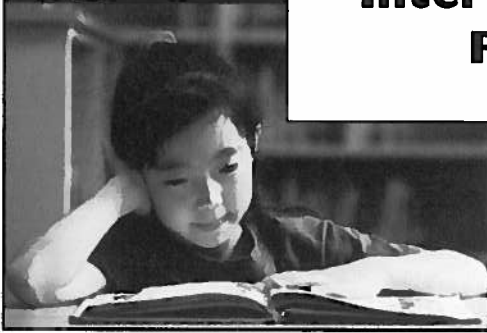


Intervention Activities for Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)



Overview on Fluency

Why Fluency Is Important

Reading fluency has sometimes been called the “neglected” component of reading. Until recently core reading curricula gave little attention to the need to build passage fluency. This all is changing now. Fluency is gaining attention and is receiving additional research funding. According to the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Report, 44% of the fourth graders were not fluent in their reading. This finding came from a component of the NAEP assessment in which examiners listened to students read passages orally and rated their reading on a scale. The examiners described the 44% of readers who were not fluent as reading in a slow and choppy manner.

In spite of the increasing recognition of the importance of fluency in reading instruction, there is no universally accepted definition for it. Some educators and researchers emphasize that fluency is accuracy and automaticity in recognizing words while reading. Others assert that fluency is best described as occurring when a reader reads so rapidly and effortlessly that he pays little attention to mechanics such as decoding. Still others focus on the appropriate use of prosody, or the expressiveness of the reader who reads fluently. A description of fluency from *Put Reading First* follows:

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically. They group words quickly in ways that help them gain meaning from what they read. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, as if they are speaking. (Armbruster et al. 2001, 22)

Fluent reading sounds natural because it is divided into meaningful chunks, with appropriate pauses at the end of phrases, clauses, and sentences. One reason

skilled readers achieve this prosody is that they recognize a high percentage of words automatically. Automaticity is a term used to describe how a skill can be applied without having to devote attention to it. Fluency requires automaticity, although more than automaticity is required to achieve prosody and expression.

Many times automaticity and speed are connected with regard to fluency. Indeed, speed when reading is important, but extreme speed is not necessary to be an excellent reader. In order to read fluently, the reader must be able to read rapidly enough to hold the meaning until the end of the sentence. Yet if the speed is too fast, meaning can suffer. So reading must be automatic, and at a pace that is above some minimum level in order to process meaning and below an overly speedy level in order not to lose meaning.

Importance of Rapid and Automatic Word Recognition

Instant word recognition has long been recognized as a critical task in efficient reading. There are at least two tasks that compete for the emerging reader's attention—word recognition and comprehension. Achieving accurate and automatic reading at the word level is a skill needed to be able to devote adequate attention to making meaning (comprehension). Readers who are accurate at reading words can devote attention to making connections between what they read and their background knowledge, as well as to other ideas in the passage.

What Causes Dysfluent Reading?

There are a variety of problems that can cause students to lack fluency. Readers who read dysfluently often lack underlying skills, such as phonemic awareness or an understanding of phonics. It is important to understand why a student isn't reading fluently in order to figure out which problem to address. According to Louisa Moats in Module 5 of the *LETRS* curriculum (Moats 2002, Book 2, 71), some possible underlying problems that can cause a lack of fluency include:

- Low proportion of words recognized “by sight”
- Variations in processing speed of known words
- Low speed when reading unfamiliar words
- Using context to identify words
- Low speed when identifying word meanings

As discussed earlier in this book, intervention begins at the lowest point of failure. If a student is not reading fluently, then it is critical to understand which early reading skills are missing so that intervention instruction can

be provided at the appropriate level. Too often teachers assume that a second grader knows the skills that have been taught, such as that a silent e assists a vowel to have its long sound, or even a skill as basic as being able to name the letters quickly and automatically. When these skills are missing and they are not taught, the student will never catch up.

When Is a Student Ready for Fluency Building?

