

## Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read words accurately and quickly. Fluency is dependent upon the type of reading, the reader's familiarity with the words, and the amount of practice reading text. The components of fluency are automaticity, prosody, accuracy and speed, expression, intonation and phrasing. Automaticity refers to accurate, quick word recognition, not to reading with expression. Although students may recognize words, their oral reading may be expressionless and/or lack phrasing and punctuation. Fluent readers know when to pause within and at the ends of sentences and when to change emphasis and tone.

Reading fluency growth does not merely consist of the ability to read words automatically in isolation (sight words). This is because the ability to read these words may not transfer when these same words appear in sentences or in connected text. Therefore, it is important to give students instruction and practice in fluency as they read connected text.

Reading fluency is a critical factor necessary for reading comprehension. A study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found a close relationship between fluency and comprehension. Unlike less fluent readers, fluent readers do not have to focus on decoding words. They can recognize words and construct meaning at the same time. Additionally, they are able to make connections between the text and their background knowledge. Fluent readers are more likely to comprehend and remember the material because they read without difficulty and in an efficient way (Rasinski, 2000).

Ways to improve and build fluency:

- **Modeling good oral reading** – Reading to students in a natural manner models fluent reading. Students should not confuse word-perfect decoding with good reading.
- **Encouraging fluency through phrasing** – Often the meaning of a text is found, not in the isolated words, but in the phrases. The ability to chunk the text into phrases helps in comprehension.
- **Providing oral support** – When a student simultaneously hears and reads a fluent rendition of a text, his or her fluency and comprehension improve.
- **Offering many practice opportunities** – With practice, students can move from decoding words to making sense of the reading.

Teachers must provide explicit instruction, guided practice, supported application and independent practice in fluency. For independent practice it is critical that the reading materials be at the student's independent level (word recognition 95% or better) or instructional level (word recognition 90% or better) (Blevins, 2001). Research has shown that oral reading leads to better silent, independent reading. However, silent, independent reading does not necessarily lead to increased fluency and reading achievement (Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2001). Readers who are not fluent are less likely to benefit from silent, independent reading. These readers would benefit more from direct instruction in reading. Fluency can be improved through authentic instructional activities such as read alouds, practicing poetry or scripts, and supported reading.

**Considerations when instructing ELLs include the following:**

- According to the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), ELLs should first learn to read in their native language. If this is not the case, then ELLs would need to hear and see hundreds of books modeled to them over the course of a school year. Additionally, ELLs should participate in read alouds, read along with proficient readers, and listen repeatedly to books read aloud in order to gain fluency in English (Antunez, 2002).
- Oral proficiency in English provides a foundation whereby students learn about the alphabetic principle and subsequently learn about the structure of spoken English words. Thus, for ELLs, reading fluency is related to oral language proficiency.
- It is important that teachers consider the English language proficiency levels of their ELLs when choosing fluency activities. For example, choral reading provides fluency practice as well as a sense of comfort for all students because it does not single out any one student.
- ELLs may be overwhelmed by the amount of information in a book when presented with it all at once. An option is to read aloud in parts as this serves as an adaptation for varying levels of listening proficiency, yet still provides a model for fluency.
- Many ELLs will read and speak English with an accent; however, this does not mean that they are not fluent readers in English. *Accent is not a factor* when assessing a student's fluency.
- Upper elementary and older ELLs are developing sight vocabulary and word identification at the same time as oral language proficiency. Therefore, they especially need more activities related to fluency building.
- ELLs benefit from interactive read alouds where teachers read books aloud with the use of expression and the active participation of the listener through predicting, discussion and checking for understanding. Read alouds expose ELLs to a strong English language model as well as give them access to books that they may not be able to read independently.
- Teachers should preview a text before reading it and select 15-20 words that might cause ELLs difficulty. Help the students to decode these words and then practice them orally as a group before reading.

## Fluency Building Activities/Strategies

### ***Reader's Theater***

**TIP:** Take into account the ELLs' oral language proficiency when assigning parts.

#### **Purpose:**

To learn how language is used in written text and to practice oral language.

#### **Materials:**

Text to create a script or prewritten script (Reader's theater does not use movement, costumes, props or scenery.)

#### **Procedure:**

1. Choose a piece of literature with a strong story line or a chapter from a content area book that can be read in parts.
2. Read the piece silently or aloud. Discuss the contents and ask the students to read it again.
3. Students will develop a script from the literature. Students may use the entire story, or they may decide to create a scene from the story.
4. Assign students an individual part or parts that can be performed by students within groups.
5. Rehearse the play.
6. Present the play to an appropriate audience.

#### ***Sources for Reader's Theater Scripts***

Barchers, S. I. (1993). *Reader's theater for beginning readers*. Englewood, CO: Teachers Idea Press.

Bauer, C.F. (1991). *Presenting reader's theatre: Plays and poems to read aloud*. New York: H.W. Wilson.

Fry, E. (2000). *25 Mini-plays: World history*. New York: Scholastic. (grades 4-8)

Martin, J.M. (2002). *12 Fabulously funny fairy tale plays*. New York: Scholastic. (grades 2-4)

Shepherd, A. (1993). *Stories on stage: Scripts for reader's theater*. New York: H.W. Wilson. (grades 1-8)

Walker, L. (1997). *Reader's theatre strategies for the middle and junior high Classroom*. Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether Publishing.

