#)
4. [How to choose a line](#)
5. [How to recover poorly-calibrated data](#)
6. [Sources of error](#)
7. [Bright sources](#)
8. [Methods for implementing self-cal](#)
9. [Why phase first?](#)
10. [Image accuracy](#)

Warning: Expressions are mostly oversimplification or approximations. See references at end for more detailed derivations.



(1a) How to Choose a Solution Interval (Solint): Theory

Choosing the solution interval - phase

- Start cautiously, e.g. scan length, to avoid freezing-in imperfect model
 - See previous talks
 - Can compare S/N to optimise solint (also see VLA self-calibration CASA guide)
 - Maybe harder if sensitivity or signal changes a lot with frequency or baseline length
- Can estimate analytically integration time giving required S/N per antenna
 - S = peak flux in Jy/beam, ideal σ_{rms} , N antennas
$$\sigma_{\text{rms}} \propto \frac{T_{\text{sys}}}{\sqrt{N(N-1)/2 \times \Delta\nu \times \Delta t}}$$
 - $\Delta\nu$ total bandwidth (used in image), Δt total time on target
 - Initial actual image σ_{rms} higher, atmospheric as well as thermal noise
 - Actual σ_{rms} should decrease as self-calibration progresses
- Each antenna has $(N-1)$ baselines
 - Degrees of freedom also reduced by refant, arbitrary origin of phase
 - Noise per antenna
$$\sigma_{\text{rms,ant}} = \sigma_{\text{rms}} \times \sqrt{\frac{(N(N-1)/2)}{(N-3)}}$$

Minimum solution interval for phase calibration

- e.g. Require $S/N \geq 3$ per antenna, per polarization (X, Y), per spw*, per solint dt
 - Noise in solint (all baselines) $\sigma_{\text{rms},dt} = \sigma_{\text{rms}} \times \sqrt{\Delta t/dt \times NP \times N_{\text{spw}}}$
 - Take $N=20$, two polarizations $NP=2$, total $N_{\text{spw}}=2$
 - Want S/N per antenna per solint $\sigma_{\text{rms},\text{ant},dt} = \sigma_{\text{rms},dt} \times \sqrt{(N(N-1)/2)/(N-3)} = S/3$
 - So $\sigma_{\text{rms}} \times \sqrt{\Delta t/dt \times NP \times N_{\text{spw}} \times (N(N-1)/2)/(N-3)} = S/3$
 - Minimum solution interval, for peak S , without spw or polarization avg.

$$dt = \frac{(N(N-1)/2)/(N-3) \times NP \times N_{\text{spw}} \times \Delta t}{(S/3\sigma_{\text{rms}})^2}$$

- If the full observation had **more** antennas, more spw, a longer time on source, thus lower σ_{rms} , then the minimum solution interval is **longer** for a given peak flux

* For continuum, spw ~equal sensitivity; use appropriate spectral widths for different spw or for line self-cal

What is signal peak? What is noise? Why $3\sigma_{\text{rms}}$?

- First image peak is probably lower and noise is higher than ideal
 - Why use peak (not total) flux in estimating S/N? To ensure that long baselines are calibrated
 - Don't calibrate weights until last self-cal cycle (usually)
 - Model needs to include contributions from antennas most in need of correction
 - Exceptions e.g. mixed 7m-12m antennas, i.e. real difference in sensitivity
- Using initial image S/N gives longer dt (plus you should allow for imperfect model)
 - As S/N improves, minimum dt shrinks (can estimate optimum σ_{rms} from sensitivity calculator)
- In map, off-source, a few pixels per 1000 have values outside $3\sigma_{\text{rms}}$
 - NB map noise has non-linear relationship with visibility phase errors
 - Nonetheless, usually ensuring S/N $3\sigma_{\text{rms}}$ *per antenna per solint* produces good solutions
 - Could start with $< 3\sigma_{\text{rms}}$ to avoid failing solutions due to a poor model rather than bad data
 - Or $> 3\sigma_{\text{rms}}$ if there are bad data, or for large data sets and potential high dynamic range



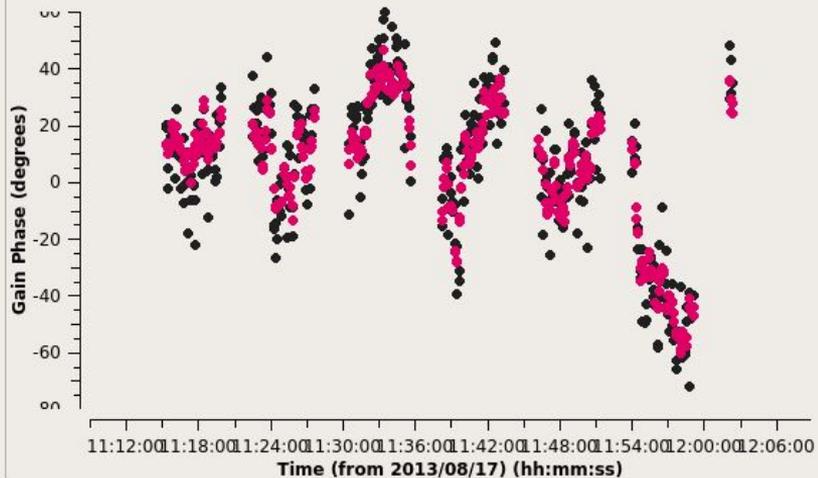
(1b) How to Choose a Solution Interval (Solint): Method S/N

Goal: choose a solint that captures the variations and flags minimal solutions

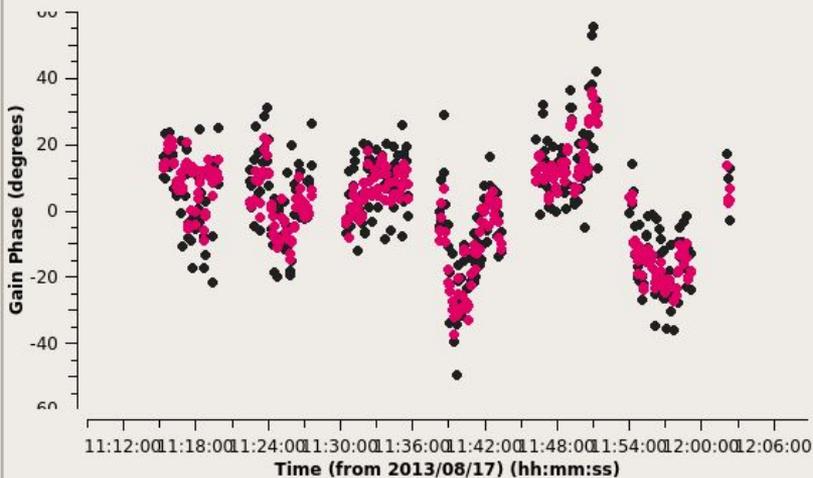
Look at multiples of int (1,2,3,4,5,etc.) (2,4,8,16,etc) -- int from listobs

Multiples of inf (inf, inf/2,inf/4) -- scan length from listobs

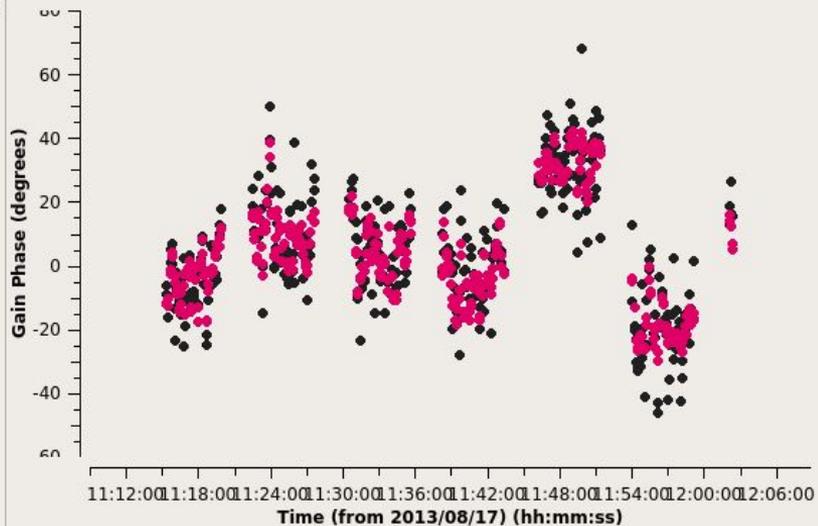
Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV03@A137



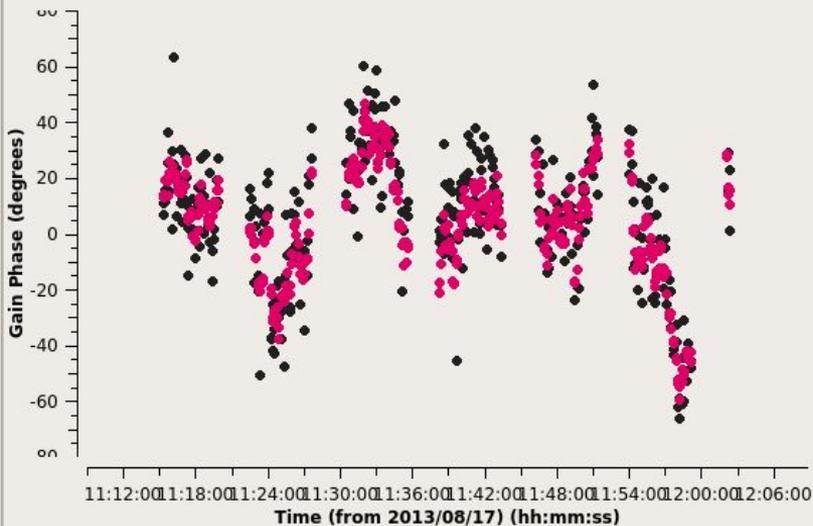
Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV04@A004



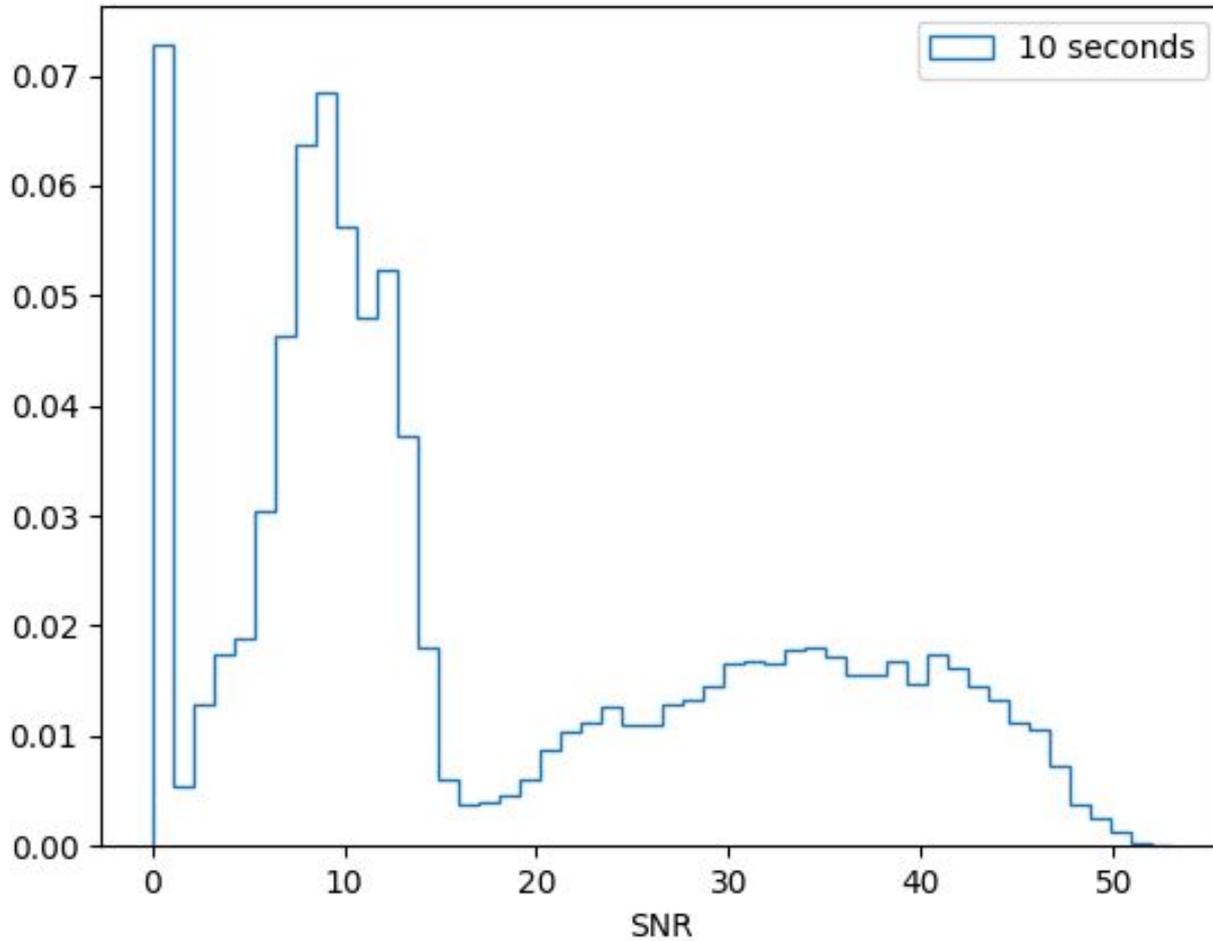
Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV05@A082



