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Synaptic Transmission Optimization Predicts Expression Loci of Long-Term Plasticity

Highlights
- A theory of synaptic plasticity that predicts pre- and postsynaptic expression loci
- The framework captures LTP and LTD data across different experiments and brain regions
- Variability of pre/post changes due to optimizing postsynaptic response statistics
- Optimization at inhibitory synapses suggests a statistically optimal E/I balance

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In Brief
For decades the variability in expression loci of long-term synaptic plasticity has remained enigmatic. Costa et al. propose a theory in which this variability is a consequence of postsynaptic response optimization, consistent with a wide range of experimental observations.
Synaptic Transmission Optimization Predicts Expression Loci of Long-Term Plasticity

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SUMMARY

Long-term modifications of neuronal connections are critical for reliable memory storage in the brain. However, their locus of expression—pre- or postsynaptic—is highly variable. Here we introduce a theoretical framework in which long-term plasticity performs an optimization of the postsynaptic response statistics toward a given mean with minimal variance. Consequently, the state of the synapse at the time of plasticity induction determines the ratio of pre- and postsynaptic modifications. Our theory explains the experimentally observed expression loci of the hippocampal and neocortical synaptic potentiation studies we examined. Moreover, the theory predicts presynaptic expression of long-term depression, consistent with experimental observations. At inhibitory synapses, the theory suggests a statistically efficient excitatory-inhibitory balance in which changes in inhibitory postsynaptic response statistics specifically target the mean excitation. Our results provide a unifying theory for understanding the expression mechanisms and functions of long-term synaptic transmission plasticity.

INTRODUCTION

Our brain must retain accurate memories of past events. Reliable memory storage is believed to depend on long-term modifications in synaptic transmission (Gruart et al., 2006; Nabavi et al., 2014; Costa et al., 2017). In synapses, the combined effect of presynaptic release and subsequent postsynaptic detection of neurotransmitters on the postsynaptic membrane potential has been formalized as a (Binomial) stochastic process whose mean and variance depend on $P_{\text{rel}}$, $N$ and $q$, such that

$$\text{mean} = NqP_{\text{rel}}$$

and

$$\text{variance} = Nq^2P_{\text{rel}}(1 - P_{\text{rel}}).$$

Here, $P_{\text{rel}}$ is the probability of presynaptic release at $N$ release sites, each affecting the delivery of a quantized charge $q$ into the postsynaptic cell (Figure 1A) (Del Castillo and Katz, 1954; Malagon et al., 1997; Sáez and Friedlander, 2007). Recent experimental methods allow one to observe the molecular machinery that underlies presynaptic and postsynaptic plasticity in ever increasing detail (Dudok et al., 2015; Tang et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2017). On the other hand theoretical models of long-term synaptic plasticity typically only capture mean changes in the synaptic efficacy (Gerstner et al., 1996; Song et al., 2000; Senn et al., 2001; Seung, 2003; Froemke et al., 2006; Pfister and Gerstner, 2006; Clopath et al., 2010; Vogels et al., 2011; Graupner and Brunel, 2012), even when explicitly modeling pre- and postsynaptic expression (Senn et al., 2001; Costa et al., 2015).

To our best knowledge, no theory has been proposed to explain the long standing riddle of high variability in the expression loci of long-term synaptic plasticity. Here we propose that experimentally observed combinations of pre- and postsynaptic changes are a consequence of an optimization of the postsynaptic response statistics. In this framework of statistical long-term synaptic plasticity (statLTSP), the initial state of the synapse determines the appropriate changes toward an upper or lower statistical bound, i.e., toward a response with minimal variance and a given mean. This view of minimal variance of the postsynaptic responses is consistent with experimental observations of highly reliable synapses and responses in vitro and in vivo (Silver et al., 2003; Arenz et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2017; Padamsey and Emptage, 2013) (Figure 1B). Recent experimental methods allow one to observe the molecular machinery that underlies presynaptic and postsynaptic plasticity in ever increasing detail (Dudok et al., 2015; Tang et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2017). On the other hand theoretical models of long-term synaptic plasticity typically only capture mean changes in the synaptic efficacy (Gerstner et al., 1996; Song et al., 2000; Senn et al., 2001; Seung, 2003; Froemke et al., 2006; Pfister and Gerstner, 2006; Clopath et al., 2010; Vogels et al., 2011; Graupner and Brunel, 2012), even when explicitly modeling pre- and postsynaptic expression (Senn et al., 2001; Costa et al., 2015).

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Moreover, by assuming a statistical bound with a given mean and zero variance, we derived a relatively simple theoretical framework with only one free parameter (i.e., the mean of the postsynaptic response). Our theory correctly identifies the expression loci of individual experiments of long-term potentiation in hippocampal and neocortical excitatory synapses. At excitatory synapses, we interpret the bound as physiological constraints on pre- and postsynaptic terminals, such as finite vesicle release probability (i.e., on $P_{\text{rel}}$) and receptor density (i.e., on $q$), respectively. Our framework also predicts the state dependence of LTP and presynaptic expression of long-term depression, consistent with experimental observations in the cortex. Moreover, our results implicate known retrograde messengers (nitric oxide and endocannabinoids) in communicating the divergence to the bound predicted by $\text{statLTSP}$. When applied to plasticity at inhibitory synapses, it proposes an optimization of the postsynaptic response statistics toward a specific bound (i.e., the mean excitatory response), which creates a statistically efficient excitation-inhibition balance. In summary, our results suggest a general principle in which long-term synaptic plasticity optimizes the mean and variance of postsynaptic responses by inducing the appropriate amount of pre- and postsynaptic change.

RESULTS

The origins of variability in expression loci of long-term synaptic plasticity have remained unclear. We introduce a theoretical framework in which such variability is explained as a consequence of a gradual optimization of the postsynaptic responses’ distribution toward a higher or lower bound, i.e., the most reliable, strongest possible synapse in the case of potentiation, or the most reliable, weakest synapse in the case of depression (Figure 1C and Movie S1). Modifying pre- and postsynaptic components has a differential impact on the postsynaptic response statistics. For example, changing $q$ may increase mean and increase variance of the amplitude of postsynaptic potentials, whereas changing $P_{\text{rel}}$ may increase the mean but decrease the variability of the postsynaptic response (Figure 1C). The effect of these changes depends on the initial state of the synapse, and how far it is from the optimal solution.
In our framework, for every pair of initial states $P_{rel}$ and $q$, there is an ideal combination of pre- and postsynaptic changes that will minimize the difference between the response statistics and the bound (i.e., the KL-divergence), creating a flow field of gradual changes (Figure 1D). In other words, statistical long-term synaptic plasticity (statLTSP) determines how pre- and postsynaptic changes should be coordinated to best close the gap between the current state and its optimum. In order to compare our theoretical framework with experimental data, we first calculated pre- and postsynaptic contributions to the postsynaptic response distribution before and after plasticity induction (or used published ones when available). For experiments at excitatory synapses, we then fitted the bound to best capture the changes in pre- and postsynaptic parameters, and we compared observed with predicted pre/postsynaptic changes. To validate these results, we used testing datasets (i.e., where the bound was not fitted) and compared with alternative models. At inhibitory synapses we estimated pre- and postsynaptic changes before and after induction and compared the trajectories of the model in which we used the mean excitatory input as the bound.

**StatLTSP Captures Expression Loci of Long-Term Potentiation in Hippocampus**

To test our statistical theory we compared various datasets of pre- and postsynaptic changes with the predicted flow field. For each long-term potentiation dataset, we obtained $P_{rel}$, $q$ and estimated the bound $\varphi$ of synaptic efficacy from the data (in units of the postsynaptic response). To this end, we used the same mean weights for model and experiment before, and after induction, and used statLTSP to predict the exact post/pre ratio of the response (see STAR Methods). Additionally, to exclude the possibility of overfitting, we analyzed the difference between the predicted flow field and observed changes in separate datasets not used for fitting $\varphi$. For hippocampal synapses recorded in slices before and after long-term potentiation (Larkman et al., 1992), our theory accurately predicted the ratio of change of $P_{rel}$ and $q$ in both the fitted dataset ($\rho^2 = 0.83; p < 0.001; \rho^2_{\text{pred}} = 0.83; p < 0.001$; Figure 2A) and two control datasets (Figures 2B and 2C). Moreover, the divergence between data and the bound decreased significantly (div$_{\text{before}} = 28.52 \pm 5.29$; div$_{\text{after}} = 11.38 \pm 2.27; p < 0.001$). To benchmark statLTSP, we compared it to a model that aimed to minimize the necessary

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**Figure 2. Statistical Long-Term Synaptic Plasticity, StatLTSP, Predicts Expression Loci of Synaptic Potentiation in Hippocampus**

(A) Long-term potentiation (LTP) experiments in hippocampus using a tetanus protocol (bound estimated in this dataset).