#### **Websites:**

<http://www.storycart.com>

<http://www.lisablau.com>

<http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/>

<http://www.loiswalker.com/catalog/guidesamples.html>

<http://www.aspa.asn.au/Projects/english/rttheatre.html>

## ***Read Alouds***

**TIP:** Activating prior knowledge is especially important when reading to ELLs.

### **Purpose:**

To read aloud to students so that students:

- are exposed to multiple genres;
- witness fluent reading;
- are motivated to read more; and,
- are exposed to material that is above their own reading level.

### **Materials:**

Book or excerpt

### **Procedure:**

1. Introduce the book.
2. Read with expression.
3. Build in time for listeners to respond during the reading.
4. Encourage predictions.
5. After reading, elicit student reaction to the story and encourage discussion.

## ***Sources for Choosing Literature to Read Aloud***

### **Books:**

*Kids' favorite books.* (1992). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Jensen, J.M., & Roser, N.L. (1993). *Adventuring with books: A booklist for pre-k-grade 6* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

*Teens' favorite books.* (1992). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Trelease, J. (2001). *The read-aloud handbook* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Penguin.

Webb, C.A. (Ed.). (1993). *Your reading: A booklist for junior high and middle school students* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

### **Websites:**

The Children's Book Council: [www.cbcbooks.org](http://www.cbcbooks.org)

Caldecott and Newbery Award medal winners and honor books:

[www.ala.org/alsc/caldecott.html](http://www.ala.org/alsc/caldecott.html)

[www.ala.org/alsc/newbery.html](http://www.ala.org/alsc/newbery.html)

Children's Literature Web Guide: [www.acs.vcalgary.ca/dkbrown](http://www.acs.vcalgary.ca/dkbrown)

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA): [www.ala.org/yalsa/](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/)

### ***Recorded Reading***

**TIP:** Older ELLs can create audiotapes of books for younger ELLs for motivation and fluency.

#### **Purpose:**

To practice reading aloud while listening to a taped version of the reading.

#### **Materials:**

Audiotape of book at or near student's independent reading level

#### **Procedure:**

1. Choose a book at or near the student's independent reading level.
2. Purchase a pre-recorded book or record the reading so as to adjust the reading rate to match that of the students. This allows the teacher to gradually increase the reading rate to move the reader to independence.
3. For the first reading, the student should follow along with the tape, pointing to each word in his or her book as the reader reads.
4. The student should try to read aloud as he or she listens to the audiotape of the reading.
5. Reading along with the tape should continue until the student is able to read the book independently.
6. Teacher can monitor student progress by asking the student to read the same reading without the taped version.

### ***Choral Reading***

**TIP:** Start ELLs with shorter texts that have good rhythms and distinct parts.

#### **Purpose:**

To have students read the same text to improve fluency and maximize the amount of reading completed per child.

#### **Materials:**

Copy of reading selection for all students at or near the independent reading level of most of the students in the class

#### **Procedure:**

1. Teacher models reading text fluently.
2. Teacher rereads the text and the students join in.
3. Use forms of choral reading:
  - a. Have small groups read specific line(s) or sections.
  - b. Divide the class into two groups, each of which reads a section.
  - c. In cumulative choral reading, an individual or small group reads one line or section. Then another reader reads the next line, and then a few more readers read. By the end of the text, the entire class should be reading.

## ***Echo Reading***

**TIP:** Use students' language experience stories for echo reading.

### **Purpose:**

To model good reading and build fluency through short selections.

### **Materials:**

Reading selection at or near student's instructional level

### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher explains to the student that the teacher will model fluent reading.
2. The teacher asks the student to listen for changes in stress and pitch, pauses, and how the text is chunked.
3. The teacher chooses a passage at or near the student's instructional level.
4. The teacher reads one on one with the student.
5. The teacher reads one sentence or phrase at a time.
6. The student echoes back the same sentence or phrase, following the words with a finger to verify that he or she is not mimicking the teacher.
7. The teacher can offer the student support if needed, discussing any difficulties the student may have.
8. As students become more proficient, increase the level of text difficulty.

#### Echo-Reading Checklist:

- Read an exclamation with strong emotion.
- Note smoothness in reading and correct pronunciation of all words.
- Chunk text using major parts of sentences (i.e., subject, predicate, etc.)
- Pause at the end of a sentence, paragraph or at a comma.

## ***Partner Reading***

**TIP:** Pair ELLs according to oral language proficiency and reading ability.

### **Purpose:**

To develop fluency by pairing a less fluent reader with a more fluent reader who will provide a model of fluent reading, help with word recognition, and provide feedback; however, partner reading can also be done with two readers of equal ability.

### **Materials:**

Reading passage

### **Procedure:**

1. The stronger reader reads a paragraph or page first.
2. The less fluent reader reads the same text aloud.
3. The stronger reader provides assistance in the form of feedback, encouragement and word recognition.
4. The less fluent reader rereads the passage until he or she can read it independently.

## References

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- Armbruster, B.B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2001). Put Reading First: The research building blocks for teaching children to read, kindergarten through grade 3. Jessup, MD: Partnership for Reading, 21-32.
- Blevins, W. (2001). *Building fluency: lessons and strategies for reading success*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books.
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- Hints on how to read aloud. Retrieved on April 25, 2004, from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article.php?ID=83>.
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- Principles of comprehension instruction. Retrieved on November 21, 2003, from <http://www.forpd.ucf.edu/content/lesson8/lesson8topic4.htm>.
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- Tompkins, G.E. (2002). *Language Arts: Content and teaching strategies (5<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Columbus: Merrill Prentice Hall.