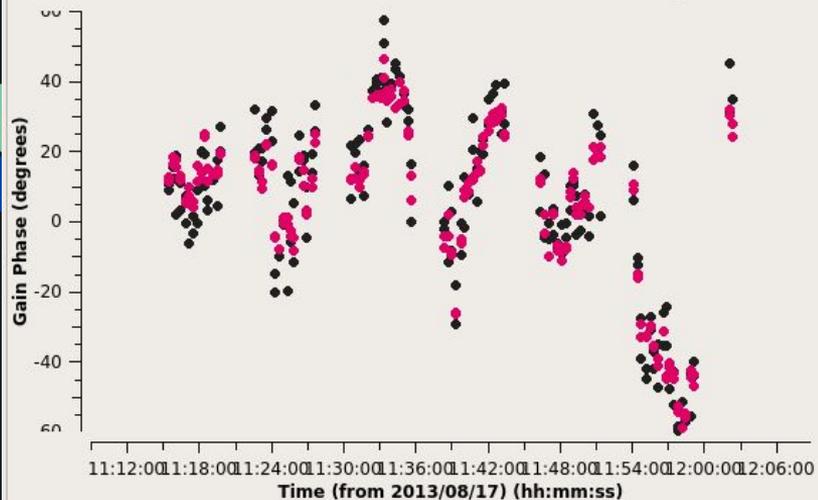
Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV07@A096



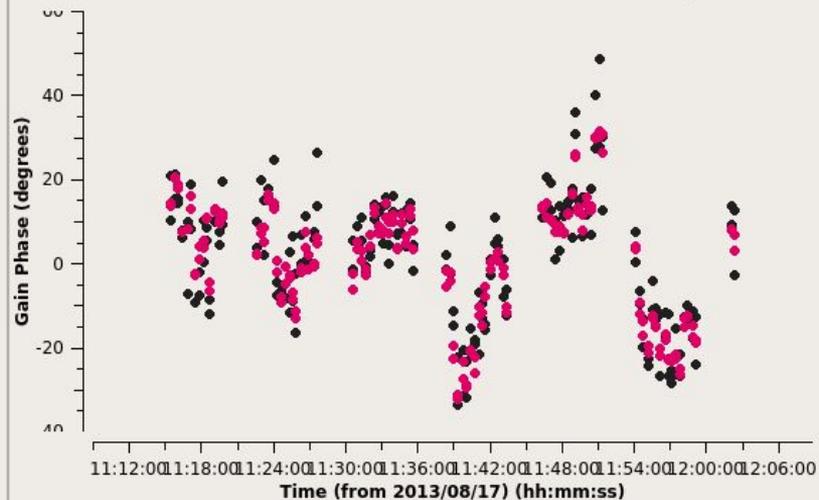
S/N of SOLUTIONs in GAINTABLES NOT the IMAGE



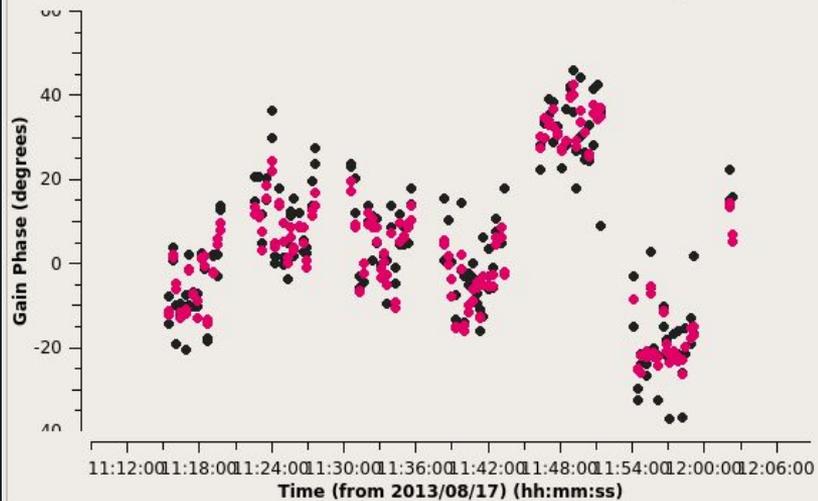
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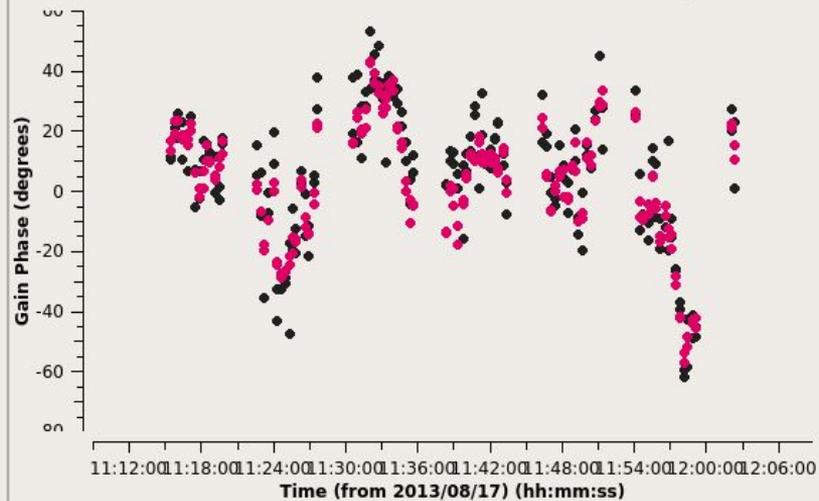
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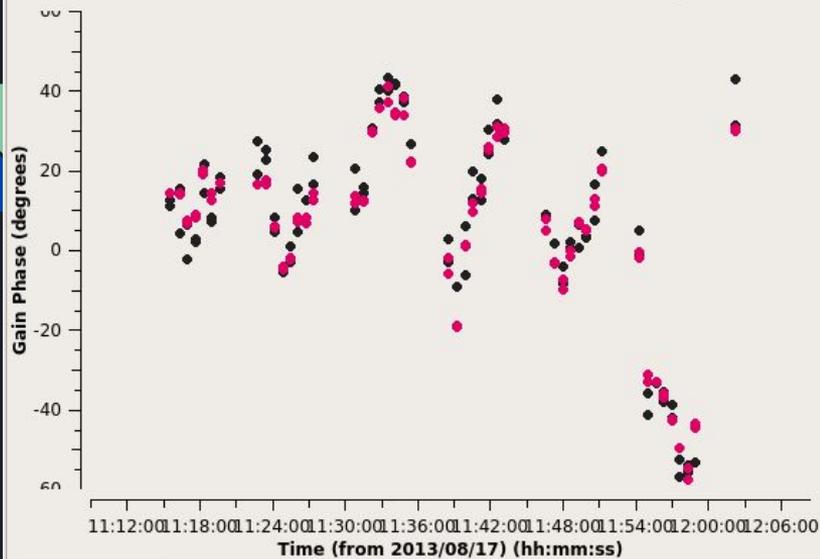
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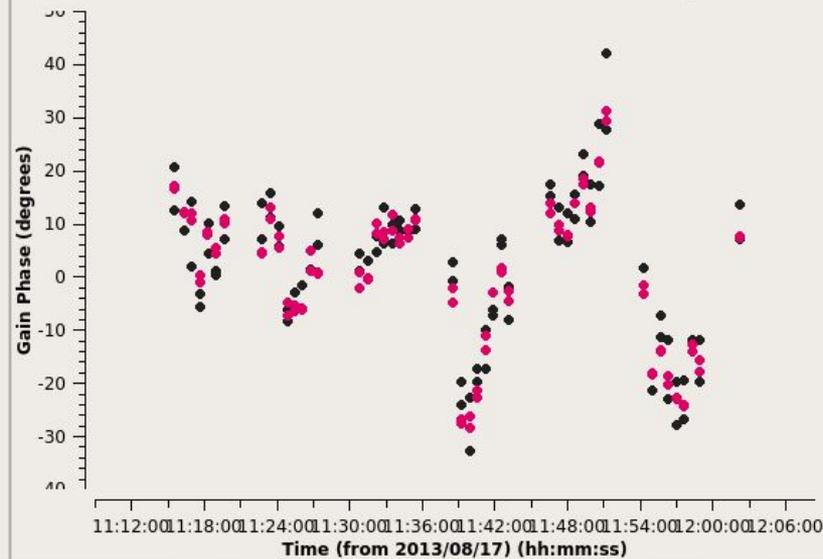
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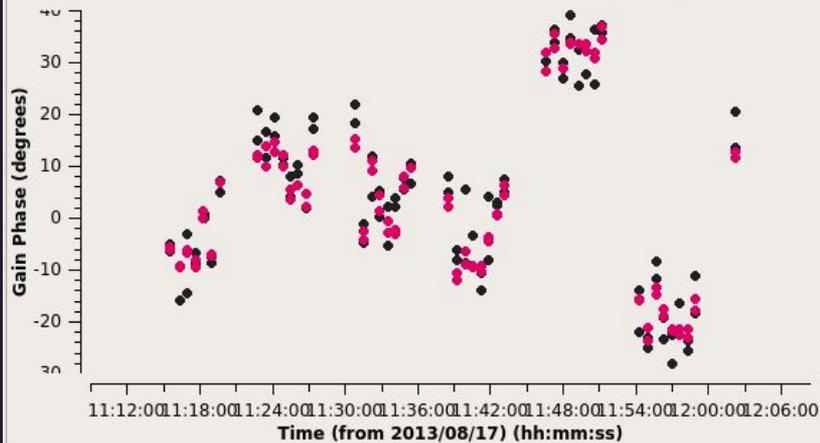
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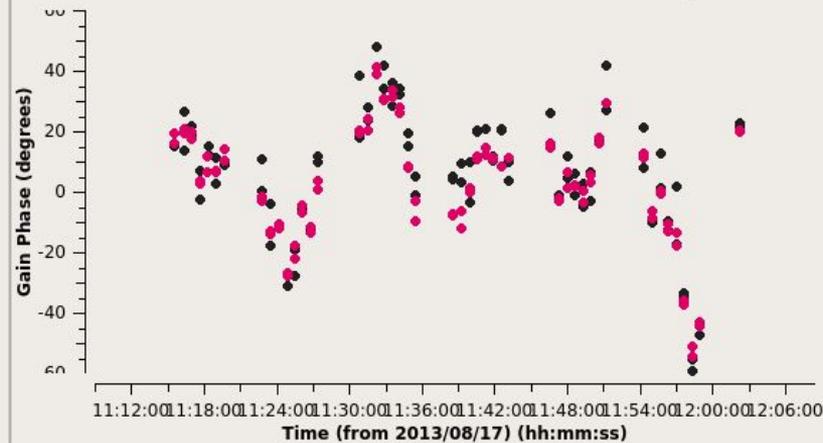
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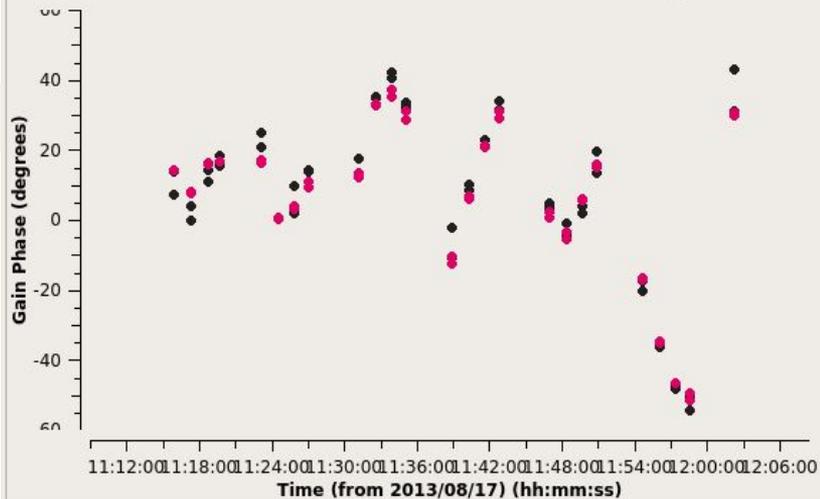
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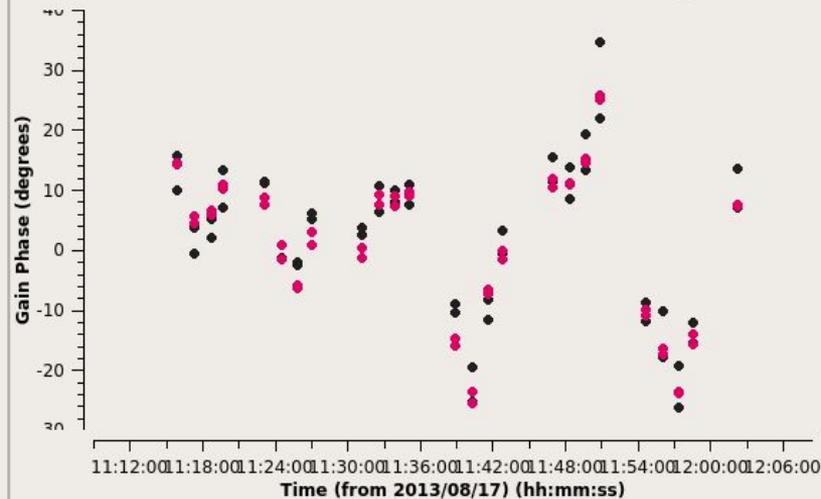
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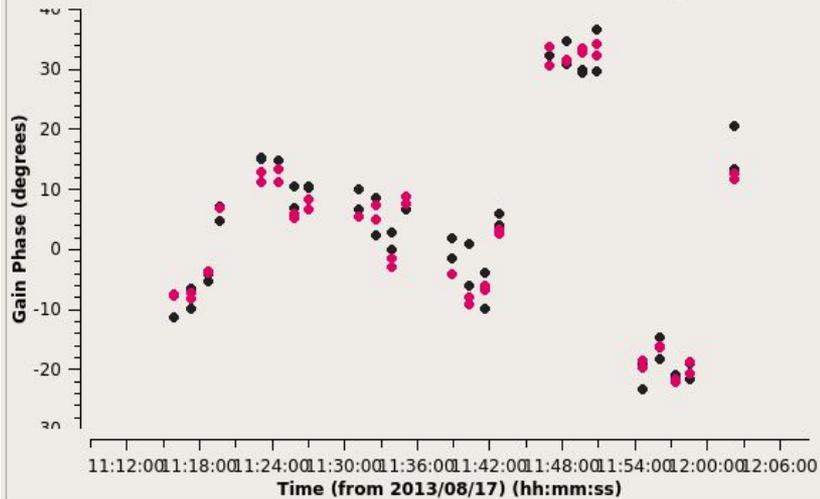
Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV03@A137