(B) Short-lasting potentiation (SLP) experiments in hippocampus using a tetanus protocol (bound estimated in A).

(C) Short-lasting potentiation (SLP) experiments in hippocampus using a long-step-current protocol (bound estimated in A). (i) Model predictions and observed changes in $P_{rel}$ and $q$ parameters (black and purple, respectively). Green cross represents the estimated bound, which is outside the plotted range of $q$ ($q_{\text{bound}} = 0.68$ mV). (ii) Predicted and observed changes in both $P_{rel}$ (blue) and $q$ (red). There is no significant difference between predicted and observed changes for both $P_{rel}$ (hipp. LTP: $p = 0.8$; tetanus-SLP: $p = 0.6$) and $q$ (hipp. LTP: $p = 0.9$; tetanus-SLP: $p = 0.6$). (iii) Distribution of angles (in degrees) between observed and predicted changes for both $P_{rel}$ and $q$ (red). There is no significant difference between predicted and observed changes for both $P_{rel}$ and $q$ (hipp. LTP: $p = 0.96$; tetanus-SLP: $p = 0.67$; current-SLP: $p = 0.9$).

StatLTSP captures expression loci of long-term potentiation in hippocampus.
amount of change in both $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ (“shortest path”), and a model in which changes of $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ were chosen arbitrarily (constrained by a positive change, “random path”). Both alternative models performed worse than statLTP (Figures 2A–2Cii; cf. Figure S1; see STAR Methods).

**StatLTP Captures Expression Loci of Long-Term Potentiation in the Visual Cortex**

We also tested statLTP on data from long-term potentiation of visual cortex layer-5 excitatory synapses (Sjöström et al., 2001, 2007) (Figures 3A and 3B). Here, too, statLTP predicted the change in $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ accurately in the fitted dataset ($r^2 = 0.94$; $p < 0.001$; $r^\text{rel} = 0.87$; $p < 0.001$; Figure 3Aii) and the control dataset ($r^2 = 0.82$; $p < 0.001$; $r^\text{rel} = 0.66$; $p < 0.001$; Figure 3Bii). As in the hippocampal data, the divergence to the bound decreased after induction (div$_{\text{before}} = 40.27 \pm 15.39$; div$_{\text{after}} = 14.46 \pm 2.91$; $p < 0.001$) and statLTP better explains the changes in the data than the alternative models (Figures 3A and 3Biii).

Notably, $q$, the (independently) fitted bound, was similar in both hippocampal and visual cortex LTP experiments ($q_{\text{hippocampus}} \sim 0.68 \text{ mV}$ and $q_{\text{visual cortex}} \sim 0.56 \text{ mV}$), supporting statLTP across excitatory synapses in these two brain areas. Moreover, if we set $q = 1 \text{ mV}$ (for both brain areas) or reduce the size of the dataset used to estimate the bound to only 3 to 4 data points (i.e., 10%–30% of the original size), our model still captures the data and outperforms all alternative models considered here. To further validate our results, we tested whether the presynaptic changes during LTP predicted changes in short-term plasticity (Costa et al., 2017) and found that presynaptic LTP, but not postsynaptic LTP, correlated well with observed changes in short-term plasticity ($r^2 = -0.1$, $p = 0.6$; $r^\text{Prel} = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$; Figure S2).

StatLTP suggests an optimization process toward reliable synaptic transmission. We tested whether such an optimization occurs during or after induction by analyzing the visual cortex LTP dataset (Figure S4). Our results show that statLTP is present immediately after induction (within the first 5 min) and that it remains stable throughout the experiment (~1 hr), suggesting that optimization happens during induction.

**StatLTP Predicts Presynaptic Expression of Long-Term Depression**

Next we tested whether long-term depression (LTD) experiments could also be captured by our framework. Decreasing $q$ or $P_{\text{rel}}$ are in principle equally viable for lowering the efficacy of a synapse (Figure 4A). However, presynaptic LTD yielded statistically more efficient changes that require fewer optimization steps to reach the bound $\varphi = 0 \text{ mV}$ than postsynaptic LTD. This is because changing $P_{\text{rel}}$ more effectively controls the variance (P$^\text{LTD}$ is 70% to 99% better than q$^\text{LTD}$, see Figures 4B and 4C). Therefore presynaptic LTD alone allows the postsynaptic response statistics to more quickly overlap with the lower bound (i.e., $\varphi = 0$). These theoretical results give a principled explanation for presynaptic expression of LTD in agreement with previous work (Zakharenko et al., 2002; Gerdeman et al., 2002; Sjöström et al., 2003; Rodriguez-Moreno et al., 2010; Costa et al., 2015; Andrade-Talavera et al., 2016). Consequently, the flow field reflected the data best when the bound was set such that $P_{\text{rel}} = 0$ while $q$ remained stable (Figure 4E). As such, the flow field accurately predicted the locus of expression in individual visual cortex LTD experiments ($r^2 = 0.8$; $p < 0.001$; $r^\text{rel} = 0.92$; $p < 0.001$; Figure 4F), and the divergence decreased after LTD induction (div$_{\text{before}} = 0.57 \pm 0.35$; div$_{\text{after}} = -0.47 \pm 0.26$; $p < 0.001$). Moreover, as for the LTP datasets statLTP captures...
LTD data substantially better than a shortest (\(r^2_{\text{short}} = -0.22; p = 0.44\); \(r^2_{\text{short}} = 0.75; p < 0.01\)) and random path model (Figure 4G).

The induction and extent of plastic changes is typically thought to rely on activity-dependent, Hebbian mechanisms. When we combined statLTSP with a learning rule (fitted to cortical slices) that comprises pre- and postsynaptic components (Costa et al., 2015) (see STAR Methods), we were able to capture accurately the changes in \(q\) and \(P_{\text{rel}}\), as well as changes in the mean synaptic weight of visual cortical slices, providing a near-complete description of pre- and postsynaptic expression of long-term potentiation and depression (Figure 5E). We could not capture the hippocampal LTP dataset (Figure S6), suggesting that the parameters of this visual cortical Hebbian learning rule may not be applicable to hippocampal synaptic dynamics in its current form.

**Theory Captures State Dependence of Expression Loci**

In our framework, the initial state of the synapse before plasticity induction plays a critical role in determining the specific post/pre ratio of change (Figure 1D). Extreme examples of such state dependency can be found in early development, when many synapses lack functional AMPA receptors, i.e., they are "postsynaptically silent." Initial LTP at these synapses has been observed to be predominantly postsynaptic in nature (Lisman and Raghavachari, 2006; Ward et al., 2006; MacDougall and Fine, 2013; Padamsey and Emptage, 2013), but once synapses are unsilenced, presynaptic modifications become more probable (Ward et al., 2006; MacDougall and Fine, 2013; Padamsey and Emptage, 2013). Our theoretical framework also captures these state-dependent results, in which synapses with low \(q\) (i.e., postsynaptically silent synapses) experience postsynaptic modifications first. Once they are unsilenced, expression is more likely to be presynaptic (Figure 5). Additionally, for the experimentally observed range of release probabilities, postsynaptic changes are more likely (Figure 5), suggesting a bias in observed expression loci that is consistent with the literature (Padamsey and Emptage, 2013). Finally, our theory predicts a specific quantifiable post/pre ratio of change for each initial synaptic state (Figure 5). Alternative models are not consistent with the above experimental observations (Figures 7 and 8).