Students are not ready for activities or strategies to build fluency with text reading until they can read words accurately. In other words, the other lower level skills have to be in place before it is time to begin building fluency at the passage level. Once a student has a sufficient level of phonemic awareness and letter knowledge, the alphabetic principle, where the letters and sounds can be connected, develops. Then from this base, the student is ready to learn phonics. Once he has learned the basic phonic relationships and can read word lists, it's time to build fluency at the word level. Learning how to blend at a sound-by-sound level precedes learning to identify an unknown word in "chunks" such as syllables, prefixes, suffixes, base words, and common letter combinations. Once rapid and accurate word decoding skills develop, then it's time to work at the sentence level. At this point, if the student has all these underlying skills in place, then it's time to build fluency in connected text or passages.

When a student cannot read words accurately, there is no point in beginning fluency activities at the passage level. It's like trying to work on speed in bike riding before the child has his balance completely coordinated or his pedaling skills mastered. Children who stumble over every few words and aren't able to bring a variety of skills together to decode unknown words are not ready for working on fluency at the passage level. In order to build fluency at the passage level, the student needs to be able to decode the passage fairly accurately, yet is not able to read it rapidly enough.

Students who are ready for fluency building activities read accurately, but haltingly or very slowly. They don't get stuck a long time on unknown words; they just go at a slow pace. Fluency activities are to improve speed, rhythm, and smoothness when reading, not to improve word reading accuracy.

Research-Based Interventions for Acquiring Passage Fluency Skills

One of the strongest research findings is the positive relationship between fluency and comprehension. Children who read fluently also comprehend well. That is because it is necessary to read fluently to have attention to dedicate to comprehension. While reading fluently doesn't automatically guarantee

comprehension for every reader, only a few students can decode well and with appropriate speed but not comprehend as they read.

Studies have also demonstrated that measuring oral reading fluency can serve as a proxy for measuring overall proficiency in reading. One minute measures of oral reading fluency are known to be the best measures of reading ability.

The primary technique for building fluency is repeated readings, where the student reads the same passage aloud with an adult or a student partner who can provide guidance. A substantial amount of research supports that rereading the same passage helps build fluency not only in that passage, but other passages as well.

There are two common approaches for repeated reading. The first approach is to reread the same passage orally with guidance, individually or in groups. The second approach is to read aloud while listening to a passage on a tape recording for feedback on accurate decoding of the words. Both are described in activities 11-1, 11-2, and 11-3, following. There are other common group activities for developing fluency, including reader's theater, choral reading, and echo reading. Repeated reading and partner reading may be more efficient in improving fluency than reader's theater.

While independent silent reading may be useful for building vocabulary and other skills, at this point there is not adequate research to validate this practice for the purpose of building fluency.

Selecting the Appropriate Passage for Building Fluency

It is important to select appropriate reading materials for fluency activities. When working on fluency activities, the student should be able to read the passage with 95% accuracy (independent reading level). This means that the student only misses one out of every 20 words. To calculate reading level, simply divide the number of words read correctly by the total number of words read and multiply by 100. This gives the accuracy percentage.

For readers who have recently mastered phonics relationships, selecting a highly decodable passage is helpful. Decodable passages have a high percentage of words that follow regular phonics relationships and very few irregular words. Using decodable text in fluency exercises enables the student to practice reading words with sound-symbol correspondences he knows, and to use that knowledge when he encounters words he doesn't recognize automatically "by sight."

While practicing fluency with connected text, it is best to supply the word when a student struggles more than a couple of seconds on any given word.

This is because the purpose of these activities is to build fluency in passages, not to learn how to decode words. If the student is struggling with a few words, particularly frequent nonphonetic words that appear in the passage, it may be helpful to provide an opportunity to practice these words separately from the passage reading. (Remember that if the student cannot read 95% of the words accurately, the passage is too difficult for a fluency activity.) In some curricula, using a word list or a chart of words provides practice reading individual words. Other curricula suggest having the student make index cards to practice difficult words.

How Fluency Is Calculated

Fluency is generally represented as the number of words read per minute. Teachers have two choices for calculating fluency. They can either have students read a passage for one minute and count the number of words read correctly. The number of words read correctly in this case is also the number of words read per minute.