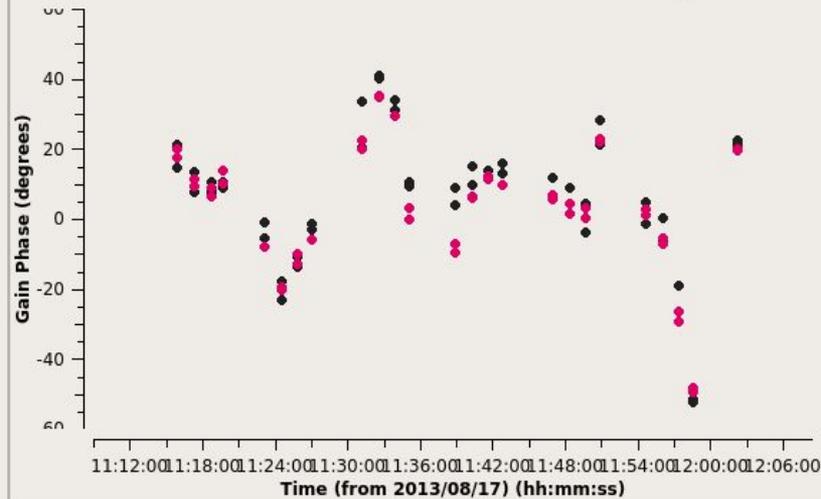
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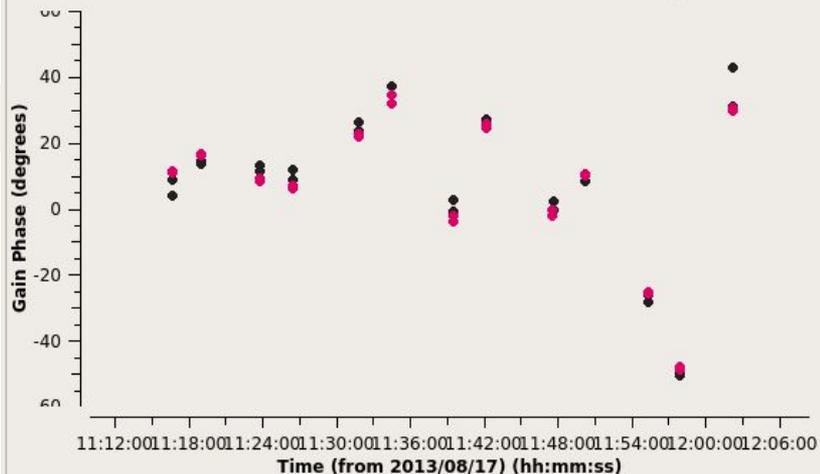
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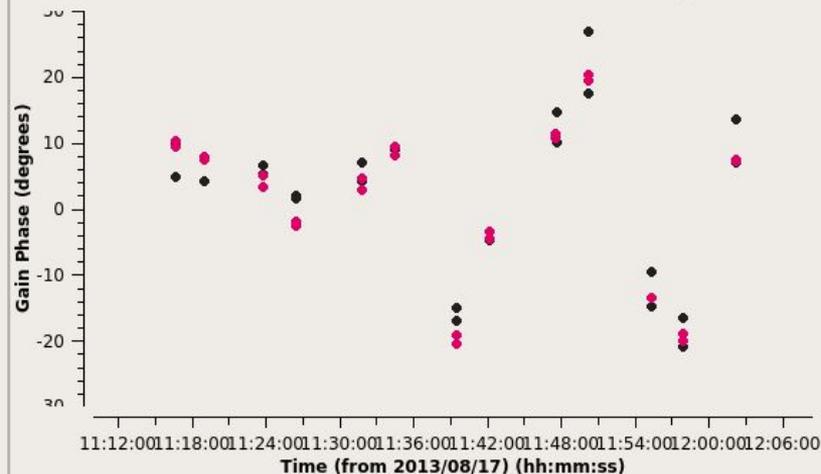
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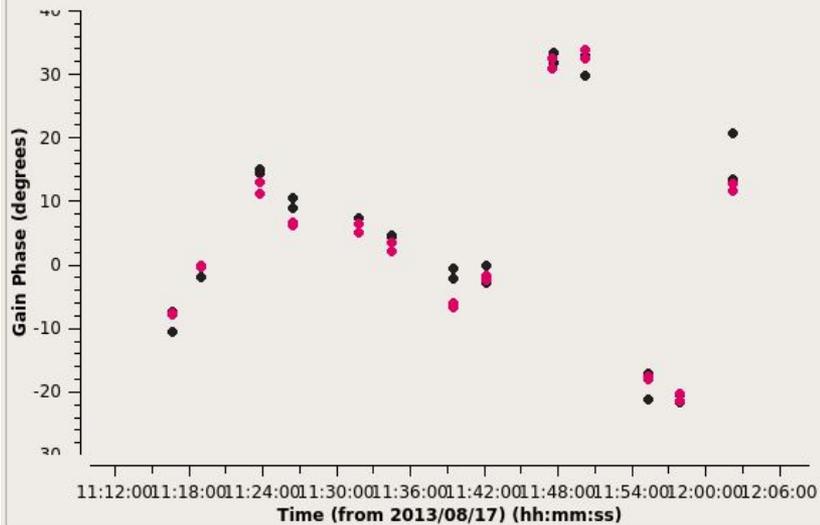
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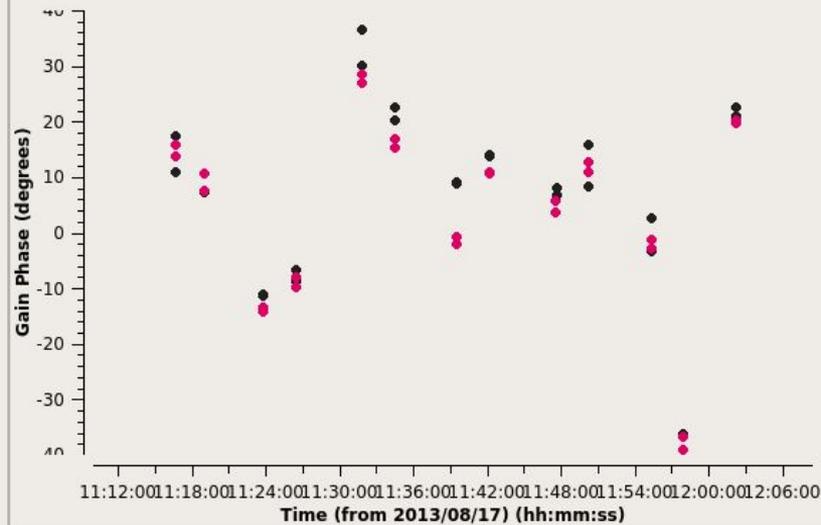
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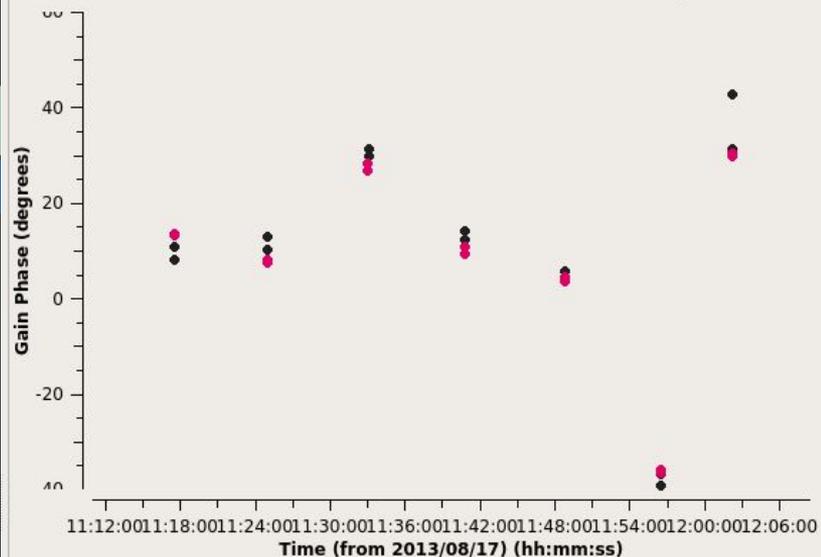
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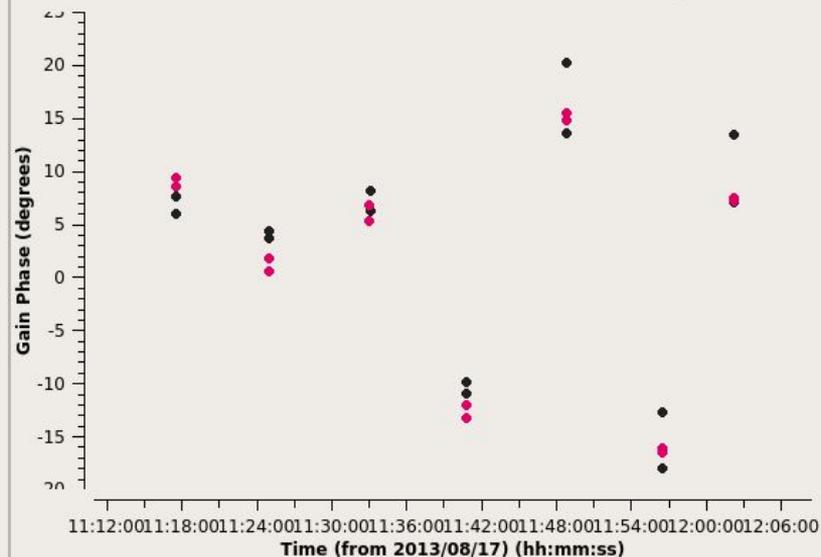
Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV07@A096