**Feedback Control of Expression Loci by Retrograde Messengers**

StatLTSP calculates the optimal changes from a gradient descent given the statistics of postsynaptic responses and a bound. To implement statLTSP locally, (1) the postsynaptic terminal needs access to \(P_{\text{rel}}\), \(q\), and the bound \(\varphi\), (2) compute appropriate changes in \(P_{\text{rel}}\) and \(q\), and adjust \(q\). Finally, (3) it has to inform the presynapse of appropriate changes in \(P_{\text{rel}}\) (and/or \(q\) for \(P_{\text{rel}}\) to be adjusted accordingly. Such retrograde communication can be studied using pharmacological intervention. Indeed, nitric oxide (NO) blockade specifically removes the
correlation between the predicted changes and observed changes in $P_{\text{rel}}$ (Figure 6A). Conversely, endocannabinoid (eCB) blockade specifically removes the correlations between predicted and observed changes in $q$ (Figure 6B) and increases the correlations between predicted and observed changes in $P_{\text{rel}}$ (compared to non-blockade, Figures 6C and S2). Additionally, after eCB blockade there has been observed an increase in presynaptic LTP (Sjöström et al., 2007; Costa et al., 2015). StatLTSP also suggests such an increase in presynaptic LTP, as illustrated by the gain in the (presynaptic) divergence after eCB blockade compared to control LTP data ($\text{div}_{\text{pre}}^{\text{p}} = 11 \pm 8$; $\text{div}_{\text{post}}^{\text{p}} = 232 \pm 167$; $p < 0.05$; Figures 6B and S2). These results suggest that NO initially communicates the necessary changes in $P_{\text{rel}}$, which are then adjusted depending on postsynaptic changes through release of eCB (Figure 6C). In line with these observations (and congruent with our framework in which changes in $q$ depend on $P_{\text{rel}}$), we could also measure a weak negative correlation between predicted changes in $P_{\text{rel}}$ and observed changes in $q$ (Figures 6B and S2). Neither shortest nor random path model could provide a similarly parsimonious explanation for any of these blockade data (Figure S9). LTD is also known to rely crucially on endocannabinoid signaling (Sjöström et al., 2003; Yang and Calakos, 2013; Costa et al., 2017), and, consistent with endocannabinoids encoding the error in $q$, we find that presynaptic long-term depression is more correlated with the initial value of $q$ ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) than the initial value of $P_{\text{rel}}$ ($r = 0.53$, $p = 0.052$).

**Inhibitory Synapses Aim for Mean Excitation**

So far we have studied how experimentally observed pre- and postsynaptic changes in excitatory synapses could be described as a statistically optimal path toward a fitted synaptic bound, without a clear functional interpretation of the bound other than a physiological restriction.

For inhibitory synapses there may be a more clear interpretation of the bound. Inhibitory activity is thought to stabilize neural dynamics by maintaining a healthy excitation-inhibition (EI) balance (Xue et al., 2014; Froemke, 2015; Hennequin et al., 2017), presumably tuned by inhibitory long-term synaptic plasticity (Vogels et al., 2011; D’amour and Froemke, 2015). Therefore, we interpreted the functional bound of inhibitory synapses as the mean of excitatory inputs to a particular neuron. We tested this idea on a dataset of inhibitory plasticity (D’amour and Froemke, 2015) (Figure 7A). As with excitatory synapses, we estimated the pre- and postsynaptic state of inhibitory synapses before and after induction (see STAR Methods). When we set the bound $\varphi$ to the mean amplitude of excitatory currents the cell received, statLTSP could capture both changes in $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ ($r^2 = 0.85$; $p < 0.001$; $r^{\text{stat}} = 0.45$; $p < 0.001$; Figures 7B and 7C). Moreover, the divergence to the mean excitatory current decreased after induction ($\text{div}_{\text{pre}} = 230.74 \pm 70.62$; $\text{div}_{\text{post}} = 111.21 \pm 33.32$; $p < 0.05$) and statLTSP described the data better than shortest ($r_{\text{short}}^2 = 0.51$; $p < 0.001$; $r_{\text{short}}^{\text{stat}} = 0.24$; $p = 0.12$) and random path models (Figure 7D). Our results at inhibitory synapses show lower correlation coefficients and model separation than what we obtained at excitatory synapses. This may be due to several confounding factors such as different types of inhibitory interneurons and the estimate of the bound. To set the bound, we used the mean excitation measured in each experiment, but this may not correspond to the excitatory currents experienced locally at the inhibitory synapses that were recorded. When we estimated the bound as in the previous datasets, we found an improved match to the experimental data (Figures 7F and 7G, $r^2 = 0.98$; $p < 0.001$; $r^{\text{stat}} = 0.58$; $p < 0.001$; cf. Figures 7C and 7D), but a relatively weak correlation between the fitted and mean excitation bound (Figure 7E), indicating the need for more precise experiments.

Interestingly, unlike measuring the EI ratio before induction of plasticity, the divergence between the initial state of the inhibitory synapse and its bound $\varphi$ predicted both the mean and variance of synaptic changes (Figures 8A and 8B). Furthermore, to complement the analysis based on statLTSP, we performed a statistical comparison between two scenarios: (1) inhibitory synapses aim for the mean excitatory input, “$\varphi$,” only, or (2) they aim to match both mean and variance (see STAR Methods). We found that aiming for the mean excitation alone, but allowing changes in the variance of inhibitory synapses, provided the best description of the experimental data considered here (Figure 8C).

If inhibitory synapses aimed for both mean and variance of excitation, presynaptic spikes could generate samples from the left tail of the inhibitory response distribution, and from the right tail of the excitatory responses (or vice versa). In other words, postsynaptic responses could be easily mismatched. On the other hand, if inhibitory synapses aim for the mean excitation...
alone, as in statLTSP, a smaller mismatch and thus a better, statistically efficient Ei balance is generated, on average (Figures 8D and 8E).

**DISCUSSION**

For several decades it has remained unclear under which conditions long-term synaptic plasticity should be expressed pre- and/or postsynaptically. Here, we created a theoretical framework to explain this variability of expression in which synapses are adjusted optimally toward a reliable postsynaptic response. Because pre- and postsynaptic modifications have very different effects on postsynaptic response statistics, the initial state of the synapse determines the best ratio of expression loci of long-term plasticity. Our theory maps well onto the experimentally observed changes in hippocampal and cortical potentiation and depression experiments.

**Optimization of Synaptic Transmission**

Statistical long-term synaptic plasticity (statLTSP) suggests an optimization process toward reliable synaptic transmission that should be triggered with every plastic event, but is stable otherwise. Our analysis of LTP data (Figure S4, Sjöström et al., 2001) shows that the impact of statLTSP is readily observable within the first 5 min after induction. Moreover, statLTSP is stable for the duration of the experiment (at least 1 hr) consistent with our framework. We would expect that further induction protocols would successively move the synaptic state closer to the bound. This remains to be tested experimentally, but previous studies have shown that highly reliable and strong

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**Figure 6. Feedback Control of Expression Loci Requires Endocannabinoid and Nitric Oxide Signaling**

Left: schematic of pre- and postsynapse with LTP protocol and pharmacological intervention used (data from Sjöström et al., 2007). Middle: scatterplot of observed changes in $q$ (i) and $P_{rel}$ (ii) over the predicted divergence in $q$. Right: scatterplot of observed changes in $q$ (i) and $P_{rel}$ (ii) over the predicted divergence in $P_{rel}$.

(A) Nitric oxide (NO) blockade data.

(B) Endocannabinoid (eCB) blockade data.

(C) Summary of blockade experiments. Control LTP (dark red and blue lines) was obtained using the same protocol, but without drug wash-in (see Figure S2). Alternative models did not provide a parsimonious explanation for the role of eCB and NO (cf. Figure S9).
synapses exist in both in vitro and in vivo conditions (Silver et al., 2003; Arenz et al., 2008; Hires et al., 2015), as proposed by statLTSP after multiple induction periods. In addition, the observed range of reliabilities (e.g., Figure 2 and 3) could be explained by mixtures of LTD and LTP events.

We postulated a bound toward which postsynaptic responses are optimized. At excitatory synapses, we interpreted such a bound as a physiological constraint (e.g., limited postsynaptic receptor occupancy and presynaptic release probability), but it could also be interpreted as a functional target such as mean excitatory currents that inhibitory synapses must aim to cancel. In the datasets we studied a bound with minimal variance provided the most parsimonious model (Figure S5). However, it is conceivable that for Hebbian protocols that lead to a mixture of LTD and LTP (e.g., with intermediate pairing frequencies), synapses could aim for an unreliable response, effectively representing the uncertainty between pre- and postsynaptic activity. There is indeed evidence suggesting that synapses may optimize their uncertainty for intermediate protocols (Hardingham et al., 2007; Costa et al., 2015). This can, in principle, also be implemented in our framework by considering a bound distribution with non-zero variance.

