



# READING FLUENCY

## Evidence Based Practices for Teaching Reading Fluency

### Abstract

This toolkit provides basic background information on reading fluency and practice-based strategies. It includes a definition for reading fluency and discusses the importance of reading fluency. Evidence-based strategies for teaching reading fluency that include excerpts from fluency lessons are included.

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## What is reading fluency?

Rasinski (2010) defines reading fluency as the ability to read text effortlessly and efficiently (automaticity) and with meaningful expression that enhances the meaning of the text (prosody). Reading fluency includes three parts: accuracy, reading speed, and prosody (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2020). Fluency is not the end goal, but it is a critical component to comprehension. Fluent reading of texts allows the reader to free cognitive space and focus on the comprehension of texts rather than focusing on figuring out words (National Center on Improving Literacy, 2020).

## Why is reading fluency important?

Fluency has often been referred to as the bridge from phonics to comprehension. When readers develop automaticity in their word recognition, then the link to phonics occurs, and when readers are able to embed meaningful expression in their reading, the link to comprehension occurs (Rasinski, et al. 2012).

Researchers such as Hoffman (2003) have explained the reciprocal connection between reading fluency and comprehension. For students to achieve reading fluency, they must decode and comprehend. The National Reading Panel (2000) findings show that fluency practice is most effective when the reading practice is oral rather than silent, when repeated readings of texts are included, and when students receive feedback and guidance from others (e.g., teachers, parents, peers...).

Ruetzel (2012) explains that because reading fluency and reading comprehension are so tightly connected, many aspects of high-quality reading instruction also pertain to providing high-quality fluency instruction. Children must become aware of what fluency is to become self-regulating fluent readers. Hoffman (2003) writes that educators should work to develop a meta-language of fluency with students that include concepts of expression, phrasing, and word stress. Students need to develop an awareness of fluency in order to monitor and improve their fluency. Ruetzel (2012) refers to fluency monitoring as meta-fluency and explains that it is fundamental to the improvement of fluency. Teachers need to explicitly teach children the meta-language of fluency (e.g., accuracy, rate, speed, purpose, expression, stress, text difficulty, volume) because it is essential for students to be able to develop their ability to think and talk about fluency and their ability to monitor and improve it.

## What are Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching Reading Fluency?

In the *Fluent Reader* (2010), Rasinski outlines 4 ways to build reading fluency: (1) model good oral reading, (2) provide oral support or assistance for readers (e.g., choral reading, paired reading, using recorded materials), (3) offer plenty of practice opportunities with repeated readings, and (4) encourage fluency through phrasing.

### Assisted Reading

*Assisted reading* is referred to by Rasinski (2010) as oral reading that is scaffolded to ease the transition from modeling to independence because a more proficient reader supports or assists the developing

reader. *Assisted reading* can take a variety of effective forms: choral reading, repeated reading, oral previewing, and tape-recorded assistance are all effective forms of assisted reading.

### Choral Reading from *The Fluent Reader* by Timothy Rasinski

*Choral reading* is an example of assisted reading and is when groups of children read the same text aloud. There are many kinds of *choral reading* such as refrain, line-a-child, dialogue, call and response, echo choral reading, and cumulative choral reading and singing. In *echo choral reading*, the teacher reads one sentence or phrase at a time and the student then echoes back the same sentence or phrase as they follow the words with their finger. *Choral reading* has many benefits including building community in the classroom. Teachers can have students read a poem, or songs, as well as familiar texts previously read (Rasinski, 2010). Rasinski explains that there are many ways to do choral reading. Some include: Refrain, Line-a-Child, Dialogue, Antiphonal Reading, Call and Response, *Echo Choral Reading*, Cumulative Choral Reading, Choral Singing, and Impromptu Choral Reading.

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One way that teachers can make choral reading more impactful and meaningful is to consider the cultural and linguistic resources of the students in their classrooms and to include culturally responsive texts such as phrases from poems, songs, and picture books the class has read.

### An Example of Echo Choral Reading

The following is an excerpt from *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* written by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Peña.

*Note: The class has previously enjoyed this Read Aloud.  
The teacher models reading fluently through expression,  
rate, and accuracy while reading.*

**Teacher reads first:**

My papi, the carpenter, is covered in sawdust and smells like a hard day at work.

His hands are rough from building homes every day- his job since he arrived in this country.

But even though he comes home tired he always has time for me.

**Teacher reads:** My papi, the carpenter, is covered in sawdust and smells like a hard day at work.

**Students echo.**

**Teacher reads:** His hands are rough from building homes every day- his job since he arrived in this country.

Students echo.