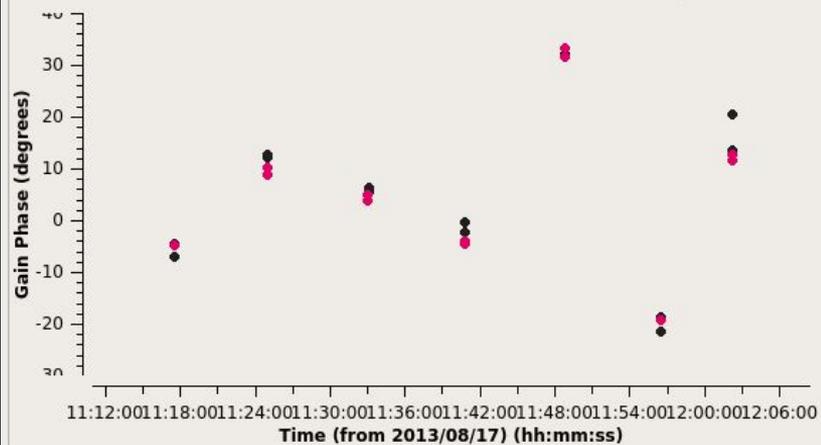
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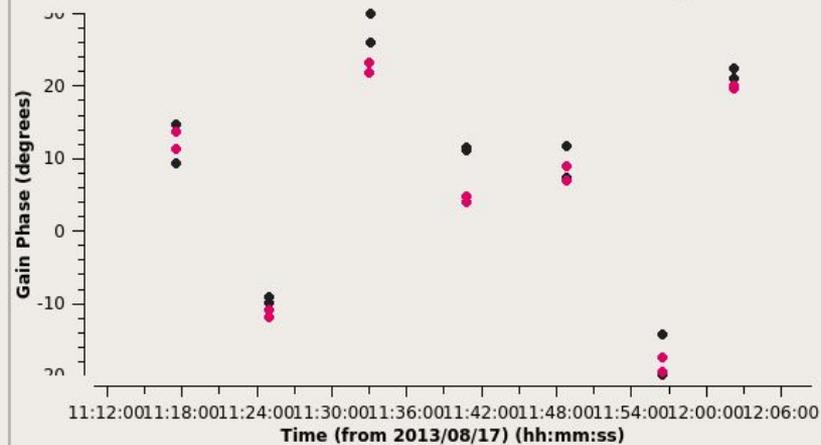
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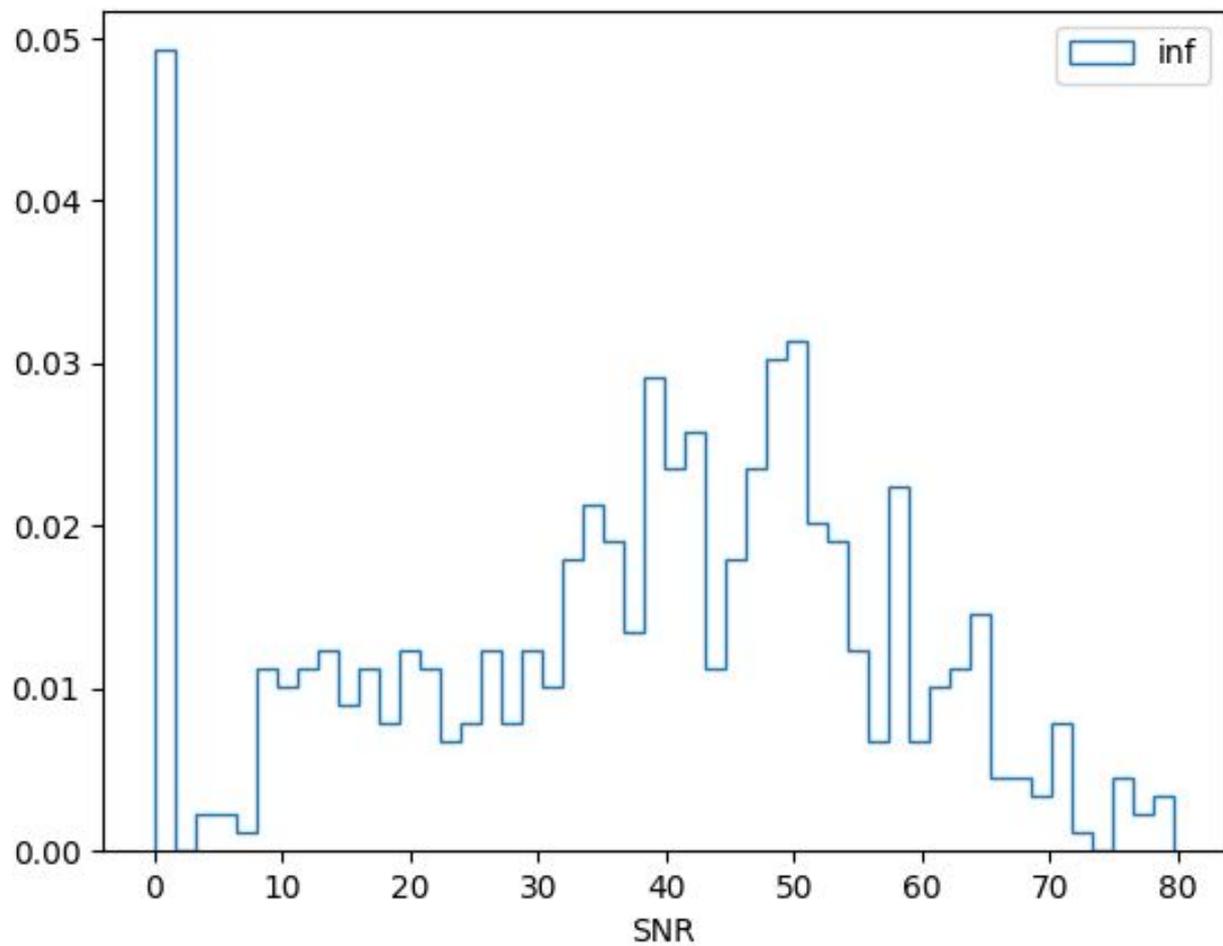


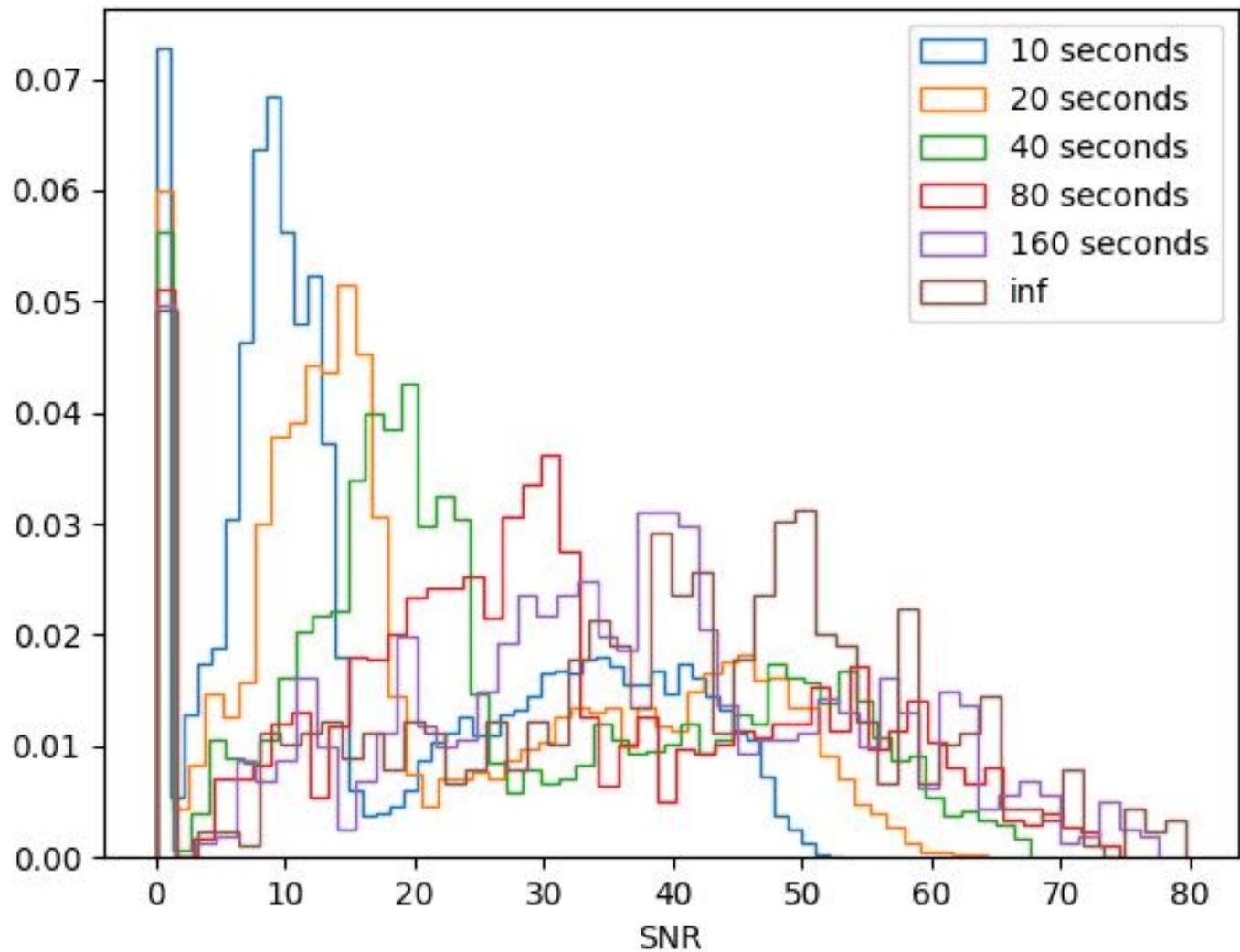
Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV05@A082