We have focused on an optimization principle that aims to capture the ratio of pre- to postsynaptic changes of long-term synaptic plasticity. However, in some cases statLTSP could also capture the absolute magnitude of the changes in the mean weight for both excitatory (data not shown) and inhibitory synapses (Figure 8A). Moreover, statLTSP showed a similar degree of pre- and postsynaptic weight dependence as observed in experiments (Figure S13). It is conceivable that combined with appropriate Hebbian learning rules, statLTSP could provide a complete description of pre- and postsynaptic long-term plasticity (e.g., Figure S6).

Comparison to Previous Models of Pre- and Postsynaptic Plasticity

Most theoretical work in the modeling community has been agnostic about expression loci of long-term synaptic plasticity, usually defaulting to a postsynaptic expression. A few studies have, instead, considered only presynaptic expression (Senn et al., 2001; Seung, 2003; Vasilaki and Giugliano, 2014; but see Carvalho and Buonomano, 2011), whereas the model by Costa et al. (2015) was developed to capture experimentally observed mean changes in both pre- and postsynaptic expression. On the other hand a few other optimality principles have been...
Mechanistic Implementation of StatLTSP

To comply with our theory during long-term potentiation, a synapse must assess the presynaptic ($P_{\text{rel}}$) and postsynaptic ($q$) effect on the postsynaptic response. Information about $q$, directly related to the number of postsynaptic receptors, should be readily available postsynaptically (Ribrault et al., 2011). $P_{\text{rel}}$, a presynaptic property, may be assessed through the relative difference between the level of presynaptic activity (encoded by neurotrophic factors, Minichiello, 2009) and the subsequent amount of released glutamate. Alternatively, $P_{\text{rel}}$ could be also conveyed via specific transsynaptic proteins, whose expression levels are known to correlate with $P_{\text{rel}}$ and which can engage in transsynaptic signaling (Lisman and Raghavachari, 2006; Südhof, 2012; Nakamura et al., 2015; Tang et al., 2016), potentially for a more direct means of communicating presynaptic information to the postsynapse.

While the precise biophysical implementation of statLTSP remains to be investigated, we could identify endocannabinoid and nitric oxide as potential messengers to communicate the desired state of $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ across the synaptic cleft. It is experimentally challenging to test their involvement directly, but there is evidence that both eCB and NO signals rely on the local (NMDA-dependent) activity at the postsynapse (Regehr et al., 2009; Kano et al., 2009; Hardingham et al., 2013), suggesting the possibility of repetitive activity-dependent communication of errors as predicted by statLTSP. In line with this interpretation is the fact that both shorter- and longer-term synaptic plasticity rely on NO and eCB for retrograde messaging (Sjöström et al., 2007; Araque et al., 2017), even though they utilize different NMDA receptor subunits (Park et al., 2013; Lisman, 2017). Congruently, long-term synaptic depression, which our theory predicts to be presynaptic and thus suggests the need for retrograde messengers, is indeed known to rely on endocannabinoid retrograde signaling (Zakharenko et al., 2002; Gerdeman et al., 2002; Sjöström et al., 2003; Hardingham et al., 2007; Rodriguez-Moreno et al., 2010; Costa et al., 2015; Andrade-Talavera et al., 2016). Interestingly, our data analysis shows that the postsynaptic component $q$ remains stable during long-term depression (Figure 4E), providing some of the first experimental evidence for stable weights as proposed by several theoretical models (Fusi et al., 2005; Clopath et al., 2008; Barrett et al., 2009; Graupner and Brunel, 2012; Costa et al., 2015; Kastner et al., 2016).

Deficits in the signaling systems of both NO (Nelson et al., 1995; Hardingham et al., 2013; Chakraborty et al., 2015) and eCB (Skaper and Di Marzo, 2012; Younts and Castillo, 2014; Hebert-Chatelain et al., 2016; Araque et al., 2017) have

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**Figure 8. Inhibition Aiming for Mean Excitation Yields a Better Statistical Excitation-Inhibition Balance**

(A and B) Changes in mean (A) and variance (B) of inhibitory currents for statLTSP (top) and the EI ratio (bottom).

(C) Model selection criteria for a model in which inhibition aims for the excitatory mean current (light green), a model in which inhibition aims for both mean and variance of excitatory responses (dark green), and a model in which inhibition aims for the mean excitation, but its variance is fixed (i.e., does not change; white) (cf. Figure S10).

(D) A given sample from inhibitory and excitatory postsynaptic responses generates an EI ratio, which we use to estimate the distribution of EI balance. Comparison of distributions of EI balance for two possible views: inhibition response statistics matches both excitatory mean and variance (dark green) or only excitatory mean (light green).

(E) Change in EI distributions as the variance of excitatory increases for both cases. Dotted lines in (D) represent the mean of the distributions and dotted lines in (E) represent the variance of the excitatory responses used in (D). Error bars represent mean ± SEM.
been implicated in learning and memory impairments as well as anxiety and depression. According to our model this may be due to a failure to communicate postsynaptic information to the presynapse, leading to non-optimal changes in $P_{rel}$ and/or $q$.

**Modifications in the Number of Release Sites**

Using an extended model of starLTSP, we also studied how changes in the number of release sites, $N$, would affect trajectories and final states of pre/post ratios. In the extended model, a new release site (which would require some form of structural modifications) was created when the postsynapse could no longer increase its number of receptors to meet a desired bound (Figure S3). Regardless of the strategy of release site growth we tested, all variations of our model converged to their output may be focused on specific facets of the excitatory input. In summary, our work provides insights on the variability of expression loci. It draws a picture of long-term synaptic plasticity in which the full distribution of postsynaptic responses (instead of merely the mean weight) is optimized through joint pre- and postsynaptic modifications that are governed by a set of tightly coordinated neurotransmitters.

**Late Long-Term Plasticity**

To our best knowledge, there are only a few studies that address expression loci of LTP for longer than 1 hr. Bolshakov et al. (1997) studied both early LTP using a standard stimulation protocol and late LTP (up to 3 hr) using a chemical induction method. They found that changes in expression loci are more likely during early-LTP, whereas during late-LTP new release sites develop. Such earlier changes in expression loci and later development of new release sites are consistent with starLTSP (as above) and are also consistent with other studies (Bozdagi et al., 2000; Bell et al., 2013). Additionally, Bayazitov et al. (2007) showed that changes in pre- and postsynaptic components remain stable for more than 2 hr after a tetanus protocol, consistent with the stability we observe during the first hour after LTP induction (Figure S4). We are not aware of any studies that monitor changes in expression loci for longer than 3 hr. However, generally speaking, late-LTP (>3 hr) relies on strong tetanization and (in turn) protein synthesis (Frey and Morris, 1997; Bolshakov et al., 1997; Redondo and Morris, 2011), which might help stabilize starLTSP for longer than 1 hr. Finally, for late LTD starLTSP would also predict presynaptic expression but to our best knowledge there are no late-LTD studies of expression loci.

**Optimization of Inhibitory Postsynaptic Responses**

When applied to inhibitory synaptic plasticity, starLTSP suggests an efficient form of excitatory-inhibitory (EI) balance in the brain, in which inhibitory synapses aim to cancel specifically the mean postsynaptic excitatory input, something that cannot be predicted from a standard EI ratio alone. Retrograde messengers have also been implicated in controlling long-term plasticity at inhibitory synapses (Castillo et al., 2011). Feedback on the EI state could similarly be mediated by retrograde messengers to create the best cancelation of the mean excitatory input. The inhibitory control we studied here is likely mediated by fast and perisomatic basket cells (D’amour and Froemke, 2015) that provide the best cancelation of the mean excitatory input on average. Other inhibitory cell types (e.g., Martinotti cells, Markram et al., 2004) might follow similar principles but their output may be focused on specific facets of the excitatory input stream.

In summary, our work provides insights on the variability of expression loci. It draws a picture of long-term synaptic plasticity in which the full distribution of postsynaptic responses (instead of merely the mean weight) is optimized through joint pre- and postsynaptic modifications that are governed by a set of tightly coordinated neurotransmitters.

**STAR+METHODS**

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**SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION**

Supplemental Information includes 13 figures and two movies and can be found with this article online at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2017.09.021](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2017.09.021).