The second method is to have a student read an entire passage that is fewer or more than 100 words. The teacher records the student's time and calculates the words read correctly per minute using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{words read correctly}}{\text{total reading time in minutes.}}$$

For example, a student who takes 2 minutes and 13 seconds (133 seconds, or 2.22 minutes) to read a passage with 237 words and makes 17 errors (a total of 220 correct words) has a rate of 99 words per minute. (Round a fraction to the nearest whole number.)

$$\begin{aligned} & \frac{220 \text{ correct words}}{2.22 \text{ minutes}} \\ & = 99 \text{ words per minute} \end{aligned}$$

The DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Measure uses a one-minute timed reading. Words pronounced incorrectly, substitutions, and omissions are all considered errors, and are indicated by marking a slash line through the incorrect word on the examiner's copy of the passage. Self-corrections within three seconds, repetitions, and insertions are not counted as errors, but they do negatively affect the fluency score by taking extra time.

Fluency Building Programs

Fluency instruction generally should begin once a student knows all the sounds and can accurately decode words with the following patterns:

- One-syllable words with digraphs and blends
- One-syllable CVC words
- The most common nonphonetic sight words

Decodable books are best for fluency work until the student can read this type of text somewhat fluently. After that the student may be ready for other types of fluency instruction.

Read Naturally is one of the most widely used fluency building programs. Candyce Ihnot, a former Title I reading specialist, developed this program for students experiencing reading difficulties. The program provides leveled passages and manuals with procedures. Some schools establish *Read Naturally* as a supplemental program that can be part of an intervention program, or used as part of an after-school program.

Read Naturally uses a procedure to place students in the appropriate leveled books. After they are placed in the appropriate book, students select a passage and, before they read the passage, write a sentence to predict what the passage may be about based on the title and the pictures. Then the student reads for one minute from a passage without rehearsal and underlines unknown words. After he finishes reading, he uses a blue pencil and graphs the number of words he read correctly in the minute for his “cold read” starting time.

After the initial reading, the student reads the same passage aloud softly while tracking with his finger and listening to a tape-recorded version of the story, timing each practice. After a number of practice readings and once he reaches his goal time, he answers some comprehension questions about the passage. Then the student invites the teacher to listen to him read the passage aloud. He records his score on the graph in red and moves to the next passage.

For more information on *Read Naturally*, see the Web site at www.readnaturally.com. A paper written by Dr. Marcia Davidson on the research supporting this program can be downloaded from the Web site. The paper also describes the *Reading Fluency Monitor*, which is a fluency assessment that can be used in conjunction with *Read Naturally*.

Intervention Activities on Fluency

Building Fluency With Repeated Oral Readings

11-1: Repeated Oral Readings

Brief Description

Students read the same story orally several times and chart their times.

Materials Needed

Passage at the student's independent reading level.

Timer.

Chart.

Step-by-Step Directions

1. Select a passage at a student's independent reading level and mark an asterisk after word 100.
2. On the first day, time each student individually while the student reads the first 100 words of the story. Record the story title, date, and number of minutes for this reading of 100 words.
3. Optional step—have student practice reading a list of as many as 30 selected words from the passage. These words should be high frequency or nonphonetic words.
4. On days two, three, and four, student rereads the same passage. Record times each day.
5. On the fifth day, student reads the passage again. Record the time and chart the student's progress across the five days. Select a different passage for the next five days.

Additional Information

Any set of passages can be used for this activity, yet they must be carefully examined to make sure that they increase in difficulty gradually, and that each student begins with a passage at his independent reading level. A collection of decodable passages is published in a manual distributed by the Neuhaus Education Center called *Practices for Developing Accuracy and Fluency* (2000). There are 30 passages in order of estimated grade level equivalents from first to fourth grade. Each story has an asterisk marked after the 100th word. Rapid Word

Recognition Charts are provided with about 30 words for each story, as well as student charts to record the day one and day five timings for each story. The first page of the manual gives directions on placing students in the appropriate starting passage, and also in how to calculate the student's fluency rate and accuracy.

11-2: Partner Reading

Brief Description

A stronger reader is paired with a weaker reader. They read a passage aloud together, either at the same time or sequentially (with the stronger reader going first).

Materials Needed

Two copies of a passage for the pair.

Step-by-Step Directions

Pairing students allows the stronger reader to help the weaker reader. A procedure is given below for how to pair students so that the distance between the student's reading skills is about right. You may also want to model how you want them to read and to establish some ground rules about when and how to help when your partner is struggling. Suggest that they wait a short time (five seconds is usually about right) before supplying an unknown word. It is important to discuss expectations with students so that no child feels that their partner is embarrassing them.

