

Increasing Reading Fluency for Middle and High School Students

Small-Group Intervention Model

Purpose: This document is meant to serve as a protocol to be used by individuals who will be leading small groups of students on their journey toward improving reading fluency. The excerpts that lie at the heart of this protocol should align to expectations for high-quality instructional materials appropriate for the grade level to ensure students participating in the protocol are truly being prepared for college and/or careers.

The protocol can be used during small groups outside of normal class times or during class when other students are engaged in activities related to the topic under study. It can be used at any time during the school year, although the earlier the intervention occurs the better, to enable students to encounter more success throughout the school year. Increasing fluency allows students to then concentrate on comprehending the grade-level material rather than focusing on trying to navigate through decoding or determining meaning of unknown words (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001; Jenkins, Fuchs, van den Broek, Espin, & Deno, 2003; Torgesen & Hudson, 2006). Typical middle school and high school ELA activities do not attend to helping students increase reading fluency.

Dr. Timothy Rasinski has defined fluency as the ability to “read words accurately, effortlessly, or automatically so that readers can preserve their limited cognitive resources for the more important task in reading—comprehension—and with appropriate prosody or expression so as to give meaning to the words that is implied through emphasis, phrasing, and intonation, and relatedly, comprehension.” (Rasinski, 2006).

The user of this protocol might be most often the classroom teacher but could also be a delegate such as a teacher volunteer, a counselor, administrator, reading coach, or even one of the students’ peers who has already achieved fluency.

NOTE: *There are two options for administering the protocol. Option 1 offers more variety in intervention approaches, along with more detail. Option 2 has fewer steps and less detail. Both are based on the research cited at the end of the document; having two options available will better enable educators to choose what is best for their particular classes and build on each educator’s familiarity with fluency work.*

What the Research Says:

- Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2017, only 36% of 8th graders who took the NAEP assessment performed at or above Proficient, and only 4% performed at Advanced. For 12th graders, data from 2015 reveals that only 37% performed at or above Proficient, and 6% performed at Advanced.
- Fluency is a critical element in literacy instruction (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003).
- Although fewer studies have been conducted on effective fluency instruction with older readers as opposed to younger students, a few common traits of effective fluency work for older

students with unfinished learning have emerged. In “Reading Fluency for Adolescents: Should We Care?” Rasinski outlines these traits as follows:

- Students need to listen to fluent readers to hear fluency modeled.
- Students need to have assistance during their own readings of text, which is provided best while the student both hears and sees the written words.
- Students must practice fluency consistently.

STEPS IN THE FLUENCY PROTOCOL

Step 1: Determine the student’s current level of fluency once you suspect there may be unfinished learning.

- For MS, we recommend:
 - *3-Minute Reading Assessments: Word Recognition, Fluency, and Comprehension: Grades 5–8* (book for purchase).
 - <https://www.readinga-z.com/assessments/fluency-timed-reading/> (free)
 - <https://www.reallygreatreading.com/diagnostics> (free)
- For HS, we recommend:
 - Quick and Easy High School Reading Assessments from the Ohio Literacy Alliance, found at <http://literacy.kent.edu/ohioliteracyalliance/fluency/fluency.htm>

Note: You will likely be able to identify which students need intervention after just a few class interactions. Ideally, the whole class would be tested but, practically, that typically takes too much time.

Step 2: Record scores for the tested students.

- If student’s scores indicate he or she struggles with fluency, follow the steps below.
- If student’s scores do not indicate a struggle, stop here.

Step 3: Set up pairs or small groups.

- To determine how students should be grouped, analyze screener scores to create pairs/groups of students with similar scores and struggles.

Step 4: Gather materials needed to begin fluency work.

- Several copies of a grade-level text currently under study in the classroom.
 - Each student in a group will need 2–3 copies of the text so he or she can mark up the text and then later have a clean version when the marks get distracting.
 - The fluent reader (e.g., the teacher, selected adult, or peer) will also need one copy per student to make annotations regarding areas of struggle for each student as well as areas of progress throughout the protocol.