**Teacher reads:** Even though he comes home tired he always has time for me.

**Students echo.**

## Repeated Reading

*Repeated reading* is a powerful instructional tool that results in improved comprehension. It provides practice for students to read the same text multiple times. *Repeated reading* holds many benefits for readers as it helps them remember important information like the main idea and important vocabulary, improves story comprehension, and leads to refined questioning and insights, and promotes more efficient reading with greater accuracy (Rasinski, 2010). Rasinski (2010) outlines guidelines for implementing repeated reading for students that teachers think would benefit from this practice the most. He suggests teachers set aside 15-30 minutes per day for *repeated reading* and that they choose passages between 50 and 500 words. The teacher should also determine the difficulty level of the text/passage they will use with students. The example below illustrates one way to approach *repeated reading*.

### Say It Like a Character- A Repeated Reading Strategy from *The Fluent Reader* by Timothy Rasinski

Oral reading fluency means more than reading accurately and quickly. It also involves reading with expression as a way to get at the text's meaning. In *Say It Like a Character*, students get "inside" characters from books by reading monologues and dialogues orally. Listeners must make inferences about the characters through the way the passage was read. For this to happen, readers need to do two things: practice reading the assigned text (fluency) and think about the feelings and disposition of the character (comprehension).

The teacher finds passages that contain monologues or dialogues. These can be as short as a sentence or as long as a full page. Rasinski suggests looking at the books that students are reading on their own or that the teacher is reading to the class. Make copies of the text so that each student has a copy. If the story is unfamiliar, give background so they understand the passage and emotions leading up to events in the story. The teacher should have students practice reading the passage silently and orally. Then read aloud the passage in several tones (e.g. angry, delighted, confused, surprised) and talk about the feelings that can be inferred.

Rasinski suggests a list of some emotions to try:

- Fear, anxiety, apprehensiveness, worry
- Anger, displeasure, hostility
- Pride (as an exaggerated positive evaluation of oneself)
- Love (strong affection for another)
- Happy, Optimistic (well-being, content)
- Enthusiasm, Vitality (strong excitement)

- Grief (intense sorrow—especially caused by loss)
- Sad, Unhappy, Depressed, Sorrowful
- Astonishment, Surprise (filled with sudden wonder or amazement)

One suggestion is for teachers to create a list of emotions with students that can be posted in the classroom and utilized not only for reading like a character but also writing like a character. The teacher can assign a feeling or an emotion to embed in the reading or let the students choose. The teacher can also help students practice the reading and then perform it, one at a time or in small groups. The students listening must guess the emotion that the reader is feeling. After the reading, the teacher should have students discuss what the reader did to convey the intended emotion (e.g., increased or decreased volume or pitch of voice, changing reading rate, utilizing a dramatic pause, or emphasizing a particular word). The teacher should also facilitate students' thinking about markers in the text such as italics, bold print, or illustrations that give cues to what the character is feeling (Rasinski, 2010).

The following is an excerpt from *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* written by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Peña.

*Note: The class has previously enjoyed this Read Aloud. The teacher models reading fluently through prosody and the facilitation of thinking of emotions and meaning in the story.*

This page from the book was chosen because of the dialogue. Voices included are the mother (mami), the father (papi), and the narrator (the girl).

Papi revs the engine and the smell of gasoline hits me as  
 he squeezes the accelerator  
 (Mami) ¡CON CUIDADO! BE CAREFUL!  
 The motor rumbles and growls (vroooooooooom)  
 (Papi) ¡AGÁRRATE! HOLD ON!  
 And then.... we take off!

### Phrased Text Lesson from *The Fluent Reader* by Timothy Rasinski

The *Phrased Text Lesson (PTL)* is one type of approach for nurturing phrased reading. The *PTL* is designed to be taught to an individual student or a small group of students for two consecutive days for 10-15 minutes each day (Rasinski, 2010). The *Phrased Text Lesson [PTL]* is designed to be taught to individual students or small groups over the course of 2 consecutive days for about 10 to 15 minutes each day.

### An Example of *Phrased Text Lesson*

**On day 1**, the teacher provides a copy of the *phrased text* to each student in the group and talks with the students about the importance of reading with phrasing. The teacher explains the slash marks on the text

that are provided as scaffolding for phrasing. The teacher should read a few sentences to the students a few times while emphasizing and slightly exaggerating the phrases. Then the teacher will then facilitate a choral reading of the text with the students a few times with the appropriate phrasing. Finally, the teacher will have the students pair up for two or three rounds of repeated reading. The teacher should try a *phrased text lesson* in a small group and then have students perform the reading for the group.

The following is an excerpt from *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* written by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Peña.

My papi,/ the carpenter,/ is covered in sawdust /and  
smells like a hard day at work.// His hands are rough/  
from building homes every day/—his job since he first  
arrived in this country.// But even though he comes home  
tired/ he always has time for me.//

**On day 2**, repeat everything from day one, but this time use the original text without phrase boundaries. This helps students transfer their knowledge about phrasing to other texts as they read.

My papi, the carpenter, is covered in sawdust and smells  
like a hard day at work. His hands are rough from  
building homes every day—his job since he first arrived  
in this country. But even though he comes home tired,  
he always has time for me.



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