**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Conceptualization and Methodology: R.P.C., T.P.V., and Z.P.; Investigation, Formal Analysis and Writing – Original Draft: R.P.C.; Data curation: R.P.C., J.A.B., and R.C.F.; Writing – Review & Editing: R.P.C., Z.P., N.J.E., R.C.F.,
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STAR METHODS

KEY RESOURCES TABLE

| REAGENT or RESOURCE | SOURCE | IDENTIFIER |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Deposited Data      |        |            |
| Hippocampus LTP     | Larkman et al., 1992 | http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/m5865cj7dd.1 |
| Hippocampus SLP     | Hannay et al., 1993 | http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/x8n3yfrzcz.1 |
| Visual cortex STDP  | Sjöström et al., 2001 | http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/7wwf2yw4jn.1 |
| Visual cortex LTP   | Sjöström et al., 2007 | http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/7wwf2yw4jn.1 |
| Auditory cortex inh. plasticity | D’Amour and Froemke, 2015 | http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/gx77r3hm8h.1 |
| Software and Algorithms |        |            |
| Code to run statLTSP | This paper | http://modeldb.yale.edu/232096 |

CONTACT FOR REAGENT AND RESOURCE SHARING

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METHODS DETAILS

1 Statistical long-term plasticity framework

The release of neurotransmitter follows a standard binomial model, which defines the probability of having k successful events (neurotransmitter release) given N trials (release sites) with equal probability $P_{rel}$ (Del Castillo and Katz, 1954). For simplicity, here we use the Gaussian approximation to the binomial release model,

$$P_{PSP}(X = k) \sim N\left(\frac{k}{N}, \frac{NP_{rel}(1 - P_{rel})}{N}ight).$$

The postsynaptic potential (PSP) is scaled by the quantal amplitude $q$, which yields

$$P_{PSP}(X = k) \sim N\left(\frac{k}{N}, q^2 \frac{NP_{rel}(1 - P_{rel})}{N}ight).$$

Our principled approach is based on the assumption that the parameters underlying the postsynaptic response statistics are being optimized by minimizing the KL-divergence (KL-div) between the release statistics and a lower or upper bound ($P_{bound}$; Figure 1A; we denote our model as statLTSP). Note that the main point here is to optimize the current distribution toward a bound/target for which we use the KL-divergence. However, it is in principle possible to achieve a similar function (i.e., optimize the difference between two probability distributions) by using alternative metrics or optimization methods (e.g., Lagrange multipliers or natural gradient). See below a more detailed discussion on using alternative methods (e.g., Hellinger distance). The bound corresponds to a postsynaptic release with minimal variance and low or high mean, for a lower or upper bound, respectively, which we define as $P_{bound} = \delta(X - \varphi)$ (i.e., a Dirac delta function centered at $\varphi$, which we write as $\delta_\varphi$ below). The KL-div is given by

$$KL(P_{bound} \parallel P_{PSP}) = \int P_{bound} \ln \frac{P_{bound}}{P_{PSP}} dX$$

with $X$ representing the postsynaptic potential and $P_{PSP} \sim N\left(\mu, \sigma^2\right)$, it becomes

$$KL(\delta_\varphi \parallel N\left(\mu, \sigma^2\right)) = \int \delta_\varphi \ln \frac{\delta_\varphi}{N\left(\mu, \sigma^2\right)} dX,$$

$$= \int \delta_\varphi \ln \delta_\varphi dX - \int \delta_\varphi \ln N\left(\mu, \sigma^2\right) dX,$$

$$= \int \delta_\varphi \ln \delta_\varphi dX - \left[ \ln \frac{1}{\sigma \sqrt{2\pi}} + \ln \exp\left(-\frac{(\varphi - \mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right) \right].$$
= \int \delta_x \ln \delta_x \, dX - \ln \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} + \ln \sigma + \frac{(\phi - \mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}.

\mathrm{KL}(p_{\text{bound}} \parallel p_{\text{PSP}}) = C + \ln(\sigma) + \frac{(\phi - \mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}

Given that the first two terms do not depend on mean and variance, and consequently on the postsynaptic response parameters (which are the parameters of interest here), from now on we focus on the last two terms (and set $C = \int \delta_x \ln \delta_x - \ln \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}}$)

\mathrm{KL}(p_{\text{bound}} \parallel p_{\text{PSP}}) = C + \ln(\sigma) + \frac{(\phi - \mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}

we now replace $\mu$ and $\sigma^2$ by the parameters of interest (from Equation 1; note that from now on for simplicity we discard $C$ as it does not depend on $\mu$ and $\sigma^2$)

\mathrm{KL}(p_{\text{bound}} \parallel p_{\text{PSP}}) = \ln \left( \sqrt{\frac{N^2 q^2 (1 - P_{\text{rel}})}{N q^2 (1 - P_{\text{rel}})}} \right) + \frac{(\phi - N q \rho)^2}{2N q^2 P_{\text{rel}} (1 - P_{\text{rel}})}

we assume the existence of a lower bound for long-term depression (LTD), $\phi = 0$ mV and estimate an upper bound for long-term potentiation (LTP, e.g., $\phi = 0.68$ mV which is the value estimated for the hippocampal dataset, see below and main text for details; see Movie S2 for how different bound values shape the KL-div).

Now we want to obtain an expression that tells us how much $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ should change to minimize $\mathrm{KL}(p_{\text{bound}} \parallel p_{\text{PSP}})$. In order to obtain such a change, we differentiate the KL divergence with respect to $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ (with $N$ being a constant)

\frac{\partial \mathrm{KL}}{\partial P_{\text{rel}}} = \frac{1}{2P_{\text{rel}} (1 - P_{\text{rel}})} \left[ (N q^2 - \phi) |\rho| (N q - 2 \phi) + \phi \right],

\frac{\partial \mathrm{KL}}{\partial q} = 1 + \phi (P_{\text{rel}} q^2)\left[ (q - 1) / P_{\text{rel}} q^2 \right].

Equations 9 and 10 define the gradient used for gradient descent, which in turn leads to the flow field plotted in Figures 1D and 1E and elsewhere. Alternatively, we also tested the use of the natural gradient (rather than gradient descent), which suggested similar results (not shown). We note that these equations can be also written in a simpler form as a function of $\mu$ and $\sigma^2$

\frac{\partial \mathrm{KL}}{\partial P_{\text{rel}}} = P_{\text{rel}}^{\text{norm}} + \varepsilon_q \varepsilon_{\Delta \phi},

\frac{\partial \mathrm{KL}}{\partial q} = \frac{1}{q} (1 + \phi \varepsilon_q),

which highlights the role of the prediction errors $\varepsilon_q = (\mu - \phi) / \sigma^2$ and $\varepsilon_{\Delta \phi} = (\mu - 3 P_{\text{rel}} \phi) / \sigma^2$. Note that $P_{\text{rel}}^{\text{norm}} = 1 - 2P_{\text{rel}}/2P_{\text{rel}} (1 - P_{\text{rel}})$ is a normalization term. The prediction error $\varepsilon_q$ resembles a scaled residual. However, note that using (scaled) residuals directly does not suffice. Take for example $\mu = \phi$ then (the scaled) residuals would be zero, even for cases of high variance. Solving for $\partial \mathrm{KL} / \partial P_{\text{rel}} = 0$ and $\partial \mathrm{KL} / \partial q = 0$ yields respectively

$\sigma^2 = - \frac{(\phi - \mu) (P_{\text{rel}} q - 2 P_{\text{rel}} \phi + \phi)}{2P_{\text{rel}} - 1},$

$\mu = \phi - \frac{\sigma^2}{\phi},$

which has a solution for mean synaptic response $\mu = \phi$ (Equation 14) and $\sigma^2 = 0$ (Equation 13; note that because $\mu = q P_{\text{rel}}$ and $\sigma^2 = q^2 P_{\text{rel}} (1 - P_{\text{rel}})$ this represents a solution where $q = \phi$ and $P_{\text{rel}} = 1$ for non-zero $\phi$). This is consistent with the derivation given below for optimal mean and variance, and the overall goal of our framework: strong, reliable responses at a given value $\phi$.

