



## Fluency Overview

### Fluency Defined

In the broadest sense of the term, fluency means the ability to read phrases and words smoothly and quickly. There are three main components of reading fluency that come into play: accuracy, rate, and prosody. Accuracy is the ability to decode words in text without error. The reader's ability to decode those words automatically is referred to as rate. Rate also includes "chunking" strategies and age-appropriate sight words. Prosody, then, is the use of phrasing and expression often used to convey meaning.

When discussing fluency, stressing reading rate alone can have disastrous results on reading comprehension. All three components of reading fluency must work together. When readers use appropriate volume, tone, phrasing, and other oral elements (or prosody), they are demonstrating evidence of constructing meaning. Reading rate develops as a function of efficient decoding skills, opportunities for successful practice, and learning to read with expression (*Rasinski, 2004*)

### Effective Fluency Instruction

When it comes to teaching fluency, teachers just need to remember the MAP. The acronym MAP stands for model, assist, and practice. *Modeling* fluent reading is best done by the teacher reading in meaningful and expressive ways. Children who are developing their reading fluency skills may be *assisted* by a more capable and fluent reader, often the teacher. Then the more reading the children do, the more automatic they become. This *practice* is done through repeated readings. So, essentially, teachers need to model fluent reading, assist students who are having difficulty and send them off to practice.

There are several strategies teachers use to teach and practice fluency. Some of the more popular include Reader's Theatre, Repeated Readings, and Phrased Reading. One that is not as popular but works well on the expressive component is Guess the Emotion.

#### Reader's Theatre

Reader's Theatre (RT) was originally developed as a way to effectively present literature in a dramatic form. In Reader's Theatre, there are no full sets, full costumes, or formal memorization. Students are encouraged to have their scripts on the "stage" so they may read directly from them. A Reader's Theatre performance creates images through character's reading and movements. It frees the performers from the limitations of a stage and lets their imaginations soar.

Two types of Reader's Theatre scripts can be used – previously made scripts or an adapted script possibly written by the students. Directions for adapting a script are listed below:

### Reader's Theatre-How to Adapt a Script

1. Choose a story or section of a book that is between 3-5 minutes long and photocopy it.
2. Decide what characters and narrators are needed and assign a marker color to each.
3. Highlight all dialogue with the appropriate marker.
4. The text that is left is narration. Assign narration creatively by determining which character it pertains to and splitting it between the character and the character's narrator.
5. Add creative touches wherever possible.
6. You are now ready to assign parts and rehearse.

The Reader's Theatre format provides an opportunity for students to develop fluency through multiple readings of the text by using expressiveness, intonation, and inflection when rehearsing the text. This, in turn, will help the students comprehend what they are reading.

### **Phrased Reading**

When delivering a short lesson, 10 to 15 minutes a day, on the phrased cued text strategy, remember to focus on either individual students or small groups who need assistance with comprehension and fluency. Content area teachers may also use this strategy to assist remedial students in need of fluency and comprehension assistance during classroom conferences or lab time.

The following steps are based on Tim Rasinski's work for Phrased Reading (Rasinski, 1994; Rasinski, 2003).

1. Make a copy of the text and prepare it with the phrase marks/slash marks and give each student a copy of the phrase-cued text.
2. Remind students of the importance of reading with prosody and phrasing, instead of reading word-by-word.
3. Explain the phrasing marks to students.
4. Read the text orally **to** the students.
5. Next, read the text orally **with** the students, emphasizing the phrases.
6. Have students read the text orally **with a partner**.
7. Discuss the students' reading of the text for the purpose of assessing their comprehension.
8. Discuss the content of the text.
9. On the following class session, provide students with a copy of the original text without the phrase marks and have students practice reading the text.

