

The Educator's Science of Reading Toolbox

By the National Center on Improving Literacy in Partnership with The Reading League Journal

HOW TO BUILD FLUENCY WITH TEXT IN YOUR CLASSROOM

The best approach to beginning reading instruction is one that incorporates explicit instruction in five areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). These are known as the “5 Big Ideas” in beginning reading. While the research is clear on what to teach, how you teach these pieces can be challenging. This Educator's Toolbox provides practical ways to incorporate fluency instruction within your classroom.

What is Fluency?

Fluency has been defined as “reasonably accurate reading, at an appropriate rate, with suitable expression, that leads to accurate and deep comprehension and motivation to read” (Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2012, p. 13). To be fluent readers, students must master word recognition skills to the point of becoming so automatic—or fluid—that decoding no longer requires cognitive effort or conscious attention.

Fluency in oral reading includes:

- accuracy, which is reading with few errors
- rate, which is the pace at which a student reads
- expression, which is reading aloud with proper intonation and phrasing

To be considered a fluent reader, all three of these components must be in place. Simply being an accurate reader is not enough. It is important to remember that fluency is not an end in itself, but rather a critical gateway to comprehension. Fluent reading frees cognitive resources to process meaning, and in turn, helps with text comprehension.

Things to Consider when a Reader is Not Fluent

When there is a fluency issue, the first thing to investigate is if the student is not reading connected text fluently because they cannot decode words fluently (accurately and automatically). If they are not able to decode words accurately and automatically, they will never be able to read connected text fluently. To determine if a student is reading fluently, start by assessing how many words the

student can read correctly per minute. If the student's words correct per minute score is below the benchmark for their grade level, use diagnostic assessments to identify the factors that are contributing to the difficulty with fluency. Letter-sound knowledge and phoneme awareness should be assessed to determine if the student is able to identify and manipulate the sounds in words and state letter-sound correspondences accurately and with fluency. Phonics knowledge should also be assessed to determine if the student is able to read individual words accurately and with fluency. If these assessments show that students are not fluent with letter-sound correspondences, phoneme awareness, or phonics, then laborious and inaccurate word reading is impacting their fluency with reading connected text. Systematic phonics instruction, targeting the student's weakest skills, should be provided. If diagnostic assessments show that the student is fluent with foundational reading skills, then fluency practice and instruction should be provided (*see the **Fluency Flowchart** for more information on providing effective fluency building instruction*).

Fluency research says that successful readers:

- rely primarily on the letters in the word, rather than context or pictures, to identify familiar and unfamiliar words
- process every letter
- use letter-sound correspondences to identify words
- have a reliable strategy for decoding words
- read words a sufficient number of times for them to become automatic

Four Steps to Building Fluency with Text

Fluency develops through plentiful opportunities for practice in which the task can be performed with a high rate of success. Repeated readings, goal setting, corrective feedback, and graphing performance are four strategies that teachers can also use to build students' fluency with text:

1. Repeated Readings

- Read the same passage several times.
- Aim to reduce the time and number of errors with each attempt.
- Use this strategy with students individually, with a peer, or in small groups.

2. Goal Setting

- Identify the number of correct words to read per minute.
- Set a goal to read farther in the passage or make fewer errors.
- Define weekly learning targets to monitor progress over time.
- Identify an end-of-year grade level target for the number of words read per minute.

3. Corrective Feedback

- Give immediate feedback if a student makes an error.
- Have the student sound out and repeat the word.
- Have the student go back and re-read the sentence.

4. Graphing Performance

- Let students see their progress by having them graph their performance.
- Have students compare their first read-through to the next read-through.
- Have students track their targets and progress over time.

Sample Fluency Routine

This is an example of an instructional routine (University of Oregon, 2013) for practicing fluency with decodable text. In this sample, **bold text** provides teachers with the specific language of the instructional routine, including how to introduce the task (“**You will whisper read to yourself...**”), model for the students (“**My turn...**”), distribute practice to students (“**Your turn...**”), and conduct checks for understanding. The lesson also provides specific information to the teacher about how to correct errors.

Decodable Text Fluency Practice

Materials Needed: Copy of decodable text listed for each student

Instructor says:

“You will whisper read to yourself the story that we just read. Your job is to read without making any errors. I will listen to some students read while everyone continues whisper reading until I say stop. I’ll show you what it looks and sounds like to whisper read.

My Turn.”

Model what whisper reading to yourself looks and sounds like.

“Your Turn.”

Hand out decodable texts and have students whisper read and then provide some additional fluency practice.

Practice for students only:

- Students will individually whisper read the text again two to three times.
- Listen to individual students read and check for accuracy and fluency. If an individual student makes an error, use the correcting student errors procedure below.

Additional Fluency Practice

At least two more times, use one of the following options to have students reread the story.

- Individual Reading: Provide more time for students to whisper read while the teacher monitors and checks accuracy and fluency of individuals.
- Partner Reading: Students read with a partner while the teacher monitors and checks accuracy and fluency of individuals.



Correcting Student Errors

1. **My turn. This word is [word].**
2. **Your turn. Word?** Student repeats the word.
3. **Start at the beginning of the sentence and read this sentence without making any errors.**

Adapted From Enhanced Core Reading Instruction © 2013 by The Center on Teaching and Learning

Summary

Fluency with connected text is a critical piece of beginning reading instruction. Fluency develops through plentiful opportunities for practice in which the task can be performed with a high rate of success, including repeated readings with immediate corrective feedback, goal setting and graphing performance. If a student is not reading fluently, it is important to first assess possible underlying issues that may be impacting the student’s ability to fluently read connected text.

Fluency instruction alone will not be effective without also addressing any underlying issues, including a lack of fluency with foundational reading skills. For more information about evidence-based reading instruction and resources you can use in your classroom, please visit the National Center on Improving Literacy at <https://improvingliteracy.org>.

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Fluency Flowchart