As an alternative metric to the KL-divergence, we have also evaluated the feasibility of using the Hellinger distance (HL) (which is another possible divergence between probability distributions) rather than the KL-divergence. For two normal distributions $Z$ and $Y$ the HL metric is defined as

$\mathrm{HL}(Z, Y) = 1 - \sqrt{2 \frac{\sigma_Z \sigma_Y}{\sigma_Z^2 + \sigma_Y^2} \exp \left[ - \frac{1}{4} \frac{(\mu_Z - \mu_Y)^2}{\sigma_Z^2 + \sigma_Y^2} \right]}$

By setting $Z$ as the bound and $Y$ as the postsynaptic response statistics, we can demonstrate that the HL metric rapidly approaches 1 (its maximum) as the variance of the bound $P$ goes to zero ($\sigma_Z^2 \to 0$) for a non-zero variance in $Y$ ($\sigma_Y^2 > 0$). Moreover, for $\sigma_Y^2 = 0$ and $\sigma_Z^2 = 0$ the HL metric is not defined. Therefore, given that the bound represents minimal variance (i.e., a delta function)
the HL metric is not suitable for our purposes. We could use a non-zero variance with the HL metric, but this would increase the degrees of freedom in our framework, making it a less parsimonious model. Finally, we also tested the use of symmetric KL-divergence, which yielded similar results to the ones we present here (not shown).

Finally, it should be noted that for analytical tractability, to calculate the KL-divergence we are using the Gaussian approximation of the Binomial release model here (see above). While this is a coarse estimate, we do not expect the results to change fundamentally for small N (number of release sites), as the key components are the mean and variance, which remain the same in both cases.

2 Optimal release probability and quantal amplitude

Here we derive the necessary conditions for minimal variance and mean equal to a bound \( \varphi \) (this also corresponds to examining the stationary points of Equations 9 and 10). From this, we have:

\[
\mu = NP_{\text{rel}}q \Rightarrow \varphi = NP_{\text{rel}}q
\]

and

\[
\sigma^2 = Nq^2P_{\text{rel}}(1 - P_{\text{rel}}) \Rightarrow 0 = Nq^2P_{\text{rel}}(1 - P_{\text{rel}})
\]

given that for the timescale of synaptic plasticity considered here \( N \) remains constant (Bolshakov et al., 1997; Sáez and Friedlander, 2009) we focus on \( P_{\text{rel}} \) and \( q \). Solving Equation 16 with respect to \( P_{\text{rel}} \) and \( q \) yields

\[
P_{\text{rel}} = \frac{\varphi}{Nq} \quad \text{with} \quad Nq \neq 0 \quad \text{or} \quad q = \frac{\varphi}{NP_{\text{rel}}} \quad \text{with} \quad NP_{\text{rel}} \neq 0
\]

and Equation 17 with respect to \( P_{\text{rel}} \) and \( q \) yields

\[
P_{\text{rel}} = 0 \quad \text{or} \quad P_{\text{rel}} = 1 \quad \text{or} \quad q = 0
\]

for \( \varphi > 0 \) as would be the case during long-term potentiation (i.e., upper bound), \( P_{\text{rel}} = 0 \) and \( q = 0 \) do not provide a valid solution (as for \( P_{\text{rel}} = 0 \) or \( q = 0 \) gives \( \varphi = 0 \) mV). Therefore for a non-zero bound with minimal variance there is a unique solution

\[
P_{\text{rel}} = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad q = \frac{\varphi}{NP_{\text{rel}}}
\]

For a lower bound (as during long-term depression), where \( \varphi = 0 \) either \( q \) or \( P_{\text{rel}} \) could be 0, or close to 0. We show (see main text) that it is more efficient to change the synaptic statistics by changing \( P_{\text{rel}} \) (Figure 4). The reason for this is that when aiming for a lower bound, \( \varphi = 0 \) mV, \( P_{\text{rel}} \) is more efficient than \( q \) at changing the variance of the release (variance = \( Nq^2P_{\text{rel}}(1 - P_{\text{rel}}) \)), which allows the postsynaptic response statistics to more quickly get probability mass on the lower bound. Functionally, such a post/pre separation of long-term depression and potentiation might enable rapid relearning of previously stored memories (Costa et al., 2015). However, for an upper bound (as during long-term potentiation) \( q \) also needs to be adjusted to set a non-zero mean response; thus both \( P_{\text{rel}} \) and \( q \) need to be updated during LTP.

3 Neurotransmitter release parameter estimation

The release parameters for the hippocampal data were estimated using a mean-variance method as described in Larkman et al. (1992). This is similar to the method we used to estimate the parameters from the visual cortex data as described below.

The release of neurotransmitter was assumed to follow a standard binomial model (Del Castillo and Katz, 1954) (as described in Section 1). The mean synaptic response is scaled by a postsynaptic factor \( q \), which can be related to the quantal amplitude such that

\[
\mu_{\text{syn}} = P_{\text{rel}}qN,
\]

and the variance is

\[
\sigma^2_{\text{syn}} = q^2NP_{\text{rel}}(1 - P_{\text{rel}}).
\]

The equations for \( \mu_{\text{syn}} \) (Equation 21) and \( \sigma^2_{\text{syn}} \) (Equation 22) can be rearranged to provide the following estimators for \( P_{\text{rel}} \) and \( q \)

\[
\hat{q} = \frac{\sigma^2_{\text{syn}} + \mu_{\text{syn}}}{\mu_{\text{syn}}N},
\]

and

\[
\hat{P}_{\text{rel}} = \frac{\mu_{\text{syn}}}{N\hat{q}}.
\]

The number of release sites \( N \) is believed to change only after a few hours (Bolshakov et al., 1997; Sáez and Friedlander, 2009). As the slice synaptic plasticity experiments analyzed here lasted only up to 1.5 hr (Sjöström et al., 2001) we set \( N = 5.5 \) in our analysis below, as estimated in Markram et al. (1997) using data from the same connection type (excitatory pyramidal cell onto excitatory py-
ramidal cell in layer-5). However, our results are robust to perturbations in the $N$ used across all datasets (Figure S12). Equations 24 and 23 were used to estimate $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ from in-vitro slice data, respectively (see more details on the datasets used below). Note that the estimations of $q$ will be in units of the experimental data, in our case mV for all the excitatory synapses (current-clamping (Larkman et al., 1992; Sjöström et al., 2001)) and pA for the inhibitory synapses (voltage-clamping (D’amour and Froemke, 2015)).

For the data from inhibitory synapses (see below) we set the number of release sites $N = 10$ (Buhl et al., 1994; Thomson et al., 1996; Tamás et al., 1997) and used data from a timing window which yields long-term potentiation (i.e., $-10 \text{ms} < \Delta t < 10 \text{ms}$; see more details in D’amour and Froemke, 2015).

This estimation method has been validated before by analyzing short-term plasticity experiments with and without pharmacological manipulation of presynaptic release and postsynaptic gain, and using pharmacological blockade of pre- or postsynaptic long-term plasticity (Costa et al., 2015). This is also consistent with our results in Figure S2. The estimations we obtain for $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ have a high degree of variability, which might be explained, by, in the intact brain, synapses undergoing a mix of long-term depression and potentiation.

4 Comparing model predictions with observations

To predict the exact changes in both $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ parameters we used Equations 9 and 10, respectively, which perform gradient descent on the KL-div (Equation 8). The initial $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ are estimated from the experimental datasets (see above) and the integration step was set to a small value to achieve a smooth numerical integration ($10^{-4}$, but the specific value does not impact the results). As our model focuses on the direction of change rather than its magnitude the numerical integration is stopped once the mean weight $\mu = NP_{\text{rel}}q$ reaches the change in the mean observed experimentally (i.e., $\mu_{\text{after}} = \mu_{\text{before}}$).

For long-term plasticity at excitatory synapses we used the mean excitatory current after plasticity induction as the bound $\varphi$ for a hippocampal and visual cortex dataset by minimizing the squared error between the observed and predicted changes

$$\varphi = \arg\min_{\varphi} \frac{1}{M} \sum_{j=1}^{M} \left[ \left( \frac{P_{\text{rel}}^{\text{after}}(\varphi) - P_{\text{rel}}^{\text{before}}}{\sigma_{\text{rel}}^{\text{data}}} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{q^{\text{after}}(\varphi) - q^{\text{before}}}{\sigma_{q}^{\text{data}}} \right)^2 \right].$$

where $M$ is the total number of $j$ experiments (i.e., data points). So that both $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ have a similar scale we normalized the quantal amplitude as

$$q_{\text{norm}} = \frac{q}{Nq_{\text{data}}}$$

where $q_{\text{data}}$ represents the arithmetic mean of $q$ of the dataset before induction and $N$ is the number of release sites. Note that the release probability $P_{\text{rel}}$ is implicitly bounded between 0 and 1.