Step 5: Create student buy-in.

- Be truthful about the purpose of the fluency work. Students will be fully aware of their own struggles with reading. Explain that fluency is a key component in increasing comprehension, but there is no correlation between intelligence and reading fluency. Lack of fluency can be addressed through exercises like the ones that follow.
- Whatever passage is used, whether an excerpt from a classroom text or other on-grade-level materials, you can certainly shorten it (e.g., concentrate on 3–4 shorter paragraphs at a time) if the passage seems too long for those who struggle.
- Note: Research conflicts regarding whether the best approach is repeated readings of the same text or repeated application of the same protocol to different texts. For purposes of this small-group intervention, we recommended repeated readings of the same text.

Step 6: Begin administering a series of the fluency protocol as seen on page 4.

- Reiterate in the small group the purpose of the work, having honest discussions of students' struggles, gaining their insights, and reflecting on the screener.
 - Ask students to reflect on how they think they did on the screener overall.
 - Ask what was most challenging (e.g., words they didn't recognize, words they didn't know the meaning of).
 - Ask about the length of the screener compared to the length of regular readings and whether the shorter length was helpful or more comfortable for students.
 - Explain to students that the struggles they felt are real and can be addressed by using this small-group protocol.
- Using the protocol, repeat the entire process at least 4 times (i.e., using the entire process across 4 weeks with 4 different texts) for the noted number of minutes per session.

Step 7: Repeat Step 1.

- Using the same screening mechanism used in Step 1, retest the student.
 - If the student has improved enough to be fluent, the process stops. Discuss progress and the accomplishment with the student and offer future reflections and assistance as needed.
 - If the student has not improved significantly in regard to fluency, repeat Step 6 for additional cycles until fluency is achieved. Each time, discuss student's progress, areas of continued struggles, and reflections on what it takes to achieve fluency.

OPTION 1 FOR FLUENCY PROTOCOL:

(Seven sessions, approximately 15 minutes each, with a wide variety of intervention strategies)

Note: To implement this protocol with fidelity and in accordance with research on promoting fluency, ALL sessions should be completed in the order provided. The same text should be used throughout the protocol, only switching to a new text when the protocol begins again.

Student Profile Sheet

Student Name:	Date:	Screener Used:	Beginning Score:
	Date:	Screener Used:	Score After 4 weeks:
	Date:	Screener Used:	Score After 8 weeks:

(Add lines as needed if intervention continues, at 4-week intervals)

SESSION 1: (Total time: 15 minutes)	
<i>Length</i>	<i>Learning Activity</i>
2 minutes	Modeling: Passage is read aloud by a fluent reader, with attention to proper pacing, expression, and accuracy. Student will actively listen and follow along in text.
5 minutes	Echo Reading: Fluent reader reads one sentence at a time, with student then reading the sentence aloud mirroring the fluent reader’s pacing, expression, and accuracy.
5 minutes	Noting Challenging Words: Student circles words that were difficult to read or that were unfamiliar in regard to meaning. Read the words together, one at a time, pronouncing and discussing meaning, with definitions provided. (Note: If using the Fluency Packet from Achieve the Core, some potentially challenging words and related short definitions have been provided for you with each text.)
3 minutes	Choral Reading: Fluent reader and student read the text one time in unison.
SESSION 2: (Total time: 15 minutes)	
<i>Length</i>	<i>Learning Activity</i>
2 minutes	Modeling: Passage chosen by student is read aloud by a fluent reader, with attention to proper pacing, expression, and accuracy. Student will actively listen and follow along in text.
3 minutes	Choral Reading: Fluent reader and student read the text one time in unison.
7 minutes	Independent Reading: Student reads aloud the text, while fluent reader monitors for pace, accuracy of words and punctuation, and appropriate expression. Student should be allowed to struggle with some words, sounding out if needed, but fluent reader should intervene with guidance at points to avoid student frustration.
3 minutes	Decoding: Using words the student struggled with during the independent reading above, student selects a couple of words to practice decoding, focusing on words that presented challenges during the independent reading activity described in the row above.
SESSION 3: (Total time: 15 minutes)	