Gain Phase vs. Time Antenna: DV07@A096

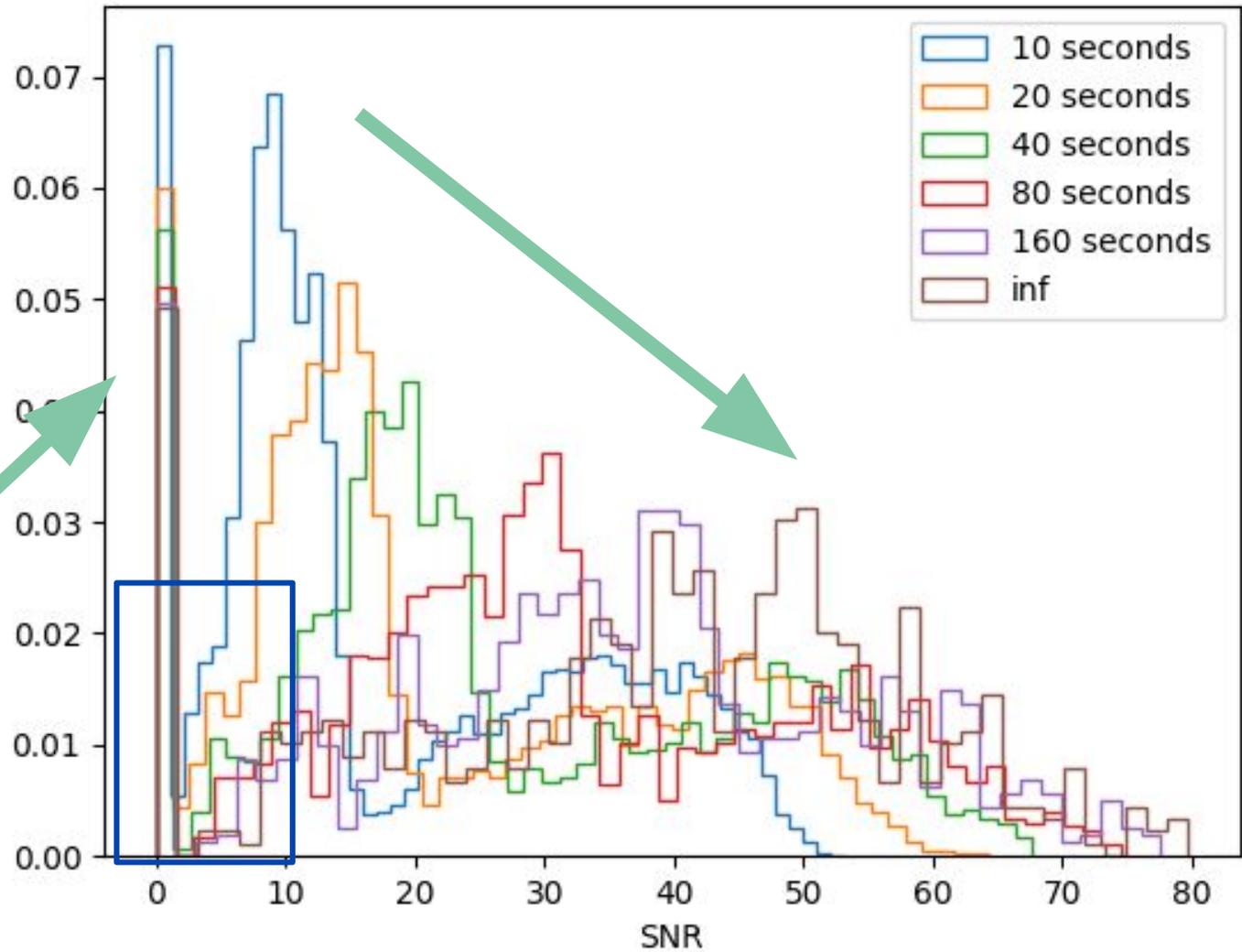


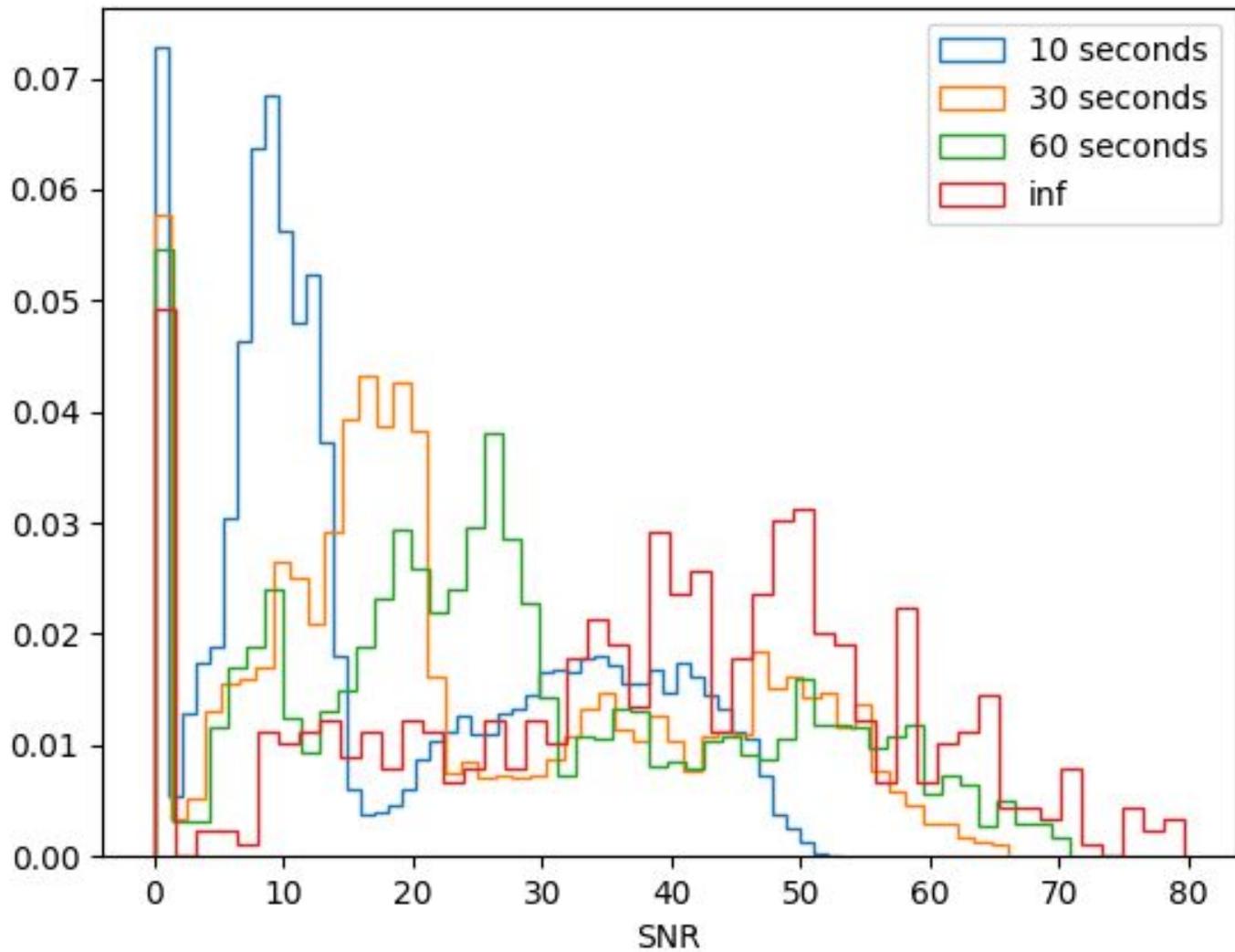


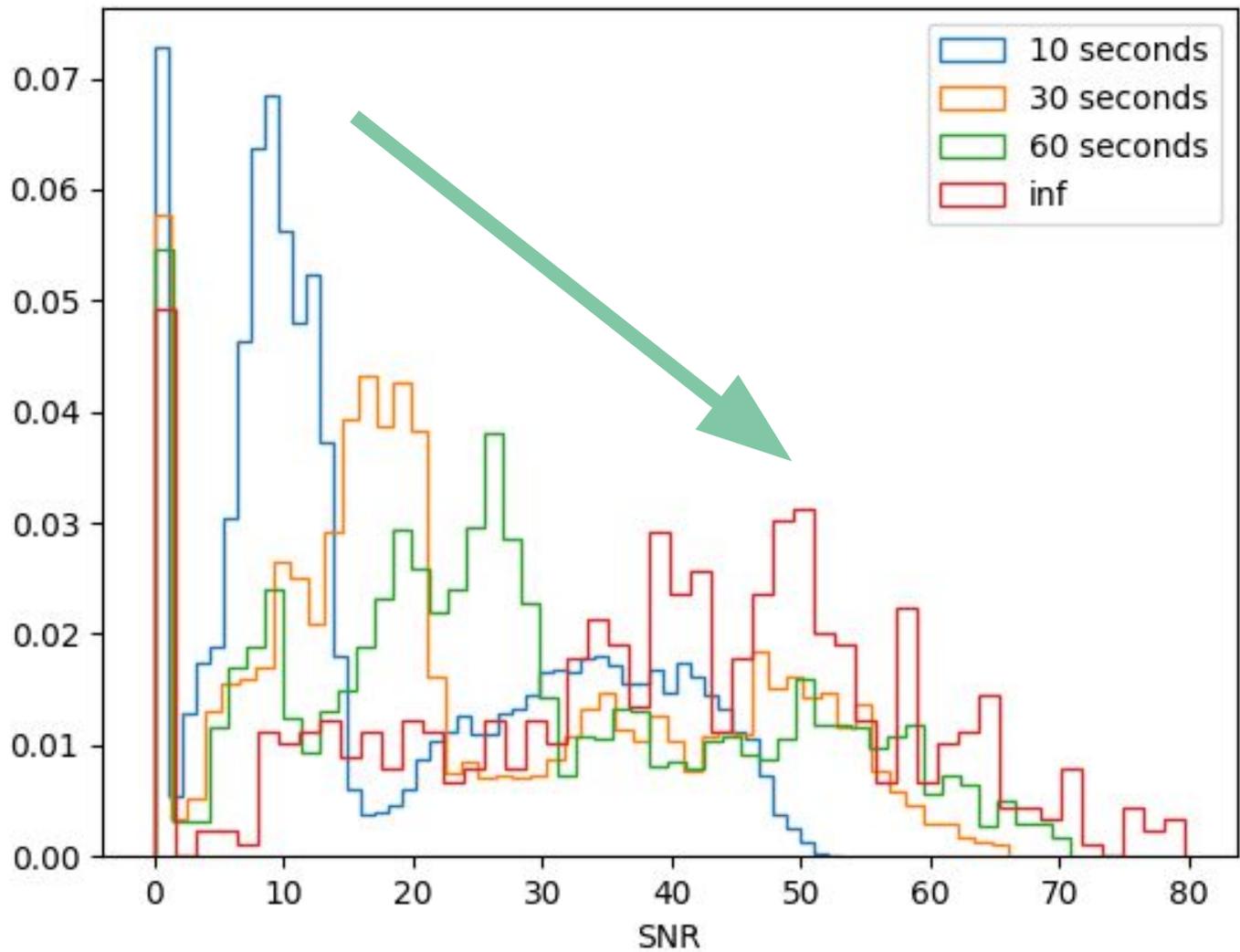




Failed solutions





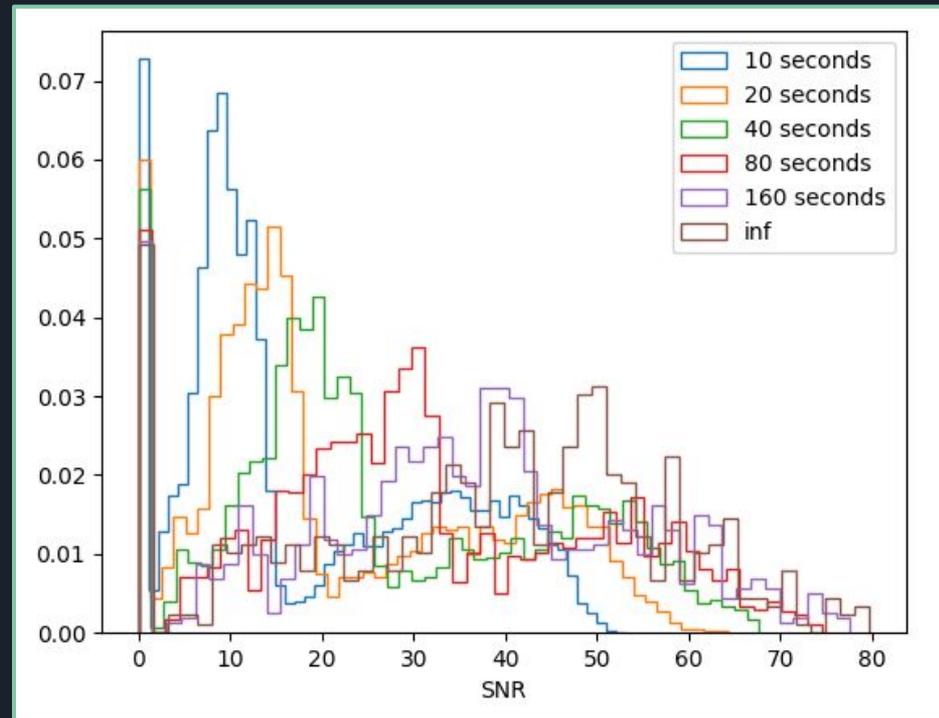
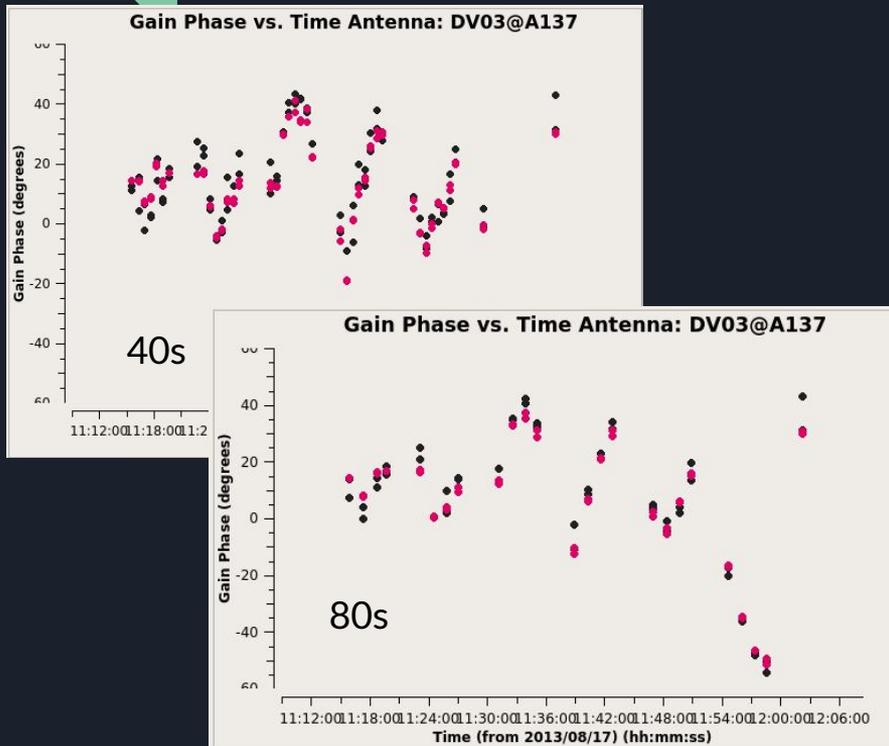




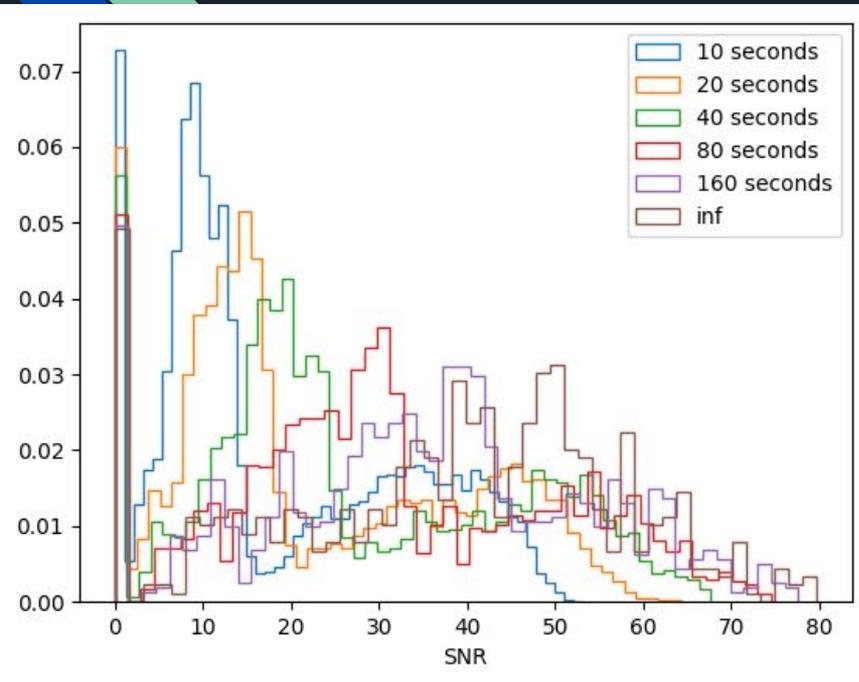
What you want in a solution interval

The shortest solution interval that balances (1) sampling the variations in the solutions, and (2) flagging the least amount of solutions.