The bound estimation was then validated on separate datasets (control datasets, see table below). For the hippocampal long-term potentiation dataset the estimated bound was 0.68 mV. Separately, we estimated the bound for the visual cortex long-term potentiation dataset which yielded a similar value of 0.56 mV. These estimated bounds represent a global solution that is consistent across several individual recordings, which does not preclude that each individual synapse may have its own statistical bound. For inhibitory synapses (recorded in auditory cortex) we used the mean excitatory current after plasticity induction as the bound $\varphi$ in each experiment (see below for more details).

5 Different modes of inhibitory and excitatory statistical balance

We used long-term plasticity data of inhibitory synapses to test whether changes in inhibition aim for the mean or/and variance of the release probability

$$\text{KL}(P_E || P_I) = \ln \frac{\sigma_I}{\sigma_E} + \frac{\sigma^2_E + (\mu_E - \mu_I)^2}{2\sigma^2_I} - 1.$$  

We used Equation 27 before, $\text{KL}(P_{E}^{\text{before}} || P_{I}^{\text{before}})$ and after, $\text{KL}(P_{E}^{\text{after}} || P_{I}^{\text{after}})$ plasticity induction – to test whether inhibitory synaptic transmission optimizes both its mean and variance, and whether it targets mean or both mean and variance of excitatory responses. To this end we use the KL-divergence in three different cases:

1. Comparison of means and variances of both excitation and inhibition, $\text{KL}(P_E || P_I)$ (Equation 27), using $\mu_I$, $\sigma_I$, $\mu_E$ and $\sigma_E$ reanalysed from D’amour and Froemke (2015). This corresponds to “inh = mean & var exc.” (Figure 8C).

2. Comparing means and variances of inhibition only the mean response of excitation, $\text{KL}(P_E || P_I)$ (Equation 27), using $\mu_I$, $\sigma_I$ and $\mu_E$ reanalysed from D’amour and Froemke (2015), and $\sigma_E \rightarrow 0$ (we used $\sigma_E = 1$, which is substantially smaller than the variance of mean excitatory synapses (see Figure S10)).

3. Here the inhibitory variance is not allowed to change $\text{KL}(P_E || P_I)$ (Equation 27), using $\mu_I$ and $\mu_E$ from D’Amour and Froemke, 2015, and $\sigma_E \rightarrow 0$ and $\sigma_I^{\text{after}} = \sigma_I^{\text{before}}$. This corresponds to “fixed inh. var.” (Figure 8C).
**Excitation-inhibition model selection**

The different models of excitation-inhibition balance introduced above were compared using model selection (Akaike information criterion (AIC), Costa et al., 2013). In particular we used the AIC special case for ordinary least-squares (OLS) (Banks and Joyner, 2017) which is given by $AIC_{OLS} = M \ln \left( \frac{\sum (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2}{M} \right) + 2M$, in which $M$ is the number of experiments, $\hat{y}_i$ is the predicted value of the $i$th data point, $y_i$ is the observed value of the $i$th data point, and $M$ is the number of parameters estimated.

### 6 Statistical EI balance

We used two Gaussians, one to model inhibitory responses, $P^{PSP} \sim N(\mu_{inh}, \sigma_{inh}^2)$, and another to model excitatory responses, $P^{PSP} \sim N(\mu_{exc}, \sigma_{exc}^2)$. Next, we compared two possible scenarios of statistical E/I balance: (i) inhibition matches both mean and variance of excitation (i.e., $\mu_{inh} = \mu_{exc}$ and $\sigma_{inh}^2 = \sigma_{exc}^2$) or (ii) inhibition matches only excitatory mean (i.e., $\mu_{inh} = \mu_{exc}$ and $\sigma_{inh}^2 = 0$). Then, we sampled excitatory and inhibitory responses from both Gaussians and for each sample we compute the excitation/inhibition ratio (see comparison in Figures 8D and 8E). Sampled values are rectified to be non-negative, $\mu_{exc}$ is set to 10 (the exact value does not affect the results quantitatively) and $\sigma_{exc}^2$ is varied between 0 and 4 (Figure 8).

### 7 Experimental data

#### 7.1 Hippocampal long-term and short-lasting potentiation

We reanalysed a dataset obtained from synapses of hippocampal CA3 pyramidal cells onto CA1 pyramidal cells. A quantal parameter estimation was performed as previously described (Larkman et al., 1992). Briefly, this involved quantal parameter estimators similar to the ones given above for evoked responses. We estimated the upper bound from one dataset and tested it in the remaining two (see Table below).

| Brain area | Experiment | Ref. | Fitted? | Control? |
|------------|------------|------|---------|----------|
| Hippocampus | LTP (duration: > 10min; protocol: tetanus) | Larkman et al., 1992 | Yes | No |
| Hippocampus | SLP (duration: < 10min; protocol: tetanus) | Hannay et al., 1993 | No | Yes |
| Hippocampus | SLP (duration: < 10min; protocol: pairing) | Hannay et al., 1993 | No | Yes |
| Visual cortex | LTP (STDP protocol) | Sjöström et al., 2001 | Yes | No |
| Visual cortex | LTP (high freq.) | Sjöström et al., 2007 | No | Yes |

Datasets used to estimate the bound (fitted) and test the estimation (control) from hippocampal and visual cortex recordings. SLP denotes short-lasting potentiation. For information on the inhibitory synapses dataset see below.

#### 7.2 Visual cortex long-term potentiation and depression

We also used our framework to predict expression loci of plasticity in the primary visual cortex for both long-term depression and potentiation. The long-term potentiation dataset corresponds to the spike-timing-dependent plasticity dataset in which positive changes in the mean weight were obtained after induction (i.e., $>0.1 Hz$ for $+10ms$ and $>20Hz$ for $-10ms$; Sjöström et al., 2001). The upper bound was estimated from this dataset and tested in a high-frequency induction LTP dataset (Sjöström et al., 2007), which is equivalent to high-frequency pairing in the STDP dataset (Datasets Table above). Similarly, for the long-term depression dataset, data points that yielded a reduction in the synaptic weight were used (i.e., $0.1Hz$, $10Hz$ and $20Hz$ with $-10ms$; Sjöström et al., 2001). The parameters were estimated using Equations 23 and 24 above, with $N = 5.5$.

#### 7.3 Visual cortex pharmacological blockade

To study the involvement of known retrograde messengers we also analyzed pharmacological blockade data of LTP in the visual cortex (Sjöström et al., 2007). Two such retrograde messengers are nitric oxide (NO) and endocannabinoids (eCB), known as important regulators of presynaptic release during long-term synaptic plasticity (Sjöström et al., 2003; Sjöström et al., 2007; Heifets and Castillo, 2009; Regehr et al., 2009; Hardingham et al., 2013; Yang and Calakos, 2013), and thus are natural candidates to help implement statLTSP (see Figure 6).

#### 7.4 Auditory cortex excitatory and inhibitory long-term plasticity

We tested our framework using long-term plasticity data from primary auditory cortex containing both excitatory and inhibitory synaptic currents (D’amour and Froemke, 2015). In these recordings both inhibitory and excitatory synaptic currents were obtained for a given postsynaptic pyramidal cell in layer-5 auditory cortex, which was recorded using whole-cell patching. For this dataset our
model was numerically integrated for 60 steps, which is based on the number of pairings applied during plasticity induction. \( P_{rel} \) and \( q \) were estimated as explained above.

