



Reading Fluency

By Valarie Algee, M.Ed.



What does it mean to read fluently? Why is fluent reading important? How can you teach someone to

become a more fluent reader? We know fluent reading when we hear it. Fluent reading is reading that flows. It sounds smooth and natural and is enjoyable to listen to. In order to read fluently, decoding and word recognition must be instant and automatic. In other words, it must require no conscious thought. Speed is a good indicator that this level of automaticity has been achieved which is why fluency is frequently assessed with a stopwatch. However, there is more to fluency than speed. In addition to reading at an adequate pace, a fluent reader is accurate as well as prosodic. When determining a level of fluency, therefore, it is necessary to consider speed, accuracy, and expression.

A vital feature of fluent reading is the ability to decode and comprehend simultaneously. Research indicates that fluency is the *link* between decoding and comprehension, in that you must read fluently in order for comprehension to occur. Of course, fluent reading does not *guarantee* comprehension; however, comprehension is unlikely to occur if the reading is slow and labored. When one is reading fluently, decoding and word recognition is happening automatically, thereby freeing up the mind to focus attention on understanding text and making connections as opposed to figuring out words.

We teach ourselves to be fluent each and every time we read; therefore, practice is a vital component of fluency instruction. There are a number of ways of achieving this practice:

Repeated Reading -- out loud, teacher-mediated reading of text in which a student reads a relatively short (50-300 words) passage aloud while receiving teacher support and feedback

Readers' Theater – turning a passage or story into a script to be practiced orally until it is mastered and ultimately performed

Poetry Reading – students perform a poem of choice after sufficient practice and rehearsal

Partner Reading – students practice reading a passage to or with one other while providing joint feedback

Modeling -- teacher or parent reads in order to provide a sense of proper speed and phrasing, and then the students replicate the reading

Reading Along with Tape Recorded Text -- not just a listening station, as the student must be held responsible for reading the text

Additionally, it is important to talk to students about what fluency is and what it means to be a fluent reader. Describe to them the components of fluency – speed, accuracy, and expression – and help them to draw connections to their own reading.

Further, students' reading can be coached and supported by setting goals, clarifying difficult words, and talking about expression and intonation. The students' reading can be tape recorded, reviewed, and discussed. Fluency rate can also be charted and tracked, with the goal of reading 100 words per minute. This often proves motivating for students. It is important, however, that the student does not focus on speed to the exclusion of accuracy and expression, as mentioned above.

Fluency is a critical element of reading, in that without it comprehension is unlikely to occur. Fortunately, however, once basic decoding is in place, fluency can be taught and developed through various means of practice along with appropriate coaching and mediation.



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