<i>Length</i>	<i>Learning Activity</i>
2 minutes	Modeling: Passage chosen by student is read aloud by a fluent reader, with attention to proper pacing, expression, and accuracy. Student will actively listen and follow along in text.
8 minutes	Independent Reading: Student reads aloud the text, while fluent reader monitors for pace, accuracy of words and punctuation, and appropriate expression. Student should be allowed to struggle with some words, sounding out if needed, but fluent reader should intervene with guidance at points to avoid student frustration.
2 minutes	Check for Understanding: Fluent reader will ask student one text-based question to check for understanding of the text that student has been reading.
3 minutes	Reflection: Student discusses with fluent reader progress and points of continued struggle. Fluent reader can ask questions about which words are still problematic, which words are read more easily now at the end, and how the student is feeling about the process so far.
SESSION 4: (Total time: 15 minutes)	
<i>Length</i>	<i>Learning Activity</i>
2 minutes	Modeling: Passage is read aloud by a fluent reader, with attention to proper pacing, expression, and accuracy. Student will actively listen and follow along in text.
3 minutes	Echo Reading for Points Brought Up in Reflection from Day Before: Fluent reader reads one sentence at a time, focusing on sentences that presented words that were challenges for the student the day before, with student then reading the sentence aloud mirroring the fluent reader’s pacing, expression, and accuracy.
7 minutes	Independent Reading: Student reads aloud the text, while fluent reader monitors for pace, accuracy of words and punctuation, and appropriate expression. Student should be allowed to struggle with some words, sounding out if needed, but fluent reader should intervene with guidance at points to avoid student frustration.
2 minutes	Noting Challenging Words: Student circles words that remain difficult to read or still confusing in regard to meaning. Read the words together, one at a time, pronouncing and discussing meaning, with definitions provided. (Note: If using the Fluency Packet from Achieve the Core, some potentially challenging words and related short definitions have been provided for you with each text.)
1 minute	Check for Understanding: Fluent reader will ask student one text-based question to check for understanding of the text that student has been reading.
SESSION 5: (Total time: 13 minutes)	
<i>Length</i>	<i>Learning Activity</i>
3 minutes	Choral Reading: Fluent reader and student read the text one time in unison.
7 minutes	Independent Reading: Student reads aloud the text, while fluent reader monitors for pace, accuracy of words and punctuation, and appropriate expression. Student should be allowed to struggle with some words, sounding out if needed, but fluent reader should intervene with guidance at points to avoid student frustration.

3 minutes	Juicy Sentence Analysis: Help student dig into one juicy sentence in the text, focusing on sentence structure, word choice, and meaning. Follow the Juicy Sentence Guidance here . (Note: if using the Fluency Packet from Achieve the Core, a juicy sentence has been provided for you with each text.)
SESSION 6: (Total time: 15 minutes)	
Length	Learning Activity
2 minutes	Modeling: Passage chosen by student is read aloud by a fluent reader, with attention to proper pacing, expression, and accuracy. Student will actively listen and follow along in text.
7 minutes	Independent Reading: Student reads aloud the text, while fluent reader monitors for pace, accuracy of words and punctuation, and appropriate expression. Student should be allowed to struggle with some words, sounding out if needed, but fluent reader should intervene with guidance at points to avoid student frustration.
3 minutes	Check for Understanding: Fluent reader will ask student one text-based question to check for understanding of the text that student has been reading.
3 minutes	Reflection: Student discusses progress with fluent reader and points of continued struggle. Ask questions about which words are still problematic, which words are read more easily now at the end, and how the student is feeling about the process so far.
SESSION 7: (Total time: 15 minutes)	
Length	Learning Activity
7 minutes	Independent Reading: Student reads aloud the text, while fluent reader monitors for pace, accuracy of words and punctuation, and appropriate expression. Student should be allowed to struggle with some words, sounding out if needed, but fluent reader should intervene with guidance at points to avoid student frustration. (Student who has made enough progress to feel confident can read the text to someone new as a type of “performance” if they so wish.)
3 minutes	Check for Understanding: Fluent reader will ask student to summarize the main idea of the text.
5 minutes	Final Feedback and Reflection: Fluent reader discusses student progress made based on the independent reading above. If there are still points of challenge or misunderstandings, those can be mentioned but, overall, the focus should be the progress student has made. Student should be asked to provide feedback on what steps in the protocol seemed most helpful, overall gauge of progress, and what he or she learned overall about both improving reading and the text itself.