solint~40-80s and minsnr~5

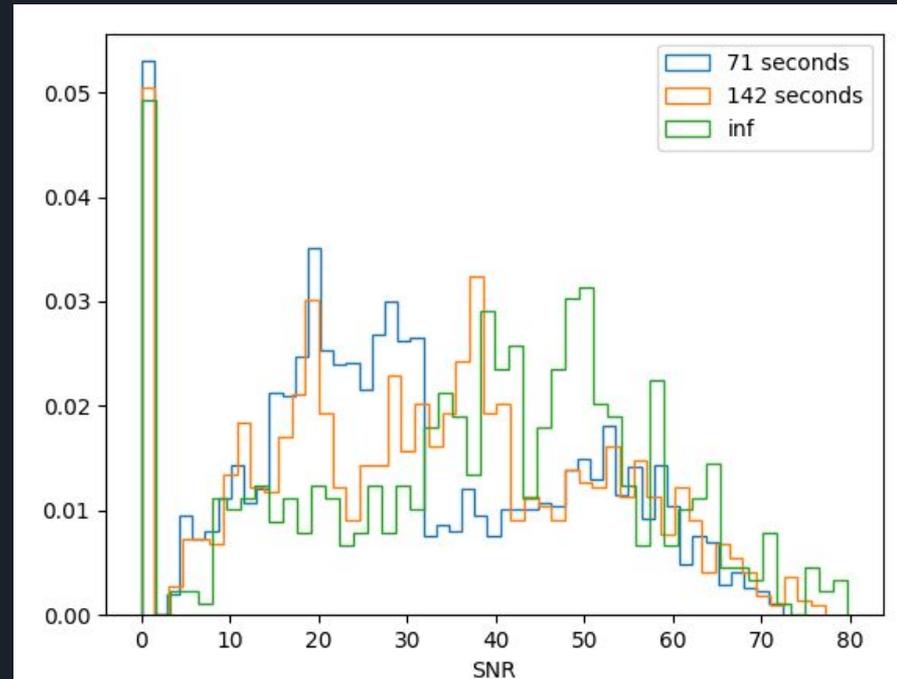


Ways of applying solution intervals with rounds of self-calibration



- Find optimal solution interval using S/N plots (higher S/N and flagged minimal solutions) apply and look at histograms again to find optimal solution interval and apply again

- Reduce solution intervals from inf (naturally improving model and increasing S/N) (inf, inf/2, inf/4, etc.) (conservative approach way to do left)



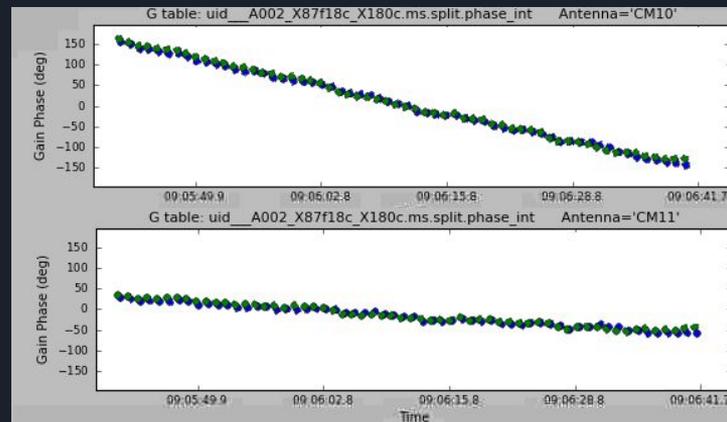
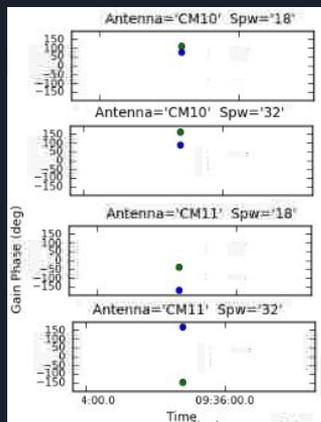
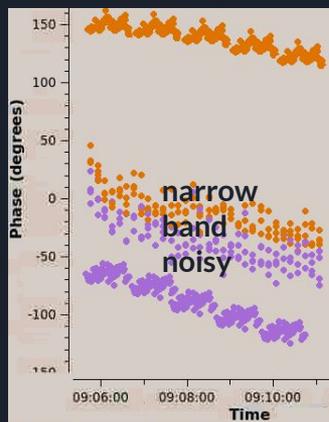
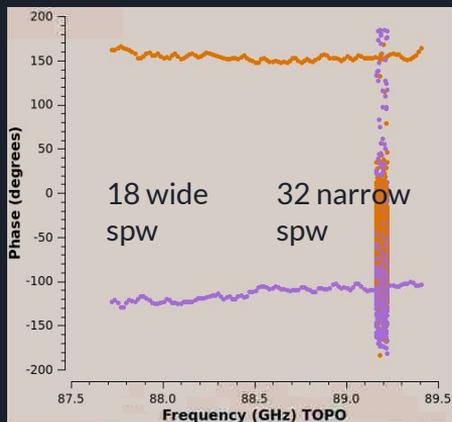


Increasing SNR in your gaintables

- Combine
 - Spectral Windows (e.g. 4 x equal spw doubles S/N)
 - If gain solutions are quite similar
 - `gaincal(combine='spw')` -> `applycal(spwmap='[0,0,0...number of spw]')`
 - Some spw normal-broad and others very narrow? Apply good solutions from broad windows to all spw (bandwidth switching)
 - **check if the spws have offsets (anything more than scatter in phase solutions ~10deg)
 - by plotting previous solutions and if so, will have to derive phase solution w bandpass calibrator with long solint (reach out to colleagues for help with this)
 - Polarizations
 - If gain solutions are quite similar
 - `gaincal(gaintype='T')`

Combining spw/polarizations? Things to check:

- Some spw OK, others very narrow?
- Apply good solutions to all spw (bandwidth switching, use spwmap)
 - Usually phase-referencing removes phase offsets between spw, correlations.
 - Plot phase-time to check (b). If offsets >5-10 deg, use bright source to remove
 - Exaggerated example:



(a) Bandpass calibrator Polarizations **XX**, **YY** Use as DiffGainCal (could, alternatively, use target itself)

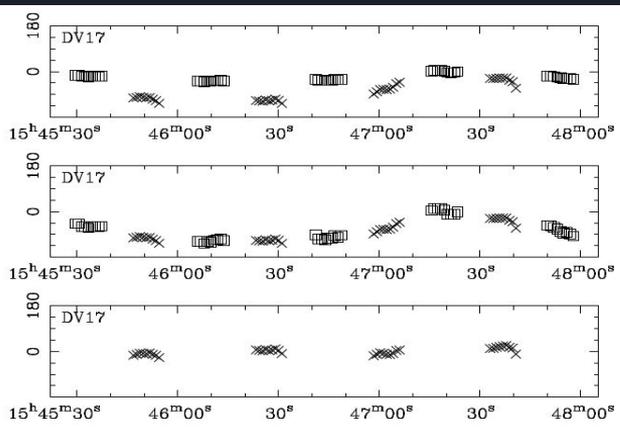
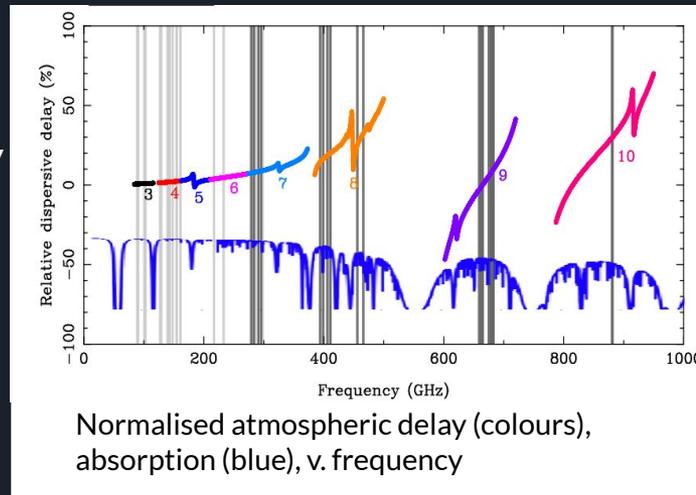
(b) Target to self-calibrate. WVR, Tsys, BP solutions applied. spw, poln phases have similar slopes, ~constant time offset

(c) DGC: average all times, solve for phase One correction per poln, per spw

(d) Apply DGC solns to target, derive time-dependent phase solutions for **wide spw 18**, p1 Corrections have same slope for **X, Y**, average about 0 Apply cal DGC solutions and p1 to spw 18 & 32

Transferring phase across large frequency intervals

- In ALMA bands, atmosphere mostly has refractive index ~ 1
 - Phase delays (cause of error) scale linearly with frequency
 - e.g. 45° correction at 220 GHz \Rightarrow 55° at 270 GHz
 - PhaseDelay suffix in CASA scales solutions by frequency
 - e.g. `applycal interp='linearPD'`
 - Usually negligible within one tuning,
 - Significant if frequency changes by $\geq 20\%$



- Phase solutions: band 3 squares \square , band 7 crosses \times
- Scale band 3 phases to band 7 frequency
- Apply to band 7; residuals ~ 0

Additional 'phase up'
needed for Band to Band,
see *Asaki et al. 2019*

(2) What can't be cured by self-calibration? (ALMA examples) (data might *also* need self-cal)

- Targets with S/N too low or where thermal noise is already reached
 - Although small phase errors can smear flux with negligible off-source noise - might be worth a try
- Bad data (maybe identified from failed solutions)
 - Pure noise (phase incoherent on all scales), spikes, very low amplitudes - **flag it!**
- 'Basket-weaving' /negative bowl - too few intermediate spacings/missing short-spacing flux
 - Reduce weight of long baselines with `uvtaper`, consider multiscale (`mtmfs`)
 - May need additional more compact array or Total Power data
- Target variability - spottiness around compact source gets worse with self-cal
 - Inspect uv amps v. time, possibly image in time chunks and/or `uvsub` variable core
- (unknown) Antenna position, pointing errors can be mitigated for compact, central sources
- Baseline-dependent errors (i.e. not antenna effects) need great care
 - `gaincal` solves per-antenna; `blcal` solves per baseline - need perfect model and high S/N
- Broad stripes shifting over planes of cube may be bandpass/delay errors
 - Can original bandpass/delay calibration be improved?
 - BP self-cal needs v. v. high S/N, smooth continuum, perfect model, spectral terms



Q: When do I stop doing rounds of self-cal?

A: When things stop getting better (recap)

- Carry on while you estimate something can be improved: Phase
 - If no/v. few solutions failed in the last gaincal, and the target phase still have errors (not just noise)
 - Try a shorter solint?
 - If you compare image with model and the mask you used and there is emission not in the model
 - Continue to improve model
 - Usually, want to get phase corrections as good as possible first
 - This reduces noise, improves image fidelity and may increase flux as correlation improves
 - Stop (or try something different) if S/N does not increase or target flux falls
 - Check improvements are realistic... beware forcing extended flux into a point
- For good S/N (here, ~ 100) try Amplitude self-cal applying phase solutions
 - Make an image+model including spectral index with `deconvolver='mtmfs', nterms=2`
 - Clean down close to the noise to make sure all the target flux is in the model
 - Examine visibility amplitudes - usually errors change more slowly than phase
 - Usually start with longer solint than the final phase solint
 - If, after amp self-cal, image flux is lower, try `solnorm=True`
 - Do another round improving model? Or maybe data are not bright enough
 - Stop (or try something different) if S/N does not increase or target flux falls

(3) More aspects of self-calibration

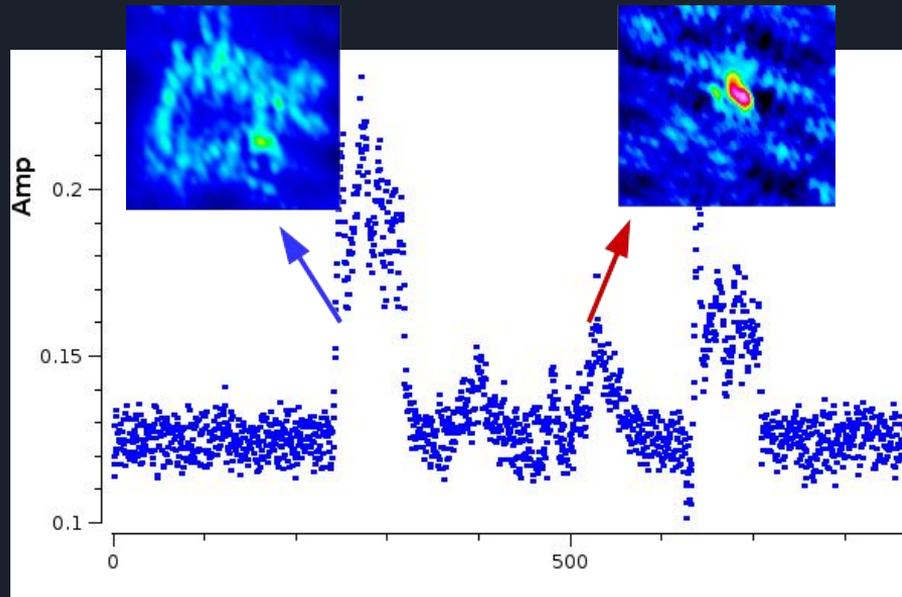
- As with any imaging, include **all significant sources in the field of view** to prepare model for self-calibration
- Check visibilities, after applycal, for bad data appearing as S/N increases
- For **mosaics** use field with brightest peak, apply to all fields (`gainfield` parameter in `gaincal/applycal`)
- For (weak) **polarization**: ALMA observes in X and Y receiver polarizations:
 - Make I (total intensity) model image
 - `gaincal gaintype = 'T'` (average correlations), real X -- Y differences are preserved
- For **extended objects** can use multiscale clean to produce model
- Amp self-cal to make **flux scale consistent** (assume no time variability!)
 - Flux scale offsets between observations at different times, and between spw (e.g. atmospheric effects)
 - Use continuum, may need to allow for **spectral index** α (`tclean deconvolver='mtmfs'`)
 - Flux density at freq ν_1 is related to that at ν_0 by $S_1 = S_0 (\nu_1/\nu_0)^\alpha$
 - e.g. $S_0 = 9$ mJy, $\nu_0 = 86$ GHz, $\nu_1 = 100$ GHz, $\alpha = 2$, so $(S_0 - S_1) = 3.2$ mJy
 - If change in flux $(S_0 - S_1)$ is more than $\sim 3\sigma_{\text{rms}}$ **in each spw**:
 - Use `nterms=2` in making image model, `ft *tt0` and `*tt1` models

(4) Calibrate on line or continuum?