## Language Arts or Social Studies Example

**It all hit me at once: / my fears about Mother; /  
the fever; / Bush Hill; / watching Grandfather die;  
/ being scared, / alone, / and hungry. // I cried. / I  
cried a river / and poor Eliza did her best to  
comfort me. / The kinder her words, / the harder  
I cried. //**

**~Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever* 1793**

### Repeated Reading

Repeated readings can be a motivational strategy that engages students in repeated readings of text. A Reading Progress Chart will help the students keep track of their growth in fluency. Engaging students in repeated readings of text “is particularly effective in fostering more fluent reading” for students “struggling to develop proficient reading strategies” (Allington, 2001). For repeated readings, the following procedure may be used.

1. Select a brief passage or story of 50 to 200 words for the student to read out loud. This passage should be at an appropriate level of difficulty (90 – 94 %).
2. Ask the student to read the passage orally. Using a copy of the passage, note the student’s miscues and keep track of the time it took the student to read the passage.
3. Ask the student to retell the passage or ask a question or two. Be sure that the student is not just word calling.
4. Record the time in seconds and the number of miscues. Note the Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM).
5. Encourage the student to practice rereading the passage independently for a day or two. The reading can be done both orally and silently. It can also be done at home. The goal is to have the student practice the passage several times before you meet next.
6. Repeat the process of having the student read the passage to you. Remember to record the time in seconds and the number of miscues. A graph may be made that shows the growth the student has made. The number of miscues, words per minute or correct words per minute may be graphed.
7. Repeat the strategy with another passage.

To evaluate the student, look for a decrease in miscues or an increase in the speed or rate. A fluency rubric evaluating prosody may also be used in conjunction with the Repeated Reading.

## Guess the Emotion

In Guess the Emotion, students are given short sentences to read. The students are required to read the sentence using a voice that conveys the feeling listed on their card. Their classmates then try to guess the emotion being expressed. It is a fun way for students to practice and develop aspects of prosody. The directions for the activity are listed below.

1. Make a set of sentence strips for each group of 5-7 students. These sentences may be popular sayings or dialogue from your latest novel. Some suggestions include: The queen said, "Let them eat cake." or "You are the nicest child in the whole world," said mother.
2. Make a set of emotion cards. "Confused", "surprised", "confident", and "bored" are just a few you may use.
3. Have students form small groups.
4. Place emotion cards and sentence strips face down in the middle of the groups.
5. One student from the group should draw a sentence strip and read it silently. S/he may then read it out loud for practice. Members of the group may help with any difficult words.
6. Next, the same student from the group draws an emotion card. This card is not shown to the rest of the group. The student rereads the sentence using the emotion listed on the card. (If the emotion does not fit the sentence, then the student may draw an additional card.)
7. Students in the group then guess which emotion the student is conveying.
8. When the emotion is guessed, then the next student in the group will continue by drawing a new sentence strip and emotion card.
- ❖ A variation would be to have the students all read the same sentence strip but draw different emotion cards. This would allow the students to demonstrate how meaning might change when the emotion changes.

While all of these strategies are very effective for teaching fluency, we cannot forget the everyday things we can do in the classroom to promote fluent reading. Reading widely and often provides practice and promotes confidence in student reading. Opportunities to participate in meaningful oral reading activities allow students to model fluent reading. Listening to the teacher model effective, fluent reading not only increases students' vocabularies but also demonstrates the value of reading.

*Contributed by Barbara Creps*

## Resources

1. Rasinski, T. (2004) *Assessing Reading Fluency*. Honolulu, HI: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning. Available at [http://www.prel.org/products/re\\_/assessing-fluency.pdf](http://www.prel.org/products/re_/assessing-fluency.pdf)
2. Rasinski, T. (2006) *Understanding and Implementing Reading First Initiatives: The Changing Role of Administrators*. International Reading Association
3. Griffin-Ross, D. and Walczyk, J. (2007) *How Important is Reading Skill Fluency for Comprehension?*. International Reading Association
4. Berglund, R. and Johns, J. (2002) *Fluency Strategies and Assessments*. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co.
5. Allington, R. L. (1983). *Fluency: The Neglected Reading Goal*. *Reading Teacher*, 36(6), 556-61