

Implementing a Token Economy

(Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2020)

Step 1: Identify the target behaviors and the rules of the token economy

- Target behaviors should be observable and measurable
- Develop criteria for task completion
- At first, start with easier behavior requirements to earn tokens and then slowly add harder behaviors/requirements
- Ensure the learners have the prerequisite skills to engage in the target behaviors to earn tokens

Step 2: Select the type of tokens (Example: chips, stars, check marks, etc.)

- Tokens should be safe and durable
- Ensure tokens can't be duplicated by the learner (learner creates the tokens)
- Tokens should be readily accessible when needed to dispense
- If the learner has a special interest (fixated interest), research has demonstrated creating a token based on the special interest can be very powerful.

Step 3: Establish the menu of reinforcers (back up reinforcers) to purchase

- Select reinforcers that are age appropriate and sensitive to the different culture populations of the classroom (extra recess, free time, homework pass, etc.)
- Select reinforcers that won't be disruptive to the learning environment
- Make sure reinforcers are workable (students shouldn't be earning a video game console).

Step 4: Determine a token exchange ratio

- Keep the initial ratio low
- Slowly increase the price of the items as students gain target skills.
- With increased earnings, increase the number of luxury items

Step 5: Determine when and how tokens will be dispensed and exchanged and what will happen if the requirements to earn a token are not met

- Establish how the learner will accumulate the tokens (wallet, folder, jar)
- Ensure the reinforcer menu is created including the cost of each item
- Decide on when the "store is open". Initially, the store should be open frequently.
- Lower functioning learners may need more frequent token exchange opportunities
- As time passes and the learners meet expectations, feel free to reduce the store hours.
- If the learner doesn't earn enough tokens, simply say, "I'm sorry you don't have enough tokens, you can try better next time."

Step 6: Field-test the system before fully implementing the token economy

- Implement the token system (privately) to make sure the learners will be earning the tokens based on the criteria set. Tokens will not be giving out during this time. Instead, the teacher can just document how often the students "would be earning tokens" as defined by the expectations (example: Is the student able to raise their hand two consecutive times before speaking out?).
- This information can be used to determine if the correct target skills have been identified along with any other adjustments that need to be made.
- Begin implementing the system once the field test determines the students are earning tokens 75-80% of opportunities across three days.