Scheduling Example for Administration of Option 1:

The protocol outlined above includes seven sessions of approximately 15 minutes each with a single short text. Depending on the way your class schedule is organized (e.g., block scheduling, short period daily), you can split the sessions in different ways. Given the demands of the classroom and that fluency work may be done more effectively in private rather than small groups within a quiet classroom, educators may wish to recruit fluent readers from parent volunteers, other educators or administrators, teacher aides, etc. If your classroom already includes a lot of small-group work and the fluency work may go unnoticed by other students, teacher-led small-group work is a great approach as well.

The examples below are suggestions for other ways the protocol can be split over the available days; note that additional configurations are possible.

Block Schedule	Class Every Day
Day A: Session 1 before school	Day A: Session 1 before school
Day A: Session 2 during class as small group or pull-out session	Day A: Session 2 during class as small group or pull-out session
Off Day (Day B): Session 3 before school or during a different subject with use of a volunteer and with permission of the other educator. (Reminder: If fluency is an issue in your classroom, it is likely an issue in other subject areas.)	Day B: Session 3 during class as small group or pull-out session
Day C: Session 4 before school	Day C: Session 4 before school
Day C: Session 5 during class as a small group or pull-out session	Day C: Session 5 during class as small group or pull-out session
Off Day (Day D): Session 6 before school or during a different subject with use of a volunteer and with permission of the other educator. (Reminder: If fluency is an issue in your classroom, it is likely an issue in other subject areas.)	Day D: Session 6 during class as small group or pull-out session
Day E: Session 7 either before school or during class	Day E: Session 7 during class as small group or pull-out session

OPTION 2 FOR FLUENCY PROTOCOL:

(Four sessions, not exceeding 20 minutes each, with a wide variety of intervention strategies)

Note: To implement this protocol with fidelity and in accordance with research on promoting fluency, ALL sessions should be completed in the order provided. The same text should be used throughout the protocol, only switching to a new text when the protocol begins again.

Student Profile Sheet

Student Name:	Date:	Screener Used:	Beginning Score:
	Date:	Screener Used:	Beginning Score:
	Date:	Screener Used:	Beginning Score:

(Add lines as needed if intervention continues, at 4-week intervals)

SESSION 1 (Total time: 15 minutes)	
<i>Length</i>	<i>Learning Activity</i>
5 minutes	Modeling: Passage is read aloud by fluent reader two times to student, with attention to proper pacing, expression, and accuracy. Student will actively listen and follow along in text using a pointer of some type (other than their finger, which may seem infantile). Remind student that the work is to improve fluency and independence, and that you will be asking questions about the text later.
10 minutes	Noting Challenging Words: Student circles words that remain difficult to read or still confusing in regard to meaning while fluent reader models reading aloud a second time, this time more slowly and pausing occasionally. Read (or spell if more appropriate) the words together, one at a time, pronouncing and discussing meaning, with definitions provided. Words that are essential to understanding important ideas in the text should be the focus of this exercise. For example, for key words, one might use the word first in the same context and then in a different context. (Note: If using the Fluency Packet from Achieve the Core, some potentially challenging words and related short definitions have been provided for you with each text.)
SESSION 2 (Total time: 20 minutes)	
<i>Length</i>	<i>Learning Activity</i>
3 minutes	Introducing the Questions: Student receives teacher-created handout with two or three text-based questions, in order of occurrence in the text and with bigger ideas coming at the end of the sequence, to check for understanding of the text that student has been reading. Read the questions aloud to the student as he or she follows along.
4 minutes	Modeling: Teacher tells student to listen carefully as the text is read aloud again. This time, student will be taking notes, underlining, or annotating points in the text that can be used to help answer the questions. Emphasize that the notes don't need to be extensive and can be simple mark-ups.