- Start with continuum if possible to make multiple observations consistent (point (3))
 - Is S/N of brightest line peak much higher than for continuum?
 - Or, is line but not continuum bright enough to self-cal?
- Might be possible to self-calibrate on line brightest channel(s)
- Even after self-calibration on continuum, S/N on a line might be higher
 - Here, VY CMa best continuum S/N ~200
 - Potential maser peak S/N ~1000
 - After continuum self-cal, improve line S/N

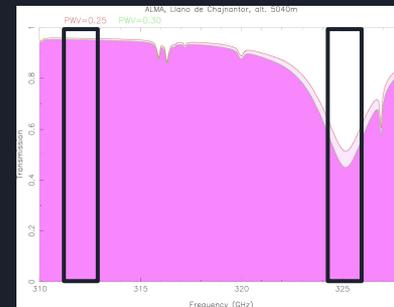
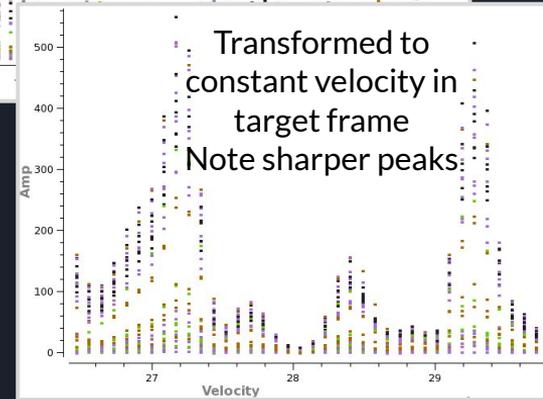
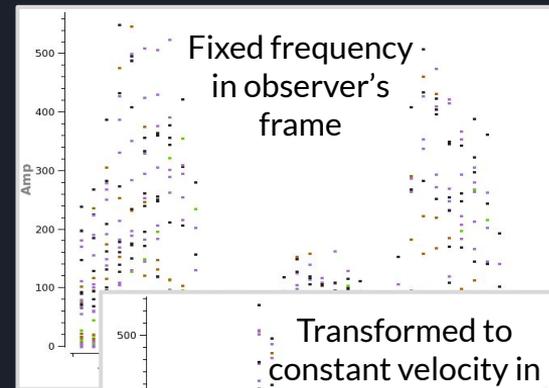
Tip: **Triangular** lines more likely to have compact emission for self-cal

- Lower spectral peak but higher Jy/beam



Spectral line for self-calibration

- Combining executions?
 - Earth rotation shifts channel-velocity correspondence
- For each EB, use `mstransform` to split spw's into V_{LSR} frame
 - Calculate start channels at same velocities for each spw for concat
- Select peak channel for imaging
 - If flat-topped maybe a few channels but check position same
 - Take care not to decrease averaged S/N by including weak channels
 - Insert model just for appropriate channel(s)
- Use `gaincal` just for selected channel(s)
- Apply corrections to all channels
 - Exceptionally, might confine to one sideband if drastic atmospheric differences



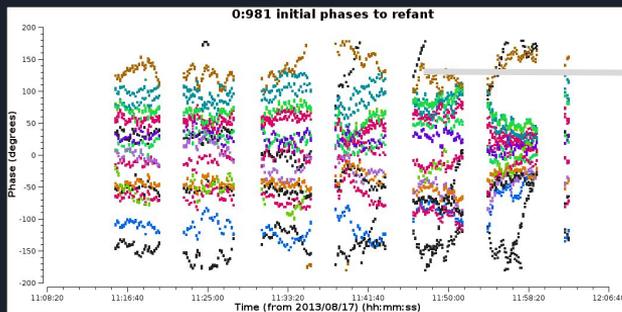
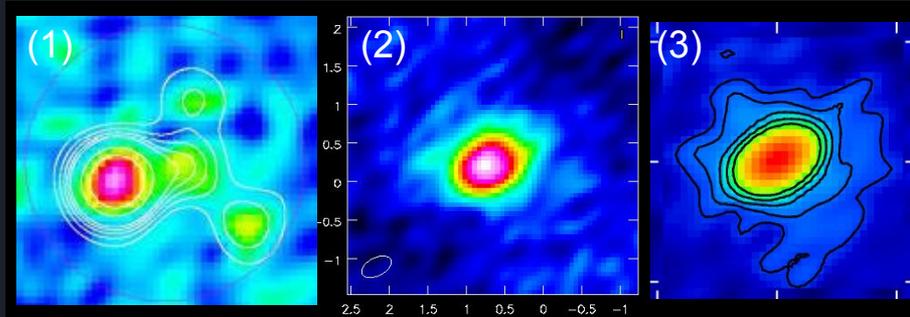
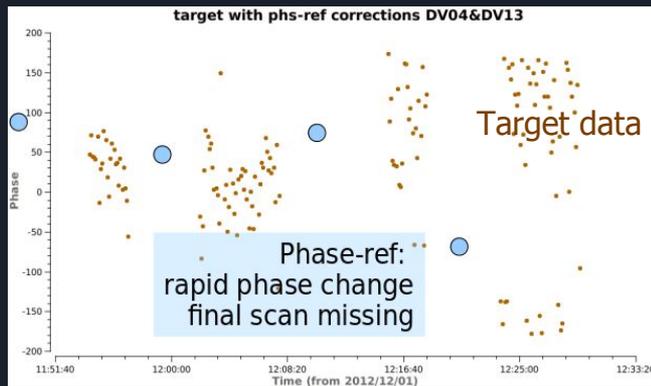
(5) Rescuing poor data

- First image (1) with all target data has 'ears'!
 - 3rd target scan is noisy
 - 4th scan has no phase reference
 - Make image, model from scans 1-2
 - Use to self-calibrate all scans

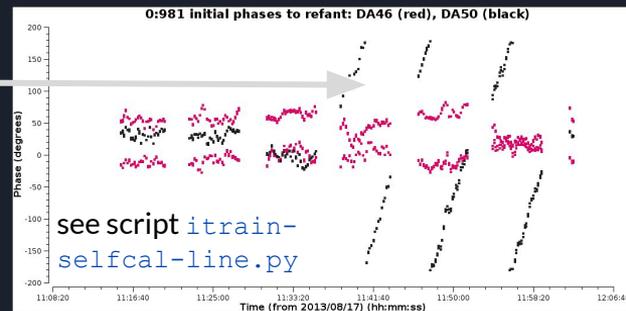
(1) All scans, no self-cal (2) Scans 1-2 first image
(3) All scans after self-calibration

IRC+10216, *Decin et al. 2015*

- VY CMa DA50 phase wraps



DA50: scan-average would decorrelate
Exclude for self-cal until good model derived
Then include, phase-self-cal with short solution interval



(6) Sources of error

Target-phase ref separation in time and direction

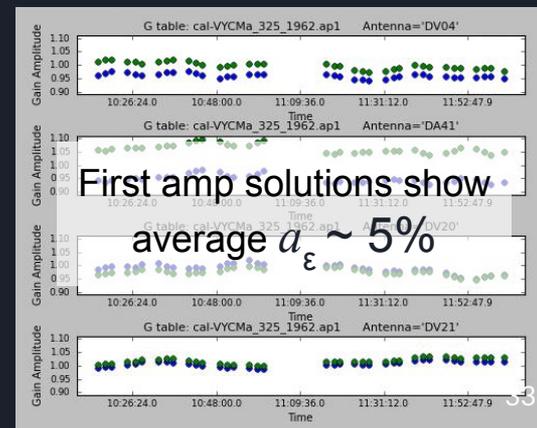
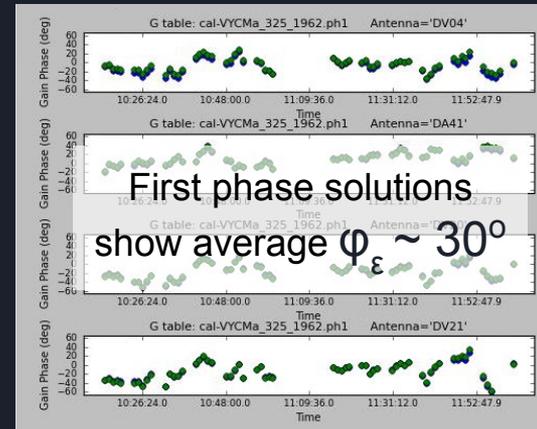
- Phase drift with time: example
 - Raw calibrator phase change $d\phi_{\text{atm}} \sim \pi$ per ~ 20 min
 - $\sim 36^\circ$ phase deviation in each phref-target cycle
- Separation on sky equivalent to time offset
 - Phase-ref: target separation $d\theta = 2^\circ = 120$ arcmin
 - 1° angular separation $\equiv 4$ min time (4^m RA)
 - $(d\theta/360^\circ) \times \cos(\text{Dec.}) \times 24\text{hr} \sim 7.5$ min at Dec. 20°
 - In 7.5 min, $d\phi_{\text{atm}}$ gives $\pi \times 7.5/20 \sim 65^\circ$ phase change due to sky separation
 - Phase-ref corrections error $\sim (\sqrt{(65^2 + 36^2)})/2 \sim (75^\circ)/2$ when interpolated across target scans
 - Mitigated if many scans, baselines, with errors in different senses
- Jitter on scales shorter than a scan also remains
 - $\sim 10^\circ$ in 30 sec
- Averaging phase fluctuations causes amp decorrelation
- Visibility $V = V_o e^{i\phi}$ so $\langle V \rangle = V_o \langle e^{i\phi} \rangle = V_o e^{-(\phi_{\text{rms}}^2)/2}$
 - Phase error $\phi_\epsilon 10^\circ$ produces 2% reduction in Visibility amplitude



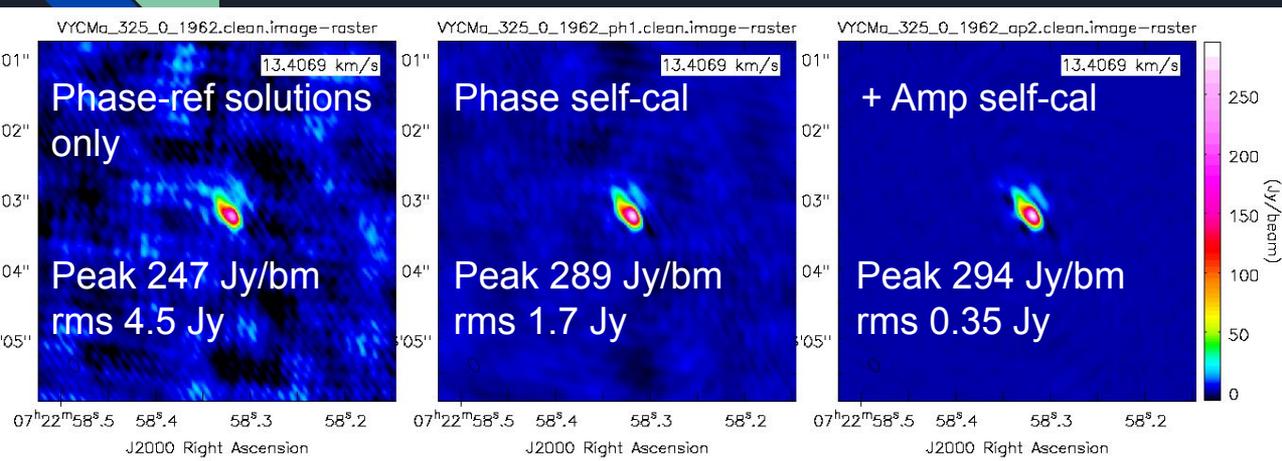
(7) Bright Sources: Dynamic Range

- Dynamic range $DB(\varphi_\epsilon)$ due to phase errors φ_ϵ (rad) on all baselines, per scan for N antennas $\sim N / \varphi_\epsilon$
 - M periods when φ_ϵ independent as atmosphere blows over
 - $DB(\varphi_\epsilon) = \sqrt{M/2} \times N / \varphi_\epsilon$
- Similarly for fractional amplitude errors A_ϵ
 - $DB(A_\epsilon) = \sqrt{M/2} \times N / A_\epsilon$
- 2 hr obs, 2.7 km b'lines/5 km/h wind ~ 30 min so $M=4$
 - e.g. $\varphi_\epsilon = \text{radians}(30^\circ) \sim 0.5$, $N = 20$ gives $DB(\varphi_\epsilon) \sim 54$
 - $A_\epsilon = 0.05$ so $DB(A_\epsilon) \sim 280$
- Even if no errors transferring corrections to target, limited by phase-ref dynamic range (see *Synthesis Imaging ch 13*)

VY CMa brightest 325 GHz maser channel



VY CMa maser self-calibration - compact peak



$$V = Ae^{i\phi} = A(\sin(\phi) + i\cos(\phi))$$

Phase errors are \sin (odd),
asymmetric +ive/-ive in image

Amp errors are \cos (even)
symmetric function in image

- Dynamic range DB before self-cal 55 (DB 54 predicted from $\varphi_{\epsilon} 30^{\circ}$)
- After 1st phase self-cal DB 170
- After phase and amp self-cal DB 840
- Phase-ref J0648-3044 0.44 Jy, rms in line-free parts of 325 GHz spw 4 mJy
 - Best dynamic range possible without self-cal $440/4 = 110$



(8) Methods of Implementing Self-cal

1. Incremental build-up of corrections **more flexible, less increase in data volume**
 - a. Make model, derive calibration table p1, apply
 - i. Applycal always uses the *data* column and (over)writes the *corrected* column
 - b. Image again (*corrected* column), calibrate again (p2) applying table p1 in gaincal, applycal with p1+p2
 - c. Continue adding tables until no more improvement, then apply all tables and split out calibrated data
 - i. You can discard a model or a gain table, for example if the final amplitude cal makes a better model, throw away the last phase table and the amp table and redo those steps
 - ii. Always, whatever table(s) you apply as gaintable in gaincal, apply those plus the new table in applycal
2. Split corrected column from MS after each correction **can be simpler but multiplies data volume**
 - a. Make model, derive calibration table p1, apply, split out *corrected* column
 - i. So in new MS, previous corrections are in *data* column
 - b. Image split data, derive calibration table p2, apply just new table p2 to new MS, split that
 - c. Continue until no more improvement and final split of calibrated data

(9) Why phase first, then amplitude?

