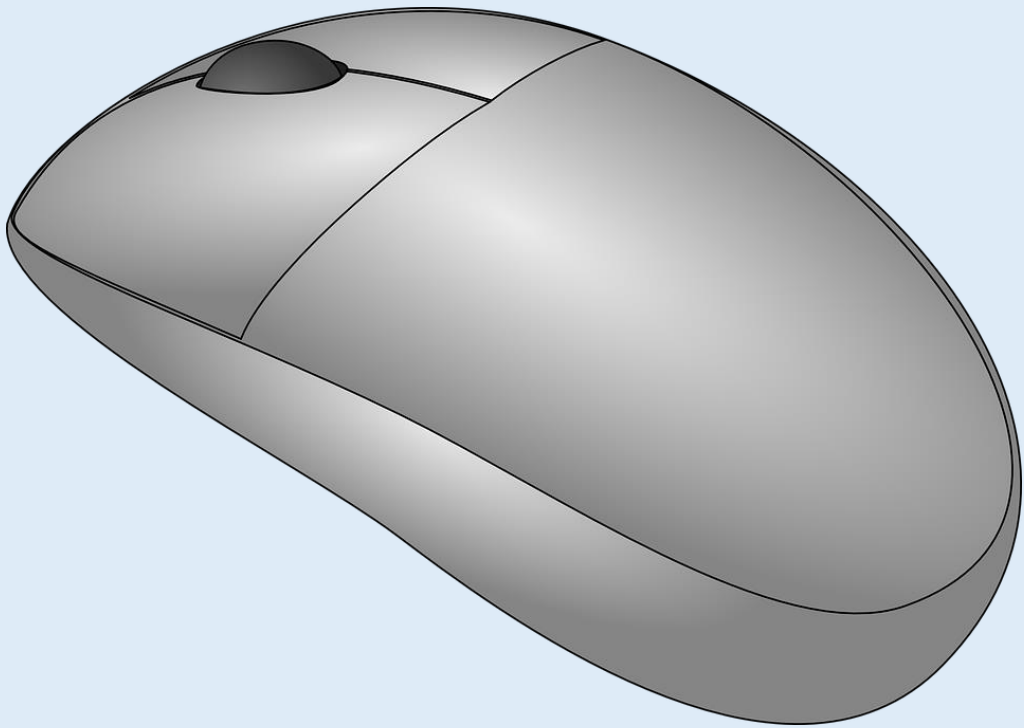# Teaching Students with Autism to Use a Computer Mouse

A How-To Guide with Online Activities

Created by **Positively Autism**:
Making Learning Fun and Meaningful for Students with Autism

Positively Autism:
Making Learning Fun and Meaningful for Students with Autism

Thanks for reading this guide! I love to share teaching ideas and materials for educators and families.

If you'd like to get more teaching activities and freebies each month in your e-mail, please join my free newsletter:
http://positivelyautism.weebly.com/subscribe-its-free.html

Thanks and enjoy the guide,

Dr. Nicole Caldwell

Founder, Positively Autism

http://www.PositivelyAutism.com/

Teaching Students with Autism to Use a Computer Mouse

By Nicole Caldwell, Ph.D.

Breaking Down This Skill

When I'm teaching a new skill to a student, I find it helpful to break the skill down into its steps or parts. In the ABA programs I've worked in, this is called a task analysis. A task analysis is when we break down a skill into small steps and make a list of the steps. This helps us more easily teach the skill our students.

Here's how I've broken down the basics of using a computer mouse for this guide. You might find that your student needs the skill broken down farther, but this has worked well for the students I've used it with.

1. Understand that the mouse button is related to the arrow on the screen.
2. Move the mouse arrow to a specific place on the screen.
3. Click a specific place on the screen to make something happen.
4. Use the mouse to move an object from one area of the screen to another.

These are the skills we'll focus on for teaching students the basics.

[Click here](#) for more information on using a task analysis.

Additional Notes Before Teaching the Four Skills

To teach these skills, you may need to use various types of prompts to help your student succeed. If your student can easily understand verbal directions, you can explain them and have the student do the activities.

If your student is still developing listening comprehension skills, you may want to use physical prompting and fading to help the student learn the skills.

If you aren't familiar with using physical prompting to teach, please read these blog posts. It's well worth your time, as using prompting and fading is a great tool for teaching this skill (and other skills) to your student. I would also recommend consulting with a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) for training on using prompts.

- [Types of Prompts and How to Use Them](#)

- [How to Use Prompts Effectively](#)

- [Procedures for Prompt Fading](#)

- [Using Time Delay to Fade Prompting](#)

Skill 1:
Understand that the Mouse Button is Related to the Arrow on the Screen

To help my students make the connection between the mouse itself and the arrow on the screen, I start by taping a printed mouse arrow onto the mouse button. I've laminated this arrow, and I put tape onto the back.

I usually physically prompt the student to put the arrow on the mouse button (showing where to put it, or guiding the student's hand to put the arrow in the correct place). I like having the arrow there because it also shows which button the student should push.

Once you have the arrow visual cue on the mouse button, you'll want to draw the student's attention to the mouse arrow on the computer screen. We'll talk about that on the next page.

