Rewards and tokens can be an effective tool when teaching a new skill or behavior, ensuring that they become part of a daily routine, and encouraging positive behaviors. Using a reward system allows an individual to focus on the positive outcomes instead of on the challenging task or expectation at hand that may be frustrating or causing anxiety.

**Reward Schedule**

A reward schedule looks like a visual schedule (see Visual Schedules How-To). However, in addition to the activity steps, it also includes a reminder about the upcoming reward that the individual will receive once they complete all the steps. This allows to build in an incentive for cooperation, provide structure and information, and reduce undesired behaviors.

**Can I give a prize after each step?** While this can be effective in the short term, as the individual will get what they want immediately after each compliance with the request or activity step, this can also cause problems later. For example, after a few steps, the prize may lose its appeal, so the individual will lose motivation to complete the rest of the steps. Also, if the individual gets used to receive a prize after each action or step (i.e. external motivation), it will be difficult to reduce the frequency of rewards and have a negative impact on the individual’s ability to reach independence.

**What should I choose as a prize?** The prize should be an item or activity that is desirable and not easily accessible otherwise. For example, if an individual about going to see a dentist, a promise to go to the park afterwards, that you and the individual go to every afternoon anyways, would not be sufficiently motivational to see the dentist.

**Should I decide what prize to include?** Let the individual select the reward to make sure it is more motivational for them to complete the activity. Use a choice board (see Choice Board Ho-To) to limit options. However, make sure that the rewards are available immediately after the activity and not easily accessible otherwise.

**Scenario for Using a Reward Schedule**

Together with an individual identify a potential reward (or several rewards that could be placed on a choice board for future selection). After the individual completes each step, they need to place the reward picture next to the step to show that the step was completed and they are so much close to the prize. If the individual has fine motor challenges, help them move the picture. Don’t forget to give specific positive praise for after each step, e.g., “Great job writing the letter.”

Make sure that the individual has access to the prize right away!
The idea of the token board is similar to a reward schedule in that the individual earns rewards, but the rewards are given after all the set expectations are met and the contracted number of tokens earned. Also, unlike the reward schedule, it may happen in the middle of an activity or after several activities, depending on the type of expectations set. Thus, tokens can be earned after a set number of tasks are completed, a set period of time in which the individual is engaged in a task, a number of correct responses, etc.

Would not it be disruptive to get a reward in the middle of an activity?
If it is a large prize, like going to the zoo, then yes it will be and more so may become a way for an individual to avoid the activity by quickly collecting tokens. Consider using smaller value prizes, e.g., a 5-minute break or a cookie, after which the individual has to be back to the task at hand.

Can I use other types of tokens rather than coins?
Of course! The tokens can be motivational on their own. For example, if an individual loves cars, then use car pictures as tokens.

What is an optimal number of coins that need to be earned?
The rule of thumb is to make sure that it is achievable! So when teaching a new skill, you may want to reward the individual more often to make sure that they feel successful and motivated. However, this can also be achieved by placing several tokens on the board prior to starting the count. For example, if your token board has slots for ten tokens, you may want to put several right away so the individual starts with a smaller number of tokens to earn. Then, when the individual gets more skillful, you can increase the number of tokens to be earned and/or increase the time between earning individual the tokens.

Can I take tokens back if an individual fails the set expectations?
While it is possible, it is punitive, which is less effective than positive reinforcement. That is why it is recommended to be used only as a last resort for major undesirable behaviors that need to be suppressed quickly. If used, the individual should know exactly why a token is taken away. Additionally, never put the individual in a "token debt," where tokens have not be earned yet and are already taken away.

Scenario for Using a Token Board

Set clear expectations for the individual to meet to earn a token. For example, create a rule board that would help remind an individual what they should do.

Similarly to the reward schedule, identify a potential reward (or several rewards that could be placed on a choice board for future selection) together with an individual. Let the individual place a token when expectations are met (e.g., every several minutes if an individual is on task or complies, or if behaviors are competed as asked). When teaching the new behavior or the use of a token board, you may need to "catch" an individual behaving as expected to ensure that they understand how the token board works. Don’t forget to combine the token with positive praise to strengthen the positive reinforcement.
How to Make a Reward System:

**Materials Needed:**
- Board template (schedule for a reward schedule)
- Cards
- Construction paper (preferred for boards)
- Scissors
- Hard and soft velcro dots or spools (cut down to 1” pieces)
- Laminate & laminator

**Steps to Make a Reward Schedule:**
1. Brainstorm potential choice options based on the interests of the individual and availability. Involve the individual in the brainstorming whenever possible.
2. Create a visual schedule for your activity.
3. At the bottom of the schedule add the phrase “I am working for.”
4. If you place the yet-to-be-used tokens at the bottom, make sure you leave enough space. Alternatively, if the schedule is mobile, you can put unused tokens on the back.
5. Print the reward card and the prize card.
6. Laminate the board and cards.
7. Cut them out.
8. Place soft velcro on the board next to each step, “I am working for”, and for unused tokens. Place hard velcro on the back of tokens and the prize card.

**Steps to Make a Token Board:**
1. Brainstorm potential choice options based on the interests of the individual and availability. Involve the individual in the brainstorming whenever possible.
2. Create a list of rules for appropriate behavior.
3. Print the board template, reward and token cards (or use coins).
4. Laminate the board and cards.
5. Cut them out.
6. Place soft velcro on the board for earned and yet-to-be-earned tokens and next to “I am working for”. Place hard velcro on the back of tokens and the prize card.
My Token Board

I am working for

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**Card Options: Reinforcers**

- Cookie
- Candy corn
- Crackers
- Ice cream
- Book
- Ice cream cone
- Apple
- Train

**Card Options: Tokens**

- Penny
- Smiley face
- Checkmark
- Balloon
- Thumbs up
- Car
- Princess
- Star

**Card Options: Reward Pictures**

- Ribbon
- Medal
- Flower
- Chocolate
- Gift card
- Phone
- Laptop
- Rocking chair