13 minutes	Check for Understanding: Student jots down answers to the questions presented OR, if more applicable to the student, the teacher can lead the discussion. Alternately, this could involve oral discussion (Think, Pair, Share), a visual response (create a graphic), etc. Give explicit instruction to use mark-ups made during the read aloud. Student should read aloud the pieces of text used to answer the question, even if answering in writing.
SESSION 3 (Total time: 15 minutes)	
Length	Learning Activity
2 minutes	Modeling: Student listens for expression as teacher reads aloud a portion or portions of the text that would best lend itself to being read with expression.
3 minutes	Echo Reading (if student still needs much support): Teacher reads one sentence at a time, with student then reading the sentence aloud mirroring the teacher’s pacing, expression, and accuracy. OR Choral Reading (for student needing less support): Teacher and student read the text one time in unison, with an emphasis on expression.
10 minutes	Buddy Reading: Passage is read aloud by each student to another student in the group, with attention to proper pacing, expression, and accuracy. Student will actively listen and follow along in text. Teacher should use this opportunity to monitor individual readings and provide feedback.
SESSION 4 (Total time: 5 minute per student x number of students in a group)	
Length	Learning Activity
5 minutes per student	Independent Reading and Reflection: Teacher pulls one student at a time to listen to an individual reading of the text. Provide feedback (both positive and constructive) and have student reflect on how he or she feels having completed the protocol. Use this as a point of encouragement for introducing the next text. Provide the text to the student to allow for independent practice if that is what he or she wishes to do.

Scheduling Example for Administration of Option 2:

As noted above with Option 1, the sessions for Option 2 can also be arranged in various ways depending on the available schedule. Here are some additional suggestions:

Block Schedule	Class Every Day
Day A: Session 1 during class as small group or pull-out session	Day A: Session 1 during class as small group or pull-out session
Off Day (Day B): Session 2 before school or during a different subject with use of a volunteer and with permission of the other educator. (Reminder: If fluency is an issue in your classroom, it is likely an issue in other subject areas.)	Day B: Session 2: during class as small group or pull-out session
Day C: Session 3 during class as a small group or pull out session	Day C: Session 3 during class as small group or pull-out session
Off Day (Day D): Session 4 before school or during a different subject with use of a volunteer and with permission of the other educator. (Reminder: If fluency is an issue in your classroom, it is likely an issue in other subject areas.)	Day D: Session 4 during class as small group or pull-out session

Additional Fluency Resources:

Fluency Packet for 6–8: Short, grade-level-appropriate passages to use with students to increase fluency. <https://achievethecore.org/page/887/fluency-packet-for-the-6-8-grade-band>

Fluency Packet for 9–10: Short, grade-level-appropriate passages to use with students to increase fluency. <https://achievethecore.org/page/1022/fluency-packet-for-the-9-10-grade-band>

Fluency Chart: Quick reference chart to use to identify readers who need fluency support, set goals, and track progress (grades 1–8). <https://achievethecore.org/page/237/fluency-chart>

Blog Post: “What is Reading Fluency?” by David Liben and David Paige, which explains the characteristics of reading fluency. <https://achievethecore.org/aligned/what-is-reading-fluency/>

Blog Post: “Building Reading Fluency” by David Liben and David Paige, which details four classroom strategies that help build fluent readers. <https://achievethecore.org/aligned/building-reading-fluency/>

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