Steps for Determining Pairs in a Classroom:

1. On a piece of paper, list all students from highest to lowest reader.
2. Cut the paper in the middle of the list and place the two pieces next to each other.
3. Pair the top reader with the student at the top of the bottom half of the list, and so on.
4. Give both students a copy of a passage and ask the stronger reader to read first.
5. The weaker reader follows along and rereads the same part of the passage.
6. It is best if both students have a copy of the passage so they can follow along. Another possibility is to have the students point to the words as they are reading or listening.

Additional Information

While students are paired they can either alternate reading parts of the passage, such as a paragraph at a time before switching, or they can simultaneously read it orally. When simultaneously reading the passage, typically the stronger reader reads just a slight bit ahead of the weaker reader, almost “pushing” the weaker reader gently to keep up a slightly more appealing pace. The weaker reader can also benefit from hearing the phrasing of the stronger reader.

Other Strategies for Building Passage Reading Fluency

11-3: Audiotaped Stories

Brief Description

Student listens to an audiotaped recording of a story, while reading aloud along with the text.

Materials Needed

- Copy of the story for each student.
- Audiotape of same story.

Detailed Description

In order to build fluency with the text, children can listen to a reading of the story on an audiotape while reading along. It is important that the student follows along while listening, so encouraging him to move his finger with the reading while he reads aloud is a good practice. You can purchase audiotaped stories, check them out from the public library, or make tapes by recording the story yourself. Another idea is for older students to make the tapes for younger students. Parents can be encouraged to make tapes for their children who are receiving intervention instruction.

11-4: Echo Reading

Brief Description

The teacher reads a section of a passage, accentuating appropriate phrasing and intonation, followed by the students echoing it as they read their own copy of the passage.

Materials Needed

- Copy of the passage for the student and the teacher.

Detailed Description

Struggling readers need to hear what fluent reading sounds like and then try to imitate it. This activity provides a very structured activity where the teacher reads a short section of the passage with expression and proper phrasing. Then the student immediately reads the same line, following the teacher's example. This echo reading continues for the entire passage.

Commercially Available Products for Developing Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)

The first place to check for additional materials is your core reading curriculum. Many core reading programs (also called basals) have books that can be used for fluency passages, as well as audiotapes of some of the books. A list of some commercially available products is included in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1

Recommended Commercially Available Materials for Improving Fluency

Name	Description	Contact Information
Fluency Programs		
<i>Read Naturally Master's Edition (Software Edition also available)</i>	Program to develop fluency. Blackline masters for stories in levels 1-8, as well as audio-taped versions.	www.readnaturally.com \$95-\$105 per level, including 24 stories and tapes
<i>Fluency First!: Daily Routines to Develop Fluency</i>	Fluency program developed by Tim Rasinski and Nancy Padak. Each grade level includes passages, word work, a CD-ROM with passages, etc.	Wright Group/McGraw-Hill, 2005 www.wrightgroup.com \$299.97, Complete Kit, Grade 1
<i>Practices for Developing Accuracy and Fluency</i>	Manual with 30 graded passages, high frequency word charts, student timing charts, & CD with taped stories.	Neuhaus Education Center's fluency manual www.neuhaus.org \$35, with CD
Resources for Teachers		
<i>A Focus on Fluency: Research-Based Practices in Early Reading Series</i>	30-page publication about fluency. Followed a summit in the fall of 2002.	Published by the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning; available online. www.prel.org
<i>The Fluent Reader: Oral Reading Strategies for Building Word Recognition, Fluency, and Comprehension</i>	Book by Tim Rasinski with tips on building fluency.	Scholastic Professional Books www.Scholastic.com ISBN 0-439-33208-7
<i>Building Fluency: Lessons and Strategies for Reading Success</i>	Book by Wiley Blevins with background information about fluency, as well as mini-lessons and activities	Scholastic Professional Books www.Scholastic.com ISBN 0-439-28838-X
Books on Tape		
Listening Center B	Books on audiocassette	www.etaquisenaire.com IN62686 \$599.95
Also LeapPad and Quantum-Pad Learning System		Leapfrog www.leapfrog.com

Note: Prices listed are at time of publication. Please contact vendor for current information.