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Skill 1:
# Understand that the Mouse Button is Related to the Arrow on the Screen, Continued

I use this practice exercise to help the student notice the arrow. The student needs to be aware of the arrow on the screen, and that the arrow can be in different places on the screen.

I made a PDF file that has 10 pages, each that has a picture of a mouse arrow in a different place on the screen. You'll load the PDF file on your computer, and have the student match a printed arrow to the arrow on the screen.

I print the arrow photos, laminate them, and put some tape on the back, so the student can tape it directly to the screen. After I praise/reward the student for correct matching, I remove the arrow, go the next page in the PDF, and let the student match the arrow again.
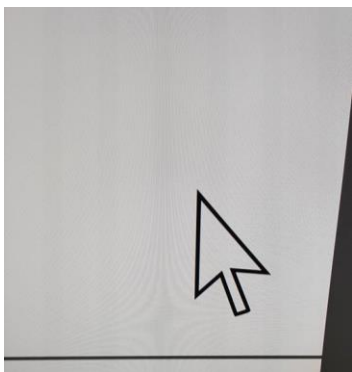
How one page of the PDF looks on the screen.
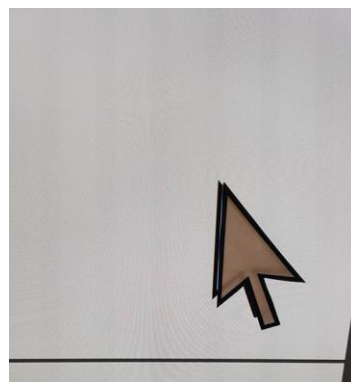
After the student matches the arrow by taping it on the screen to match.

**Get the free PDF for this activity by clicking here.**

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Skill 2:
Move the Mouse Arrow to a Specific Place on the Screen

For this skill, we'll have the student start using the mouse. I've created an online activity that you'll use with this step.

Before going to the link to the online activity, see if your computer's display settings with let you enlarge the size of the mouse arrow, so your student will be able to see it better. If your computer doesn't have this setting, it's fine. I've taught it without a larger arrow, and it works fine.

On the online activity, each page will contain a picture of a single mouse arrow, with nothing else on the page. This is to prevent distraction. When the student moves the computer mouse arrow to touch the arrow picture on the screen, it will reveal a photo of a train, as a "reward" (no clicking necessary). After you see the train, the teacher clicks the photo to go to the next page.

Here are two screenshots of the online activity. You'll find the activity and a few additional instructions at the link below.

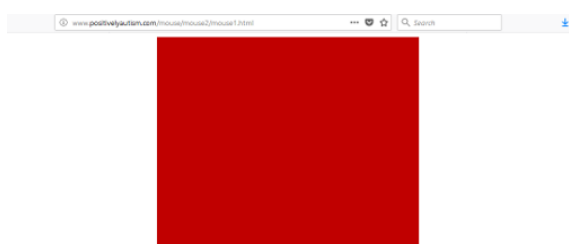**Access this online activity by clicking here.**

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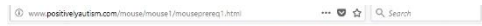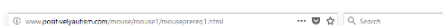
Skill 3:
Click a Specific Place on the Screen to Make Something Happen

Once your student has mastered skill two, you can move on to this step. Please feel free to do the step two activities many times. My students often need multiple sessions of practice with skill two before moving on, so take your time.

There is another online activity that your student will do with this skill. On this activity, each page will contain a single shape, with nothing else on the page. This is to prevent distraction. When the student clicks the shape, it will reveal a photo of a train, as a "reward" for clicking with the mouse. After you see the train, the teacher clicks the word, "Next" to go to the next page. The size of the shapes starts large to make it easier for the student initially, and the shapes will gradually get smaller as you go on.

Here are two screenshots of the online activity. You'll find the activity and a few additional instructions at the link below.

NEXT

Access this online activity by [clicking here](#).

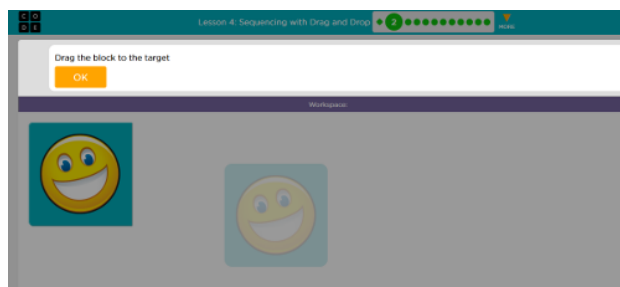Text © 2017. Positively Autism.

Skill 4:
Use the Mouse to Move an Object From One Area of the Screen to Another

For this skill, you'll need your student to practice clicking on an object, holding the mouse button while you move the object, and then letting go of the button. This may require some physical prompting at first.

If you're not familiar with using different types of prompts, please read the following blog posts for important information on how to prompt when teaching:

- Types of Prompts and How to Use Them
- How to Use Prompts Effectively
- Procedures for Prompt Fading
- Using Time Delay to Fade Prompting

For this skill, I recommend using this online activity from the free website Code.org. You'll find instructions at the website. Code.org has lots of free, fun activities that your student will be able to use once he or she has good skills with using the computer mouse.

Access this online activity by clicking here.

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