8 Analysis of pre- and postsynaptic long-term depression

In principle, the synaptic weight can be decreased either pre- or postsynaptically, by setting \( P_{rel} = 0 \) or \( q = 0 \), respectively. The same is true in our framework if the lower bound is set to zero (Movies S1 and S2). In order to evaluate which synaptic release parameter is the most efficient for long-term depression in our framework we calculated the change in KL-div changing either \( P_{rel} \) (with \( \varphi_{P_{rel}} = 0 \), Equation 28) or \( q \) (with \( \varphi_q = 0 \), Equation 29) as

\[
\text{total } \Delta P_{rel} = \int_{P_{rel}=0.1}^{P_{rel}=1} \int_{q^4=0.1}^{q^4=1} \text{KL}(P_{bound} \parallel P_{PSP}) \ dq \ dP_{rel}
\]

(28)

\[
\text{total } \Delta q = \int_{P_{rel}=0.1}^{P_{rel}=1} \int_{q^4=0.1}^{q^4=1} \text{KL}(P_{bound} \parallel P_{PSP}) \ dq \ dP_{rel}
\]

(29)

the qualitative outcome does not depend on the exact values of \( P_{rel} \) and \( q \) integrate over as long as it covers a wide enough range (note that this is related to the path integral over \( P_{rel} \) or \( q \)). This analysis together with the analysis of experimental data (see Figure 4) show that during LTD, changing \( P_{rel} \) (with \( \varphi_{P_{rel}} = 0 \)) is statistically more efficient than modifying \( q \), \( \varphi_q \) was fitted to 0.11 mV (to minimize the error between model predictions and data as described above), which provides an estimate for a postsynaptic stable state for \( q \). This is consistent with a wide range of data, in that the initial phase of long-term depression is presynaptically expressed (Zakharenko et al., 2002; Gerdeman et al., 2002; Sjöström et al., 2003; Hardingham et al., 2007; Rodríguez-Moreno et al., 2010; Costa et al., 2015; Andrade-Talavera et al., 2016), and a slower postsynaptic LTD component (Costa et al., 2015).

9 Linear correlation analysis and statistical tests

To compare model predictions with the changes observed in the data we used a standard (Pearson) linear correlation analysis. Elsewhere, normality was accessed using a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and significance was tested using a standard t test for normally distributed data or a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney U-test) otherwise. Significance levels are represented as * (p < 0.05), ** (p < 0.01) and *** (p < 0.001), and paired tests were performed on the relative changes (e.g., random path model relative to statLTSP).

10 Alternative models

Below, we describe possible alternative models to the statLTSP.

10.1 Random path model

In this model a random direction of change was generated by sampling changes in \( P_{rel} \) and \( q \) from a truncated Gaussian distribution \( Y \sim \mathcal{N}(0 < X < + \infty; \mu = 0, \sigma^2 = 1) \) when comparing with long-term potentiation experimental results and \( Y \sim \mathcal{N}(-\infty < X < 0; \mu = 0, \sigma^2 = 1) \) for long-term depression experimental results. This prevents negative and positive changes, respectively. Additionally, \( P_{rel} \) is kept within its bounds (i.e., between 0 and 1). When applying this random path model to the inhibitory plasticity data we used a non-truncated Gaussian distribution \( Y \sim \mathcal{N}(X; \mu = 0, \sigma^2 = 1) \), as statLTSP in this case can also take any direction (i.e., positive or negative). However, our results hold for a truncated Gaussian.

10.2 Shortest path model

In this model the shortest (euclidean) change was used as an additional control model to compare the statistical framework with. Distances were calculated for each combination of \( P_{rel} \) and \( q \) that corresponded to a new mean weight \( \mu_{after} \) observed experimentally (\( P_{rel}^{after} = 0.1 \) and \( q_{after} = \mu_{after} / P_{rel}^{after} \)) as

\[
d = \sqrt{\left(P_{rel}^{after} - P_{rel}^{before}\right)^2 + \left(q_{after} - q_{before}\right)^2}
\]

(30)

the shortest point was selected as the new predicted \( (P_{rel}, q) \) combination, which was then compared with the one estimated experimentally. Additionally, two versions were compared: (i), \( w_{after} \) was used as the absolute change observed in the data for each datapoint (e.g., \( \Delta \mu = 0.5 \)) and \( q \) was normalized as above (i.e., \( q = q / N^4_{data} \)) (Figures S1A–S1D); (ii) \( w_{after} \) was set as the relative change (e.g., \( \Delta \mu / \mu_{before} = 1.25 \)), in which case \( q \) was not normalized (Figures S1E–S1H). The first version was used throughout the paper to compare with statLTSP due to also capturing changes in the data (Figures S1A–S1D), but we obtained similar results when using the ‘relative change’ model (Figures S1E–S1H).

10.3 Non-statistically bounded model

Here we discuss a linearized version of statLTSP, in this model we assume the following changes

\[
\Delta P_{rel} = (1 - P_{rel})
\]

(31)

\[
\Delta q = (B - q)
\]

(32)
where $\beta$ was optimized ($\beta = 0.63 \text{ mV}$, which is similar to the bound estimated using statLTSP) to fit the hippocampal data (using the cost function defined in Equation 25). This model can be interpreted as a special case of our statLTSP, and provides an equally good fit to the hippocampal and visual cortex datasets we study here. However it does not capture some of the key experimental results, such as state-dependence (Figure S8) and presynaptic expression of LTD (Figure S8). Note that $q$ is normalized as described above (Equation 26), and that this model is similar to typical weight-dependence in learning rules formulated in terms of the modifications in the mean weight (van Rossum et al., 2000). Indeed we also show that statLTSP captures the weight-dependence observed experimentally (Figure S13).

10.4 Pre- or postsynaptic only model
We also tested a modified version of the statLTSP in which only pre- or postsynaptic modifications are allowed. As expected, either pre- or postsynaptic only models do not capture changes in the component kept fixed (not shown). Moreover, keeping one of the components fixed decreases the quality of the fit on the other (“plastic”) component.

11 Combining Hebbian learning rules with statLTSP
In Figure S6 we present results on combining a spike-based triplet STDP learning rule (Costa et al., 2015) (with explicit learning rules for pre- or postsynaptic components) and statLTSP. This is done by setting the 'potential' change (i.e., the allowed change in $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$) as $P_{\text{rel}}^{\text{pot}} = P_{\text{rel}}^{\text{before}} + \Delta P_{\text{rel}}(\rho, \Delta t)$ and $q^{\text{pot}} = q^{\text{before}} + \Delta q(\rho, \Delta t)$, where $\Delta P_{\text{rel}}(\rho, \Delta t)$ and $\Delta q(\rho, \Delta t)$ are given by the STDP learning rule (Costa et al., 2015). $\rho$ and $\Delta t$ represent the firing rate and timing, respectively, used in the visual cortex STDP experiments. Then statLTSP modified $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ from a given initial state until one of the two (i.e., $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$) potential changes was met.

In Figure S6 we show that such a combination can also capture the changes in the mean weight for the visual cortex data, for which a pre- and postsynaptic Hebbian learning rule has been developed (Costa et al., 2015), but not for hippocampal data, for which we used the equivalent of $\Delta t = 10\text{ ms}$ and $\rho = 50\text{ Hz}$ in the STDP visual cortex protocol, which approximates a tetanus protocol.

12 Extended statLTSP with changes in the number of release sites
We have extended statLTSP to also consider the number of release sites $N$ (Figure S3). In this extended model a new release site (which would require some form of structural modifications) is created when the postsynapse can no longer increase its number of receptors to meet a desired bound with the existing number of release sites. Experimentally, is it still unclear the pre- and postsynaptic state of a new release site (Bolshakov et al., 1997; Sáez and Friedlander, 2009), thus we considered three possible variations of this model of release site insertion:

1. A new synapse with the same release probability $P_{\text{rel}}$, but new postsynaptic receptor density $q$ (Figure S3A)
2. A new synapse with new release probability $P_{\text{rel}}$ and new postsynaptic receptor density $q$ (Figure S3B)
3. A synaptic division in which both release probability $P_{\text{rel}}$ and $q$ are split evenly (Figure S3C).

In all three cases, we assume that each release site $i$ is optimized given its own bound (bound$_i$ = bound$/N$). The combined effect of these changes moves the overall postsynaptic response toward a larger bound as discussed in the main text (bound = bound$/N$) (Figures S3A–S3C). Our results suggest that if the desired bound is higher than the upper limit of the current postsynaptic density, new release sites would develop (Figures S3A–S3C). As expected, all three model variations converge to the same final postsynaptic response, but they make slightly different predictions for the trajectories of $P_{\text{rel}}/q$ as dictated by their starting points in state space (Figures S3A–S3C).

DATA AND SOFTWARE AVAILABILITY

A graphical interface for the statistical model can be accessed in ModelDB (see Key Resources Table). The datasets analyzed and respective estimations reported in this paper have been deposited to Mendeley Data and are available at http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/m5865cj7dd.1, http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/x8n3yfzrzc.1, http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/7wvf2yw4jn.1, and http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/gx7r43hm8h.1.