- If there are phase errors, the amplitude will decorrelate
- Phase fluctuations due to atmospheric refraction change faster than amplitude drifts due to absorption/emission
 - e.g. ALMA measures PWV every few sec, T_{sys} every few minutes
- Amplitude solutions require higher S/N per antenna - longer solint
- Analogous to closure relations (not actually method used in gaincal):
 - Visibility for baseline between antennas 1 and 2: $V_{12} = Ae^{i\phi_{12}}$
 - Add visibility phases for 3 baselines and phase errors cancel out - phase closure
$$[(\phi_{12} + (\phi_{\epsilon 1} - \phi_{\epsilon 2}))] + [(\phi_{23} + (\phi_{\epsilon 2} - \phi_{\epsilon 3}))] + [(\phi_{31} + (\phi_{\epsilon 3} - \phi_{\epsilon 1}))] = \phi_{12} + \phi_{23} + \phi_{31}$$
 - Amplitude closure needs 4 antennas, i.e. more baselines contribute to each solution
$$\frac{[A_{12}A_{\epsilon 1}A_{\epsilon 2}] \times [A_{23}A_{\epsilon 3}A_{\epsilon 3}]}{[A_{34}A_{\epsilon 3}A_{\epsilon 4}] \times [A_{41}A_{\epsilon 4}A_{\epsilon 1}]} = \frac{A_{12}A_{23}}{A_{34}A_{41}}$$
- Very occasionally, an antenna is totally mis-scaled in amplitude - need to fix it early on



(10) Final image accuracy

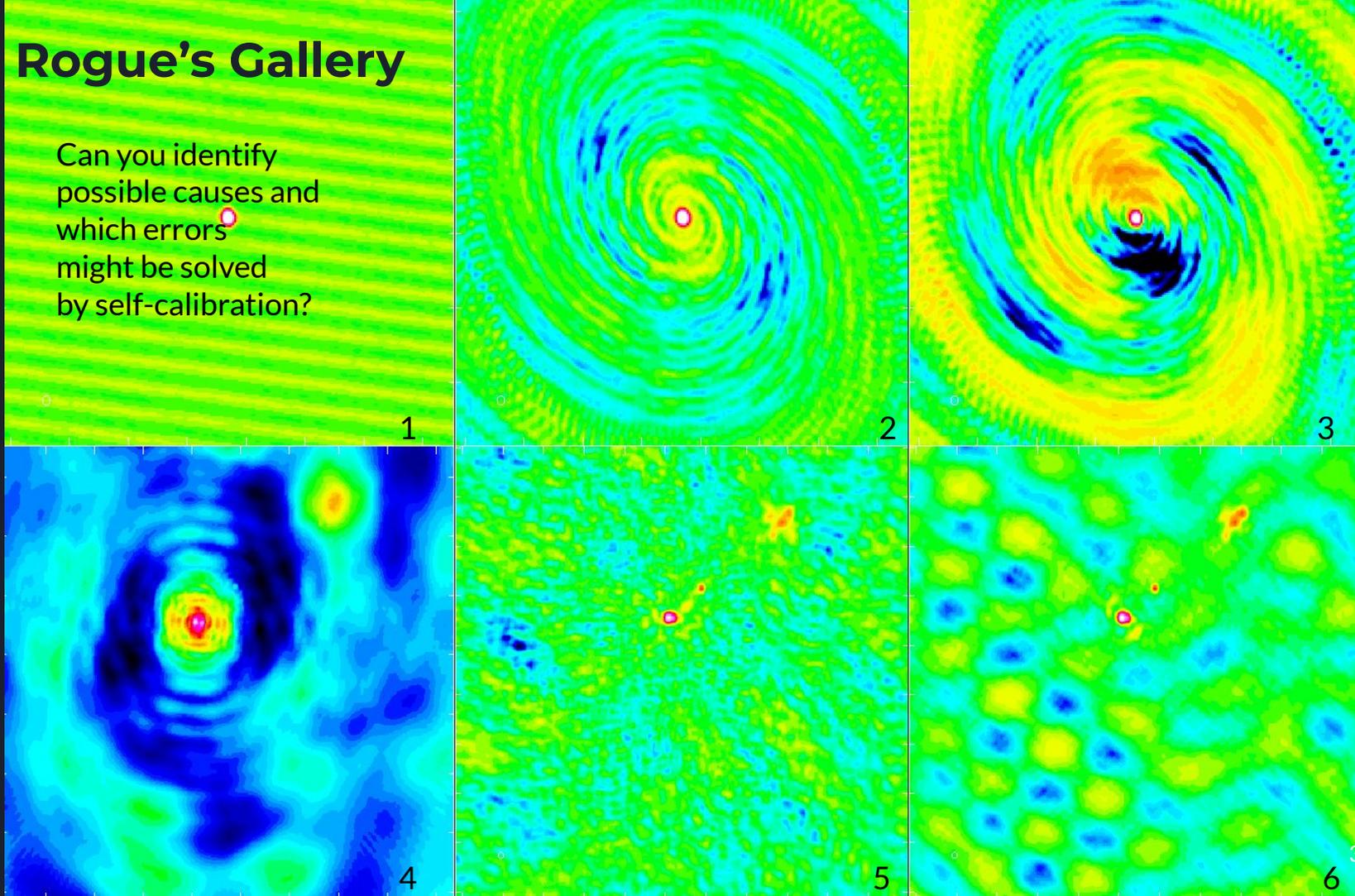
- Astrometry - factors influencing accuracy
 - Antenna positions
 - Phase reference position accuracy
 - Phase correction accuracy: phase rate, offsets in time and angular separation
 - Target S/N
 - Resolution
 - First image after applying phase reference solution gives target position
 - **Using first image as model keeps astrometrically accurate position**
 - But self-cal cannot *improve* absolute position even if target S/N improves
- Flux scale (photometry)
 - Mostly determined by flux standard accuracy and determination of phase reference flux
 - Can be over-estimated (`fluxscale` biased to higher values in noisy data)
 - Target flux may be reduced by phase decorrelation or not all flux in amplitude model
 - More rarely, overcleaning a compact model may pile in too much flux

My image is still awful! Noisy/no source/...

- Check weblogs/QA log, previous calibration - is phase ref OK?
- Check all non-default settings in tclean are appropriate
- Check how much data you have in plotms (so flagged data don't appear)
 - Use sensitivity calculator to predict rms - get PWV from weblog/QA logs
- You've checked for bad data
 - If you tried self-calibration, were the solutions coherent? Applied correctly? Right model?
- Does more channel averaging or tapering the beam improve S/N?
- Is there more emission in the field of view? (especially nearby galaxies, Galactic SFR)
 - Make larger image, inspect uvdistance plot
 - Do you need more compact array/total power data to fill in missing spacings?
 - Already combined? Are positions and flux scale correctly aligned?
- Wide bandwidth continuum? Solve for spectral index (see More Aspects slide)
- Extended emission? `deconvolver='mtmfs'` or `'multiscale'`

Rogue's Gallery

Can you identify possible causes and which errors might be solved by self-calibration?



Rogue's Gallery

Bad data on long baseline
(or bright but distant
confusion, if lines curve)

1

Amp error - maybe cure
by self-calibration

2

Phase error - maybe cure
by self-calibration

3

Undercleaning?
Missing short spacings?

4

Confusion (or bad data
on short baseline, if lines
straight)

5

Basket-weaving?
Delay errors? - improve delay
/bandpass pre-calibration
Too low 'robust' value?

6



Resources/More information

VLA Self-cal Tutorial ([https://casaguides.nrao.edu/index.php?title=VLA Self-calibration Tutorial-CASA5.7.0](https://casaguides.nrao.edu/index.php?title=VLA_Self-calibration_Tutorial-CASA5.7.0))

ALMA Self-cal Tutorial ([https://casaguides.nrao.edu/index.php?title=First Look at Self Calibration](https://casaguides.nrao.edu/index.php?title=First_Look_at_Self_Calibration))

Advanced Gain Calibration Techniques (Brogan et al. 2018): <https://arxiv.org/abs/1805.05266>

INAF (<http://www.alma.inaf.it/images/Selfcalibration.pdf>)

NAASC ([https://science.nrao.edu/facilities/alma/naasc-workshops/nrao-cd-wm16/Selfcal Madison.pdf](https://science.nrao.edu/facilities/alma/naasc-workshops/nrao-cd-wm16/Selfcal_Madison.pdf))

ALLEGRO ([https://www.alma-allegro.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Allegro CASATrainingDay2018 selfcalupdate.pdf](https://www.alma-allegro.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Allegro_CASATrainingDay2018_selfcalupdate.pdf))

ERIS (<https://www.chalmers.se/en/researchinfrastructure/oso/events/ERIS2019>)

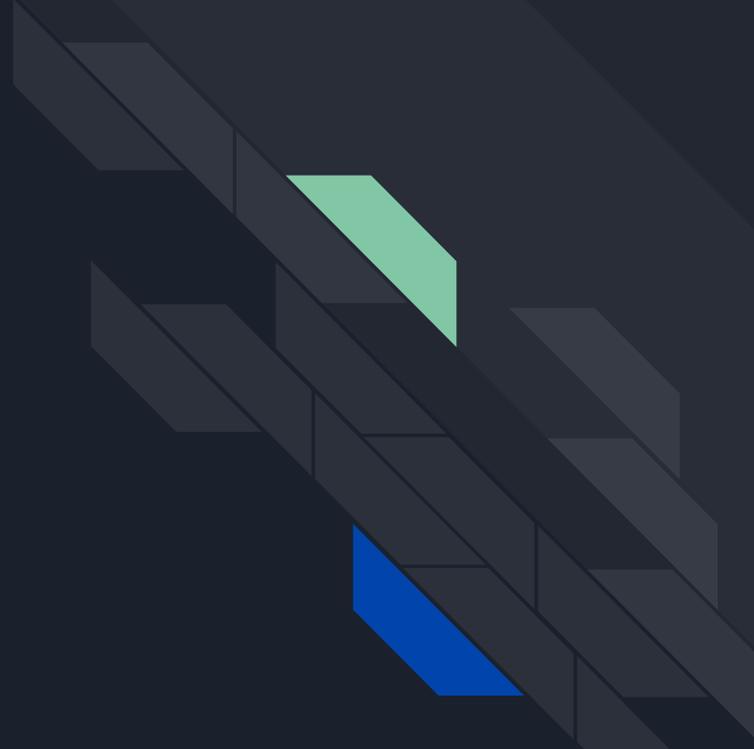
DARA (<http://www.ib.man.ac.uk/DARA/>)

Synthesis Imaging Taylor, Carilli & Perley (<http://www.phys.unm.edu/~gbtaylor/astr423/s98book.pdf>)

ALMA technical handbook for current cycle

ALMA memos

Additional slides





Advanced script that shows how self-calibrate using a line and how to recover antenna DA50

In this tutorial we provide an example script on how to perform self-calibration of a dataset using a strong maser line (instead of using the continuum):

```
itrain-selfcal-line.py
```

In this case the antenna DA50 is not flagged in the Measurement Set. Given its suspicious behaviour, the antenna is excluded of the first cycles of self-calibration. In particular, the antenna is excluded at the time of generating new models with `tclean` by specifying `antenna='!DA50'`.

Given its behaviour, we exclude antenna DA50 until a good model is derived and then we include it for a phase self-calibration step with a short solution interval.